

COASTAL PELAGIC SPECIES ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON  
PACIFIC SARDINE HARVEST SPECIFICATIONS AND MANAGEMENT MEASURES  
FOR 2025-2026 - FINAL ACTION

The estimate of the northern subpopulation (NSP) of Pacific sardine (77,750 mt) produced by the acoustic-trawl survey is substantially over the 50,000 mt minimum stock size threshold (MSST), while the update assessment (G.3 Attachment 1) estimates the stock below that MSST. Alternative assessment models examined by the Stock Assessment Team (STAT), all of which were said by the STAT to be plausible, resulted in higher stock estimates, most over the MSST (see G.3 Attachment 1). Fishermen have continued to observe substantial numbers of sardines, particularly in southern California, where catches are more prevalent in the live bait fishery. The conservative category/tier 2 designation recommended by the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) incorporates substantial precaution into the specifications, particularly given the new update assessment. In addition, as noted by the SSC, the decline of NSP catches in Mexico in recent years is not reflected in the distribution term in the harvest control rule formula, which effectively increases the degree of precaution in the harvest specification's estimates.

We support the following recommendations:

P* Buffer	0.45
Acceptable Biological Catch ( $ABC_{\text{tier2}}$ )	3,957 mt
Annual Catch Limit (ACL)	2,200 mt
Annual Catch Target (ACT)	2,100 mt

The CPSAS recommends a 2,100 mt ACT compared to the Coastal Pelagic Species Management Team (CPSMT) recommendation of 2,000 mt because it would provide flexibility to participants before the potential accountability measures are triggered.

We also support the CPSMT Recommended Accountability Measures:

1. Incidental landing limit in CPS fisheries of 20 percent.
2. If the ACT of 2,100 mt is attained, a per-trip limit of 1 mt of Pacific sardine applies to all CPS fisheries.
3. An incidental per-landing allowance of 2 mt of Pacific sardine in non-CPS fisheries until the ACL is reached.

We recommend that the Council approve the 520 mt proposed to be allocated to the California Wetfish Producers Association Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP; G.2 Attachment 1). Participants in the EFP will rigorously manage catches to limit the potential for EFP to impact other fisheries by reaching the ACT.

While the CPSAS provides these recommendations following the rebuilding plan for Pacific sardine adopted by the Council in November 2024, we believe that the current management does not reflect reality by managing only the NSP. While all sardine catch is counted towards the NSP

ACL in-season, there is no application of the habitat model, which shows a majority of catch (particularly from the live bait sector) is from the “southern” subpopulation (SSP). This inconsistency in catch accounting could lead to fisheries constraints (both CPS and non-CPS) if either the ACT or ACL is reached, despite final catch estimates of the NSP being below those specifications. Until the stock structure problem is resolved, this major industry concern could be temporarily addressed by excluding live bait and incidental catch that the habitat model (or a simplified and conservative month/area rule based on the habitat model) determines are unarguably SSP from ACL accounting. This measure would prevent the mismatch of management with the NSP stock definition from impinging on fisheries beyond the directed commercial sardine fishery.

These dilemmas further emphasize the need for management of sardines to be revised to include all sardines off the West Coast.

PFMC  
04/12/25