

2004 Pacific sardine landings

The Pacific sardine harvest guideline for January 1, 2004, through December 31, 2004, was 122,747 metric tons (mt) (69 FR8572, February 25, 2004). As of December 31, 2004, the northern allocation had landed 44,937 mt, and the southern allocation area had landed 46,574 mt, for a total of 91,511 mt.

2004-2005 Pacific mackerel landings

The 2004-2005 Pacific mackerel harvest guideline was 13,268 mt with a directed fishery of 9,100 mt and a reserve of 4,168 mt. The Pacific mackerel season began on July 1, 2004, and ends on June 30, 2005. As of December 31, 2004, landings of Pacific mackerel were 3,464 mt.

NMFS and the Council would prefer to wait until the April 2005 Council meeting to release the unused portion of the Pacific mackerel directed fishery (as landings have been low) to allow for the directed Pacific mackerel fishery to continue as late into the season as possible.

Pacific sardine 2005 harvest guideline

A harvest guideline and biomass estimate for Pacific sardine for the 2005 fishing season were reviewed during public meetings of the Coastal Pelagic Species (CPS) Management Team (CPSMT) and the CPS Advisory Subpanel (CPSAS) held at the Southwest Region (SWR) in Long Beach, California, on September 28-30, 2004 (69 FR 55144, September 13, 2004). Based on a biomass estimate of 1,193,515 metric tons (mt), the harvest guideline for Pacific sardine for January 1, 2005, through December 31, 2005, is 136,179 mt. As required by the Fishery Management Plan (FMP), the harvest guideline will be allocated one-third for the northern subarea, which is north of 39E 00' N. latitude (Pt. Arena, California) to the Canadian border, and two-thirds for southern subarea, which is south of 39E 00' N. latitude to the Mexican border. For 2005, the northern subarea allocation would be 45,393 mt; the southern subarea allocation would be 90,786 mt.

A proposed rule was published on December 8, 2004 (69 FR 70973) that solicited public comment on the Council's harvest guideline recommendations. The public comment period ended on December 23, 2004. One comment was received that generally criticized commercial fishing rules but the comment did not yield information that would provide a basis for changing the 2005 Pacific sardine harvest guideline.

The final rule has been slowed because of salmon bycatch in the Pacific sardine fishery prompting the need for a formal Endangered Species Act (ESA) section 7 consultation.

Salmon bycatch & biological assessment

In order to implement the harvest guideline for Pacific sardine the final rule must include a determination section detailing that implementation of the harvest guideline will not affect other laws such as the ESA. In order to fulfill the determination section on ESA, the SWR had the Northwest Fisheries Science Center (NWFSC, Dr. Edmundo Casillas) perform an analysis of the likelihood of ESA listed salmon species being taken. The NWFSC concluded that the Pacific Northwest portion of the sardine fishery was indeed showing a likelihood of take of ESA listed salmon species. The take of ESA listed salmon species indicated by the NWFSC analysis triggered a formal section 7 consultation to assess the potential take of listed salmon species, and the likely effects or implications of those takes by the Pacific sardine fishery. The SWR-Sustainable Fisheries Division produced a biological assessment and the SWR-Protected Resources Division is currently producing a biological opinion on whether the Pacific sardine fishery will jeopardize the continued existence of ESA listed salmon species.

CPS observer program

The SWR initiated a pilot observer program on California purse seine fishing vessels landing CPS in July 2004. The pilot observer program's main focus is to gather data on total catch and bycatch, and on interactions between their fishing gear and protected species such as marine mammals, sea turtles, and sea birds. Observers were contracted and trained by NMFS in the beginning of July 2004. As of December 3, 2004, observers have completed 30 vessel trips ranging from Morro Bay, California, to San Diego, California. Out of 30 trips, 17 targeted Pacific sardine, one targeted tuna, one targeted northern anchovy, and 11 targeted market squid. Out of the 30 trips, there were 38 observations of net entanglements of California sea lions (one died and the other thirty-seven were released alive) and 18 interactions with unidentified seagulls. Additionally there were numerous incidents of bycatch of fish and other marine organisms including but not limited to: bat rays, bat stars, octopus, California barracuda, California halibut, Giant sea bass, jack smelt, Pacific sanddabs, sculpin, starry flounder, skates, pelagic stingrays, white croaker, and yellowfin croaker.

EFH 5-Year review

The SWR is coordinating with the Council on their effort for the 5-year review of Essential Fish Habitat (EFH). The SWR received a copy of a December 29, 2004, letter from the Council to Dr. Hogarth detailing the Team's initial conclusions about the current EFH information and their approval to use the process recommended by NMFS for formal Council review. The approach is for the Team to write a detailed report of their five-year review of CPS EFH in the 2005 CPS Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) document, to have the Council officially adopt the 2005 CPS SAFE document at their June 2005 Council meeting, and to document their process for the administrative record.