

COASTAL PELAGIC SPECIES ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON
PACIFIC SARDINE HARVEST SPECIFICATIONS AND MANAGEMENT MEASURES
FOR 2024-25—FINAL ACTION

The Coastal Pelagic Species Advisory Subpanel (CPSAS) received a report on Pacific sardine harvest specifications and management measures.

Survey and assessment results show a continuing increase in the estimated population of the northern subpopulation, while the assessment estimate has increased above the overfishing limit. Fishermen have observed increasing and substantial numbers of sardines, particularly in southern California, where catches are more prevalent in the bait fishery. In addition, the revised habitat model suggests a substantial portion of the catches (including bycatch in southern California) are not from the northern subpopulation. The conservative category/tier 2 designation incorporates substantial precaution into the specifications, particularly given the new benchmark assessment. In addition, as noted by the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC), the decline of northern subpopulation sardine catches in Mexico in recent years is not reflected in the distribution term, which effectively increases the degree of precaution in the specifications estimates.

We support the CPS Management Team’s (CPSMT) recommendations of:

Biomass	58,614 mt
OFL	8,312 mt
P* Buffer	0.40
ABC tier 2	6,005 mt
ACL	6,005 mt
ACT	5,500 mt

We also support the CPSMT Recommended Accountability Measures:

1. Incidental landing limit in CPS fisheries of 30 percent.
2. If landings in the live bait fishery attain 3,000 mt, a per-landing limit of 1 mt of Pacific sardine per trip will apply to the live bait fishery.
3. If the ACT of 5,500 mt is attained, a per-trip limit of 1 mt of Pacific sardine applies to all CPS fisheries.
4. An incidental per-landing allowance of 2 mt of Pacific sardine in non-CPS fisheries until the ACL is reached.

We believe that the 670 mt proposed to be allocated to the two EFPs (150 mt to the first EFP and 520 to the second EFP) will leave sufficient Pacific sardines for both the bait fishery and bycatch in other fisheries.

The Pacific Sardine Stock Assessment Review (STAR) Panel report (I.2, Attachment 2) states that “stock structure investigations remain a high priority....completion of that work is considered a high priority, with considerable potential impacts for management.”

We believe that the most pressing scientific research need is to understand the stock structure to facilitate management of Pacific sardine coastwide. Sardines off California are largely excluded from survey estimates of the managed northern subpopulation, and only a small portion of the California catches are attributed northern subpopulation by the habitat model. This despite the fact that the most recent three survey years show greater biomass of the southern (unmanaged) population, than the northern (managed) subpopulation. The urgency to refine the science for management of the northern subpopulation is reduced as long as the stock is recovering and above the overfished threshold.

We also support the STAR Panel's recommendation to continue to compare species composition of trawl and seine gears and of the *F/V Lisa Marie* and the NOAA white boats to improve the accuracy of the acoustic trawl survey.

A minority (the Conservation Representative) notes that Pacific sardine, while showing an increased age 1+ biomass forecast based on the 2024 benchmark stock assessment, remain nearly 100,000 mt below the directed fishery threshold. The Pacific sardine biomass estimate is only 8,000 mt above the Minimum Stock Size Threshold, which does not justify any significantly increased harvest in the near term. Further, these data do not warrant that 2024-2025 specifications should utilize an ACT increased by nearly 2,000 mt. Due to the myriad data uncertainties surrounding Pacific sardine including, but not limited to, the current basis for calculating E_{msy} and uncertainties regarding accounting for the southern subpopulation and its interactions with the commercial fishery, a precautionary management strategy is of the utmost importance. In addition, a lower P-star value to account for these uncertainties. Further, the incidental catch allowance should remain at status quo (20 percent), or even be lowered, to prevent the ACL from being exceeded. Overall, these recommendations would allow the Council to take a more precautionary approach that is appropriate in light of the collapsed condition of the stock.

The entire CPSAS appreciates the excellent work of the Stock Assessment Team and appreciates the Council's consideration of our report.

PFMC
04/09/24