

JOINT COUNCIL STAFF/NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE REPORT ON STOCK ASSESSMENT PRIORITIZATION

Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) West Coast Region (WCR) and Southwest Fisheries Science Center (SWFSC) staff have discussed the current schedule of assessments outlined in the situation summary and have concerns about the capacity needed to meet that proposed schedule. The following attachment describes those concerns and offers a new proposed schedule for the Council and its advisory bodies to consider.

2026

In 2026, the Council would generally consider an update assessment for Pacific sardine to inform the harvest specifications and management measures for the 2026-2027 fishing year. However, the SWFSC will conduct the first operational Integrated West Coast Pelagics Survey with the Northwest Fisheries Science Center in 2025 and a review is recommended prior to incorporating into Coastal Pelagic Species assessments. That review could take place in early 2026. The review of this methodology is likely to take similar staff from the SWFSC to prepare any necessary materials, as well as Council staff and advisory body members, including Scientific and Statistical Committee, participation.

Given the methodology review of the Integrated Survey, Council and NMFS staff are proposing postponing an assessment for Pacific sardine in 2026.

2027

In 2027, both a benchmark for Pacific sardine and Pacific mackerel are proposed based on Council Operating Procedure 9. The benchmark assessment for Pacific sardine would include results from the Integrated survey as well as considerations for Japanese sardine if the data warrants it. However, completing two benchmark assessments in a single year is a major hardship for the SWFSC as the same stock assessment team members would be assigned to those assessments. This would also require two Stock Assessment Review panels and participation from Council staff and advisory body members.

Council and NMFS staff are therefore exploring solutions for this situation, such as potentially delaying the Pacific mackerel benchmark until 2028. The last benchmark assessment was in 2023, and the planned 2027 benchmark assessment would have supported the 2027-2028 and 2028-2029 harvest specifications. While there is no proposal on how to deal with this issue at this time, Council and NMFS staff will continue discussions and bring forward a proposal at a future meeting.