COASTAL PELAGIC SPECIES MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN AMENDMENT: REVISED SARDINE STOCK AND MANAGEMENT PROVISIONS – FINAL ACTION

The Coastal Pelagic Species Management Team (CPSMT) discussed Agenda Item J.3, Attachment 1: Summary of Information Available for Council Decision Making on Fishery Management Plan (FMP) Amendment: Revised Sardine Stock and Management, Attachment 2: DRAFT Impacts Analysis/MSA Analysis for the Proposed Amendment to the Coastal Pelagic Species Fishery Management Plan to Revise the Pacific Sardine Stock Definition, and Attachment 3: DRAFT FMP Amendment Text (redline).

The CPSMT recommends adoption of Alternative 1 as the final preferred alternative in this amendment, with one modification — the removal of the DISTRIBUTION term in the Pacific sardine harvest control rules in the CPS FMP.

The CPSMT recommends adopting the draft CPS FMP text (redline) (Agenda Item J.3, Attachment 3) and allowing Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) staff discretion to correct any minor grammatical errors. The CPSMT recommends selecting the alternate CPS FMP text at the top of page 47 that removes the DISTRIBUTION term to simplify the harvest control rule for Pacific sardine.

The CPSMT reiterates its recommendations from the July 2026 Joint Meeting and the September 2026 Council meeting (Agenda Item J.1, Attachment 2, September 2026 and Agenda Item J.1.a, Supplemental Report 1, September 2026; summarized in Table 1) that the more intensive management approach continue to be used for the U.S. Pacific sardine stock. This approach uses annual estimates of biomass and reduced exploitation rates as biomass declines, and is appropriate for the U.S. Pacific sardine stock to best meet the goals and objectives within the CPS FMP. In addition, with the goal of maintaining the current harvest approach and adapting it to the new science on stock structure, the CPSMT supports using the existing annual management harvest specifications process for Pacific sardine and recommend P*, annual catch limit (ACL), annual catch target (ACT), and accountability measures based on data available for the specifications cycle.

Table 1. Summary of CPSMT recommendations (changes from September 2026 J.1.a CPSMT report shown in strikethrough).

FMP Element	Specification
Management Strategy	More intensive
ACL	Less than or equal to the ABC
Harvest Guideline	H = (BIOMASS – CUTOFF) * FRACTION ~~* DISTRIBUTION~~ (not to exceed MAXCAT or ACL)
CUTOFF	150,000 mt
FRACTION	Equal to E_{MSY}
~~DISTRIBUTION~~	~~1.0~~
MAXCAT	200,000 mt

Redefining the Pacific sardine stock in the CPS FMP renders the rebuilding plan for the "northern subpopulation" of Pacific sardine inapplicable. However, precautionary management measures described within the rebuilding plan are still included in the FMP and remain unchanged under Alternative 1, including the closure of the directed fishery and limits on incidental allowances when the biomass is below CUTOFF. For example, when a stock is overfished as defined in the FMP, incidental catch allowances for commercial fishing cannot exceed 20 percent of landed weight, and when a stock is not overfished but below CUTOFF, incidental catch allowances cannot exceed 45 percent of landed weight (CPS FMP sections 5.2.1 and 5.2.2).

Harvest Control Rule Parameters

DISTRIBUTION
The CPSMT now recommends the DISTRIBUTION term be removed from the Pacific sardine harvest control rules. In past statements, the CPSMT has recommended defining DISTRIBUTION = 1, which is functionally equivalent to removing the DISTRIBUTION term. CPS FMP section 4.2 states, *"In cases where biomass estimates include portions of the population in foreign waters, a DISTRIBUTION term will be used to estimate the percentage of the population in U.S. EEZ."* Under Alternative 1, biomass estimates would be calculated solely for the portion of the population present in U.S. waters. Therefore, the DISTRIBUTION term no longer applies to the harvest control rules for Pacific sardine.

FRACTION
The CPSMT recommends that FRACTION in the harvest guideline (HG) be set equal to E_{MSY}. This allows FRACTION to change over time with E_{MSY} as new scientific information becomes available. Bounds on E_{MSY} could be applied, as deemed appropriate by the Scientific and Statistical Committee.

CUTOFF
The CPSMT recommends keeping CUTOFF in the HG calculation and to apply the current value used at 150,000 mt. The CPSMT views a 150,000 mt CUTOFF as the most reasonable option for management of a U.S. Pacific sardine stock because simulation analyses in Amendment 8 (PFMC 1998) and Hurtado-Ferro and Punt (2014) indicated that it effectively protects spawning biomass and reduces the risk of stock collapse while minimizing unnecessary constraints on the commercial fishery (Agenda Item J.3, Attachment 2). Although it is not a requirement of the Magnuson-Stevens Act or National Standards, the CPSMT supports the use of CUTOFF as a precautionary value to protect this stock from exploitation pressures during times of low abundance.

MAXCAT
The CPSMT recommends applying the same maximum catch (MAXCAT) value of 200,000 mt per fishing year that was used for the northern subpopulation. MAXCAT at 200,000 mt was previously analyzed and found to stabilize the fishery and allow high levels of harvest over time when the population is large.

PFMC
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