

COASTAL PELAGIC SPECIES ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON FINAL ACTION ON
SARDINE ASSESSMENT, SPECIFICATIONS, AND MANAGEMENT MEASURES

The Coastal Pelagic Species Advisory Subpanel (CPSAS) and Coastal Pelagic Species Management Team (CPSMT) received a joint briefing from Dr. Kevin Hill on the Pacific Sardine Stock Assessment for USA management in 2015-16 (Agenda Item G.1.a, Assessment Report).

The CPSAS thanks the Stock Assessment Team for their efforts. The CPSAS appreciates the Council's consideration of the following points in deliberating management measures for the 2015-2016 sardine fishery:

1. Although the current stock assessment reflects a declining trend and biomass has fallen below the CUTOFF, industry remains concerned about the ability of current acoustic trawl surveys to measure the full extent of the biomass. The CPSAS strongly supports the Scientific and Statistical Committee and CPSMT recommendation to conduct a methodology review of the Acoustic Trawl Method (ATM) survey.
2. The update assessment was based on 2014 spring and summer surveys, and does not factor in small sardines that have been observed in recent months both in California and the Pacific Northwest. The spring 2015 sardine survey is currently observing spawning activity off southern Oregon.
3. The size of sardine stocks are largely driven by environmental conditions. There was a very poor year-class in 2010, followed by three years of poor recruitment. Both the sardine stock assessment and the acoustic-trawl series clearly show this. **With low recruitment, biomass drops very quickly absent any fishing.** This directly contradicts arguments that sardines are declining due to overfishing.
4. **The sardine control rule is designed to shut down the directed fishery after a series of poor recruitment years.** The sardine harvest control rule is a highly precautionary management policy.
5. Please consider that achieving Optimum Yield requires balancing fishery opportunity, economic stability and ecosystem needs.
6. Sardines frequently school with other CPS species, and are now showing up in other CPS catches. An allowance of sardine caught incidentally in other CPS fisheries will be necessary to keep boats fishing and processors' doors open.
7. The industry wants to maintain a sustainable resource, as well as a sustainable fishing industry.

Management Measures

The CPSAS recommends the following sardine management measures for July 1, 2015 – June 30, 2016, based on an Overfishing Limit (OFL) of 13,227 metric tons (mt), and an Acceptable Biological Catch of 12,074 mt, as outlined in Table b of the Stock Assessment Report (Agenda Item G.1.a. Assessment Report).

The CPSAS supports the CPSMT recommendations (G.1.b, Supplemental CPSMT Report) including setting the Annual Catch Limit at 8,000 mt and an incidental landing allowance in other CPS fisheries of 40 percent Pacific sardine by weight until a total of 1,500 mt are landed in non-tribal fisheries; and then 30% by weight. We can also support the addition of an annual catch target (ACT) if recommended by the CPSMT, understanding these management measures will be reviewed in September, with the incidental landing allowance adjusted up or down as needed.

These incidental catch percentages are based on analysis by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), which finds sardine caught incidentally in all other CPS fisheries, but with the highest incidental rate in the Pacific mackerel fishery. Without an incidental catch of sardines the CPS fleet could be preempted from fishing in 2015, particularly in California.

The CPSAS also stresses the importance of the CPS Fishery Management Plan (FMP) provision allowing the live bait fishery to continue. While this is considered to be harvest, an estimated 90 percent of the live bait catch is returned to the ocean alive.

PFMC
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