

COASTAL PELAGIC SPECIES ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON ANCHOVY GENERAL STATUS OVERVIEW

The Coastal Pelagic Species Advisory Subpanel (CPSAS) and Coastal Pelagic Species Management Team (CPSMT) received a joint briefing from Dale Sweetnam on the Southwest Fisheries Science Center (SWFSC) Summary of Current Information Available on Coastal Pelagic Species, with Emphasis on Northern Anchovy. In addition, the CPSAS reviewed Agenda Item H.3 Supplemental Reports and comments, including a paper submitted by Dr. Richard Parrish (Agenda item H.3.b, Supplemental Public Comment 4). We also listened to the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) discussion on this agenda item, and considered public comments.

In discussion, CPSAS members commented on the dramatic increase in anchovy recruitment reported in the SWFSC briefing. For example, the 2015 summer SaKe survey caught anchovy from the Southern California Bight to Vancouver Island, and the juvenile rockfish survey found the highest abundance of both sardine and northern anchovy young-of-the year ever recorded (Agenda Item H.3.a, SWFSC Report). Between 2008 and 2014, sardine and anchovy have not responded in historic patterns: there has been a spatial and temporal shift in spawning distribution. In his presentation, Dale Sweetnam noted the takeaway message – it looks like we’ve gone into a transition period in which sardine and anchovy abundance is not varying inversely. In addition, during his presentation to the SSC, Mr. Sweetnam stated that he did not classify the current anchovy status as a “crisis.”

The SWFSC report acknowledged that the current CalCOFI survey grid may not be adequate to follow anchovy abundance. This information corroborates fishermen’s reports, who have been seeing abundant anchovy from Southern California to north of San Francisco for the past few years.

In his statement (Agenda Item H.3.b, Supplemental Public Comment 4), Dr. Richard Parrish states that the biomass of the central anchovy stock is extremely variable even without a fishery. He commented that expansion and contraction of range is not simple, rather, it is highly age-dependent: younger anchovies are always concentrated near shore, even at high abundance. However, this near-shore abundance was omitted from the recent paper (Agenda item H.3.b, Supplemental Public Comment) that concluded the central anchovy population has collapsed.

Anchovies are typically not targeted in Southern California, but this fishery is very important for local Monterey boats and markets, who fish anchovy when other CPS are unavailable, as in 2015. Due to limited markets and very light fishing, the anchovy stock has been classified as monitored rather than actively managed for the past two decades. If catches were to increase significantly, the Council has flexibility to move to active management.

The CPSAS discussed public comment calling for harvest reductions or closure of the central anchovy subpopulation in addition to an immediate stock assessment. Further restricting the

catch now would essentially curtail Monterey's historic wetfish fleet. Market squid are largely unavailable due to El Niño conditions and although Monterey Bay is full of sardines, that fishery is currently closed.

The SWFSC is planning an assessment in 2016, after the larval lab finishes processing the backlog of samples from recent years. The SSC suggested holding a workshop first to decide on an appropriate model, considering the difficulties inherent in modeling anchovy variability.

The CPSAS is concerned about workload priorities. We recognize that the Amendment 13 settlement agreement has already created a very large additional workload for scientists, the CPSMT, and the CPSAS. As we reported in our June statement, we see no immediate crisis or need that warrants changing the current schedule of priorities. We encourage prioritizing efforts to improve stock assessment methods for all CPS, with a primary focus on the sardine survey and calibrating the new acoustic equipment, including sonar, so it can be used as soon as possible. We support the concept of a workshop to determine the best model to assess anchovy. Any anchovy assessment should include all recent year data to capture recent recruitment.

In conclusion, recent surveys have documented a very large increase in anchovy recruitment. Anchovy now supports a small, localized fishery in Monterey that currently is critical to keep fishermen fishing and market doors open.

PFMC
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