COASTAL PELAGIC SPECIES ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON PACIFIC SARDINE STOCK DEFINITIONS

The Coastal Pelagic Species Advisory Subpanel (CPSAS) believes this action will satisfy the need to bring all Pacific sardine in U.S. waters into conservation and management.

We believe a one stock management program should be selected as the preliminary preferred alternative (Alternative 1). The recent comprehensive reviews of science, data, and genetic work all suggest that Pacific sardine off the U.S. West Coast are a single population and should be managed as such. One-stock management also avoids the costs and complexities of two stock management.

Selecting Alternative 1 as PPA will allow both NMFS Science Center and Region staffs to move forward with focused work to develop an assessment and a management program for a single stock. We encourage the Council to move toward a simplified, transparent management program that relies on direct stock management through use of surveys and assessment and less on speculative environmental variables. We look forward to continuing to work with the Council on this one stock management to ensure that it meets the fishery and ecosystem objectives of the CPS FMP.

The conservation representative highlighted the risks associated with managing Pacific sardine as one coastwise stock, including localized depletion. She recommended the Council consider strategies to reduce these risks and address regional differences in life history, ecosystem dynamics and the needs of dependent predators. The other members of the CPSAS did not come to consensus on this portion of the statement.

The CPSAS suggests that Japanese sardine be excluded from the fishery management unit. The current information concerning Japanese sardines in U.S. waters suggests that their presence may be ephemeral, as they were absent from survey data before 2022 and may be in decline in U.S. waters since their discovery. Further monitoring of this species should be undertaken and evaluated to determine whether inclusion of Japanese sardine in the FMU may be justified at a future time. While the CSPAS' recommended range of alternatives does not include Japanese sardine, we support the SSC recommendation that if Japanese sardine continue to be present in U.S. waters, they be consistently treated in assessments and catch accounting (i.e., not separated out in assessments and catch accounting; Agenda Item J.3.a Supplemental SSC Report 1 November 2025).

The CPSAS is recommending the following Purpose and Need and Range of Alternatives, revised from those provided in Attachment 1 (Agenda Item J.3 Attachment 1 November 2025).

Purpose and Need

Due to the increased presence and catches of Pacific sardine designated as southern subpopulation (SSP) and newly published research on the population structure of Pacific sardine, this action aims to reevaluate the fishery management unit (FMU) for sardine in the Coastal Pelagic Species (CPS) Fishery Management Plan (FMP). Specifically, the action will determine if the sardine stock is 'appropriately identified,' whether the stock should be adjusted, or whether an additional stock needs to be moved into the FMP.

This action is necessary to ensure sardine conservation and management is consistent with the goals and objectives of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, the National Standards, and the CPS FMP.

Range of Alternatives

No Action - The Council would not define stocks other than those currently defined in the CPS FMP (Section 1.2, Table 1-1). Only the northern subpopulation of Pacific sardine would continue to be defined as a stock in the FMU.

Alternative 1 - The Council would amend the CPS FMP (Section 1.2, Table 1-1) to include all Pacific sardine in U.S. waters in the FMU. The FMU would include one stock of Pacific sardine, delineated coastwide.

Alternative 2 - The Council would amend the CPS FMP (Section 1.2, Table 1-1) to include all Pacific sardine in U.S. waters in the FMU. The FMU would include two stocks of Pacific sardine, delineated by northern and southern stocks.

PFMC
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