

SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE REPORT ON FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN AMENDMENT: MANAGEMENT PROVISIONS FOR THE REVISED SARDINE STOCK

The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) reviewed Agenda Item J.1, [Attachment 1](#): Review of Management Provisions for Pacific Sardine, [Attachment 2](#): Joint Report of the SSC's Coastal Pelagic Species (CPS) Subcommittee (SSC-CPSSC), CPS Management Team (CPSMT), and CPS Advisory Subpanel (CPSAS) on the Review of Management Provisions for Pacific Sardine – hereafter referred to as the Joint Report, and [Attachment 3](#): Proposed Amendment to the Coastal Pelagic Species Fishery Management Plan to Revise the Pacific Sardine Stock Definition. Katrina Bernaus (Council Staff) gave an overview of the action being considered and the task for the SSC and was available to answer questions. Owen Hamel (SSC) provided a summary of the Joint Report.

For status determination criteria and related reference points, the SSC makes the following recommendations on biomass specification, minimum stock size threshold (MSST), and setting of the overfishing limit (OFL) and acceptable biological catch (ABC).

The SSC supports the conclusion made in the Joint Report that age-1+ biomass remains the most practical estimate for use in sardine status determination and should remain the current management metric. Maturation rates are relatively stable through time, with the majority of age-1+ fish being identified as mature. Other metrics, such as spawning stock biomass or spawning output (egg production) could be explored.

The SSC recommends adopting a formulaic approach to MSST that is based on spawning biomass depletion metrics, where MSST is set to a value between $B_{10\%}$ and $B_{30\%}$ (i.e., between 10% and 30% of B_0). This range accommodates uncertainty around $B_{20\%}$, which was identified as an appropriate MSST value in a 2016 NMFS SWFSC Report. Similar proportions have been used in the management of many CPS stocks globally (Agenda Item J.1, Attachment 3). The specific percentage of B_0 and the value of B_0 used to determine MSST will not be identified until after the 2028 benchmark assessment is complete. The SSC recommends a management strategy evaluation (MSE) to support specification of appropriate parameters when the 2028 benchmark assessment is completed. While a constant percentage of B_0 may be selected at that time, allowing that percentage to vary depending on factors that affect stock productivity and distribution should also be considered. In the absence of the numerical parameters to determine a specific MSST, the SSC proposes to set MSST at a reasonable proxy that will be determined during the annual harvest specifications process.

The SSC recommends a formulaic approach to setting the OFL as $\text{BIOMASS} * E_{\text{MSY}}$, with BIOMASS equal to age-1+ biomass in U.S. waters. The SSC will set E_{MSY} using currently supported approaches and recommends exploration of an updated MSE-based E_{MSY} or adaptive productivity-based E_{MSY} . The SSC supports the SSC-CPSSC recommendations for the six approaches discussed during the July 2026 workshop (Attachment 2) to specify E_{MSY} . The DISTRIBUTION term in the formulas is no longer necessary because BIOMASS is measured in U.S. waters only.

The SSC recommends maintaining the current approach for setting the ABC, which is implemented by multiplying the OFL by an uncertainty buffer determined by P^* and a σ (sigma) with a time-varying component related to natural mortality.

Given uncertainty about the degree of demographic connectivity of sardines within U.S. waters, the SSC recommends that the Council consider regional management approaches that avoid localized depletion. The SSC reiterates the recommendation in its April 2026 statement (Agenda Item F.5.a [Supplemental SSC Report 1](#) April 2026) that transboundary connectivity be accounted for when assessing the stock and applying the harvest control rules.

PFMC

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