Agenda Item J.1.a
Supplemental CPSAS Report 1
September 2026

COASTAL PELAGIC SPECIES ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN AMENDMENT: MANAGEMENT PROVISIONS FOR THE REVISED SARDINE STOCK

The Coastal Pelagic Species Advisory Subpanel (CPSAS) supports advancing revision of the stock definition of Pacific sardine and the stock's management provisions and adopting a range of alternatives (ROA) for this action. The CPSAS supports the goal of management of the stock to be informed by a coastwide benchmark assessment and supports using adaptive management in light of that assessment and any additional analyses (such as a management strategy evaluation [MSE] type process). NMFS stands ready to assist with the development of the assessment and to rapidly implement revised management, as reflected in the announcement by NOAA Fisheries Assistant Administrator Eugenio Piñeiro Soler on July 2, 2026, which identified revision of the sardine stock structure as one of its top regional priorities in support of Executive Order on Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness.

Based on discussions with Council and NMFS staff, this outcome would be delayed considerably (i.e., at least 2 to 3 years) if final action to revise the stock definition is not taken by November 2026 and resources are diverted to continue to manage the "northern subpopulation." Of Pacific sardine. The CPSAS asks the Council to confirm this timeline with NMFS West Coast Region and Southwest Fisheries Science Center and confirm the implications of alternative pathways/timelines. We therefore encourage the Council to move forward with final action in November 2026. At this meeting, the CPSAS recommends the Council adopt the range of alternatives (note CPSAS addition below) and select an ROA and preliminary preferred alternative (PPA) as recommended by the SSC and CPSMT.

We ask the Council to consider the following in moving forward:

The Council and NMFS are obliged to revise the stock definition as rapidly as practicable, as the current management is based on dated science that suggests that sardine off the West Coast are comprised of multiple stocks and leaves a substantial portion of the sardines off the West Coast unaccounted for in much of the applicable management. Failure to move forward is failing to apply the best available science.

The recommendations by the SSC and CPSMT are consistent with the best available science and result in precautionary, conservative management as required under the Magnuson-Stevens Act, with no additional risk to the sardine population. Regardless of any action in November, the directed fishery is quite certain to remain closed prior to completion of any benchmark assessment, consideration of the results of that assessment, and additional analyses.

The proposed FMP revisions build upon the existing framework management system in the CPS FMP under which newly received information from any benchmark assessment and subsequent analyses will be rapidly applied to management, ensuring that the fishery is always managed consistently with best available science. While the CPSAS supports the proposed ROA recommended by the SSC and CPSMT, the CPSAS requests that additional options be added to the ROA for a higher (341,400 mt, analyzed in the 2014 MSE) and lower (50,000 mt, analyzed for Amendment 8) CUTOFF value for consideration in November. This analysis of these options should consider the implications of currently available and historical analyses in the context of the newly understood coastwide stock structure.

If the stock is above CUTOFF and there is a directed fishery, the current management system includes seasonal apportionments that have had the effect of geographically distributing catches. The CPSAS acknowledges the SSC statement (Agenda Item J.1.a Supplemental SSC Report 1) that emphasized remaining uncertainty about the demographic connectivity "***within US waters***" and regional management to address localized depletion. If such a concern were to arise, the CPSAS understands that the Point of Concern framework in the CPS FMP could be used.

Current sardine catches (i.e., bait and incidental catches) are minimal (i.e., less than 2,300 mt annually for the last 10 years) and have no impact on the stock, particularly when considering the mortality in Mexican fisheries (at least150,000 mt annually for last 5 years) and natural mortality (marine mammal, sea birds, etc.).

Given that best available science clearly indicates that the current management of only the "northern subpopulation" is inadequate under NMFS's and Council's obligations under MSA, the absence of risk to the sardine stock, and the potential harm to both bait and incidental catch fisheries that could arise from excluding much of the sardine population off the west coast from management, we strongly encourage the Council to proceed expeditiously.

PFMC
09/20/2026