

2028-29 STOCK ASSESSMENT PRIORITIZATION AND SCHEDULE

The stock assessment prioritization (SAP) process was designed to guide stock assessment priorities, survey design, and the long-term integrity and value of abundance indices while allowing priorities to be revised as new information becomes available. The Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) underwent an SAP for coastal pelagic species (CPS) assessments for the first time in November 2022 and again in November 2024.

This agenda item asks the Council to confirm a 2028 Pacific sardine benchmark assessment, establish assessment and analytical priorities for 2029, and provide direction for checking in on this schedule mid-biennium, making adjustments, as necessary. The Council may also want to provide direction on reviewing the longer-term CPS stock assessment schedule described in [Council Operating Procedure 9](#) (COP 9) as well as the [CPS science and management priorities list](#).

Proposed Stock Assessment Schedule

Table 1 below, discussed further in Attachment 1, shows the most recent, upcoming, and proposed CPS assessments through 2030. The proposed schedule reflects historical practices and expectations outlined in COP 9. While COP 9 specifies annual assessments for Pacific sardine, it does not specify assessment type. Historically, the Pacific sardine benchmark assessments have been followed by two update assessments.

For the central population of northern anchovy (CSNA), no assessment is proposed for 2028-29. A benchmark assessment is expected in 2030 per COP 9 and will be considered in the next SAP exercise. The short-term CSNA biomass will also be evaluated in April 2028 and at that time, a 2029 assessment could be recommended if conditions outlined in COP 9 are met.

The Council is also considering an action to revise the stock definition for Pacific sardine (Agenda Item J.3 November 2026). An update assessment for the northern subpopulation (NSP) and a U.S. coastwide age 1+ biomass estimate are anticipated in 2027 to inform harvest specifications under the revised stock definition. The Council has indicated their expectations for a 2028 benchmark assessment based on the proposed revised U.S. coastwide stock definition. The Council has also expressed interest in additional analyses for Pacific sardine, such as a management strategy evaluation (MSE), or similar, following the 2028 benchmark assessment.

Table 1. Coastal Pelagic Species Assessments by Last, Upcoming, and Proposed Assessment Type and Date. Note, these dates represent proposed assessment/review timing. These may be adjusted through Council direction and subsequent work planning.

Species	Last Assessment	Upcoming Assessment	Proposed Assessment
Pacific sardine (NSP)	Feb. 2025 – Update (northern subpopulation [NSP])	Feb. 2027 – NSP Update &	Feb. 2028 – U.S. Benchmark

Species	Last Assessment	Upcoming Assessment	Proposed Assessment
		U.S. (coastwide) age 1+ biomass estimate	Feb. 2029 – U.S. Update
Pacific mackerel	Feb. 2025 – Catch Only Update	Feb 2027 - Update	Jun 2029 - Benchmark
Central subpopulation of northern anchovy (CSNA)	Feb. 2022 – Benchmark	-	April 2028 – Short-term biomass check <i>Feb. 2030 – Benchmark (to be considered in next SAP)</i>

2028 Pacific Sardine Benchmark Assessment

The Council should confirm its desire to schedule a 2028 U.S. coastwide Pacific sardine benchmark assessment to inform harvest specifications and management measures for the 2028-29 fishing year.

Establish Stock Assessment and Analytical Priorities for 2029

The proposed 2029 schedule includes 1) a Pacific mackerel benchmark assessment and 2) a Pacific sardine update assessment. The Pacific mackerel benchmark assessment is proposed to inform harvest specifications and management measures for the 2029-2030 and 2030-2031 fishing years. The Pacific sardine update assessment is proposed to inform harvest specifications and management measures for the 2029-2030 fishing year.

In September of 2026, the Council expressed interest in conducting an MSE or similar analysis for Pacific sardine following the 2028 benchmark assessment. These additional analyses have not yet been scheduled but could, at earliest, occur in 2029. Therefore, potential development of these analyses could add a third analytical activity to the 2029 schedule on top of the two proposed assessments.

As further discussed in Attachment 1, the addition of this third analytical activity is likely to compete for limited capacity within the Southwest Fisheries Science Center. The assessments and an MSE or similar analyses may require overlapping participation by the same stock assessment team members, in addition to requiring scientific review, participation by Council, its advisory bodies, and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) West Coast Region staff. It is not yet clear that resources and time are available to conduct all three of these tasks, nor the Council's expectations for analyses in terms of scope or timeline. These details may be clarified upon the completion of the 2028 benchmark assessment.

In the event that the additional requested workload cannot be accomplished alongside the proposed 2029 stock assessments, one or more may need to be adjusted or delayed. This could mean, for example, adjusting the assessment types produced in 2029, extending the timeline for the sardine analyses, among other possibilities. Considering the expected CSNA benchmark assessment in

2030, and the fact that analytical work on Pacific sardine could span several years, any adjustments to the proposal for 2029 should also consider implications through 2030, and beyond.

Therefore, at this meeting, the Council should provide clarity on their expectations for scheduling an MSE or similar analyses for 2029 and establish this work's relative priority within the existing stock assessment proposal. The Council may provide adjustments to the proposal outlined in Attachment 1 as needed, and/or adopt an interim stock assessment schedule for 2028-2029 that could be adjusted following the 2028 benchmark stock assessment. The Council may request that Council and NMFS staff bring forward a proposal for these adjustments, including an expected scope of an MSE or similar analyses, at a future meeting.

Long-Term CPS Stock Assessment Schedule & CPS Priorities

The Council may also wish to review the long-term CPS stock assessment schedule described in COP 9 and based on historical practice. In April 2025, the Council identified stock assessment frequency as its second [science and management priority](#), following Pacific sardine stock structure. The Council may consider taking up this next priority after final action on the Pacific sardine stock definition amendment. This review could examine how assessment frequency and timing can better align with the characteristics of individual stocks, fishing intensity, management needs, and available science capacity while maintaining adequate monitoring to support conservation needs. Specific objectives are outlined in detail in Attachment 1. If the Council wishes to pursue a review of the long-term CPS stock assessment schedule, it could request a proposal from Council and NMFS staff as early as November 2027. The Council may also wish to revisit the science and management priorities list as a whole, as an MSE or similar analysis for Pacific sardine is not currently listed. The Council could request this list be revisited as early as April 2027.

Council Tasks:

- 1. Establish CPS stock assessment and analytical priorities and schedule for 2028-29, including:**
 - a. Confirm a 2028 benchmark assessment for Pacific sardine**
 - b. Establish assessment and analytical priorities for 2029 and recommend adjustments to the Attachment 1 proposal, as appropriate**
 - i. Pacific mackerel benchmark assessment**
 - ii. Pacific sardine update assessment.**
 - iii. Pacific sardine MSE or similar analysis, following the 2028 benchmark assessment.**
 - iv. Provide direction on revisiting 2029 stock assessment and analytical priorities at a future meeting, considering scoping of additional sardine analyses and adjustments to the stock assessment proposal**
- 2. Provide direction on scheduling an agenda item to address a long term CPS assessment schedule**
- 3. Provide direction on scheduling an agenda item revisiting CPS science and management priorities**

Reference Materials:

1. Agenda Item J.2, Attachment 1: Joint Council/NMFS Staff Report on 2028-2029 Stock Assessment Prioritization and Schedule.
2. If received, Public Comments are electronic only ([see e-portal](#)).

Agenda Order:

- J.2 2028-29 Stock Assessment Prioritization and Schedule Katrina Bernaus
- a. Reports and Comments of Management Entities and Advisory Bodies
 - b. Public Comment
 - c. **Council Action:** Adopt Stock Assessment Priorities and Schedule for 2028-29 and Provide Direction on Associated Schedule, as Appropriate

PFMC
10/27/26