

**DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE****National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**

[I.D. 033099C]

**Notice of Availability of Draft Stock Assessment Reports**

**AGENCY:** National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

**ACTION:** Notice of availability; request for comments.

**SUMMARY:** NMFS has revised the Alaska, Atlantic, and Pacific marine mammal stock assessment reports in accordance with the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA). Draft revised 1999 reports are available for public review and comment.

**DATES:** Comments must be received by August 26, 1999.

**ADDRESSES:** Send requests for printed copies of the draft Reports to: Chief, Marine Mammal Division, Office of Protected Resources, National Marine Fisheries Service, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910-3226, Attn: Stock Assessments. Copies of the regional reports may also be requested from Douglas P. DeMaster, Alaska Fisheries Science Center (F/AKC), NMFS, 7600 Sand Point Way, NE BIN 15700, Seattle, WA 98115-0070 (Alaska); Richard Merrick, Northeast Fisheries Science Center, 166 Water St., Woods Hole, MA 02543 (Atlantic); and Irma Lagomarsino, Southwest Regional Office (F/SWO3), NMFS, 501 West Ocean Boulevard, Long Beach, CA 90802-4213 (Pacific). Electronic copies of the reports can be found at [http://www.nmfs.gov/prot\\_res/mammals/sa\\_rep/sar.html](http://www.nmfs.gov/prot_res/mammals/sa_rep/sar.html).

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Cathy Eisele, Office of Protected Resources, NMFS, at (301) 713-2322, Douglas P. DeMaster (206) 526-4045, regarding Alaska regional stock assessments; Irma Lagomarsino, (310) 980-4020, regarding Pacific regional stock assessments; or Richard Merrick, (508) 495-2311, or Steven Swartz, (305) 361-4487, regarding Atlantic regional stock assessments.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** Section 117 of the MMPA (16 U.S.C. 1361 *et seq.*) requires NMFS and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to prepare stock assessments reports for each stock of marine mammals that occurs in waters under the jurisdiction of the United States. These reports contain information regarding the distribution and abundance of the stock, population

growth rates and trends, estimates of annual human-caused mortality from all sources, descriptions of the fisheries with which the stock interacts, and the status of the stock.

The MMPA also requires NMFS and FWS to review these reports annually for strategic stocks of marine mammals and at least every 3 years for stocks determined to be non-strategic. NMFS, in conjunction with the Alaska, Atlantic, and Pacific Scientific Review Groups, has reviewed the MMPA status of marine mammal stocks, and has revised reports for which significant new information was available. Tables 1-3 contain lists of all the stock assessment reports which NMFS has revised. Tables 1-3 also detail changes that have been made to their estimated abundance, human-caused mortality, or other relevant items. NMFS solicits public comments on these draft revised Alaska, Atlantic, and Pacific reports.

NMFS has chosen to label these reports the 1999 Stock Assessment Reports, as the intent is to finalize and publish these reports in 1999. It should be noted that the previous reports, labeled the 1998 Stock Assessment Reports, were finalized on February 19, 1999 (64 FR 8323).

**Alaska Stocks**

NMFS, in conjunction with the Alaska Scientific Review Group, reviewed information available for all strategic stocks of Alaska marine mammals under its authority, as well as for several other stocks. A total of 13 of the 33 Alaska stock assessment reports were revised for 1999 (Table 1). Most proposed changes to the stock assessment reports incorporate new information into mortality estimates. The revised stock assessment reports include western U.S. Steller sea lions, eastern U.S. Steller sea lions, all five beluga whale stocks (Cook Inlet, Bristol Bay, Eastern Bering Sea, Eastern Chukchi Sea, and Beaufort Sea), western North Pacific humpback whales, central North Pacific humpback whales, Baird's beaked whales, Stejneger's beaked whales, and Cuvier's beaked whales. In addition, the stock assessment report for the Eastern North Pacific transient killer whale stock was revised and moved to the Pacific region document. The new information on abundance and mortality did not change the status (strategic or not) of any of these 13 Alaska stocks relative to the last time the respective stock assessment report was revised (1996 or 1998).

Fishery mortality sections in the revised reports have been updated to include observer program, fisher self-reporting, and stranding data through

1997, where possible. Similarly, subsistence harvest information through 1997 has been included for those stocks which are taken by Alaska Natives for subsistence purposes. New abundance estimates are available and have been included in the revised assessments for two stocks: western U.S. Steller sea lions and Cook Inlet beluga whales. New Potential Biological Removal level (PBR) estimates have been calculated for those stocks having new abundance estimates.

**Atlantic Stocks**

The 1999 Atlantic stock assessment reports (including the Gulf of Mexico) were prepared by staff of the Northeast Fisheries Science Center and Southeast Fisheries Science Center. NMFS staff presented the Reports at the November 1998 meeting of the Atlantic Scientific Review Group and subsequent revisions were based on their contributions and constructive criticism.

Major revisions and updating of the stock assessment reports were completed only for Atlantic Coast strategic stocks and Atlantic Coast and Gulf of Mexico stocks for which significant new information was available. The stock definitions were changed for four Atlantic stocks (Sei whale; gray, harp and hooded seal) based on stock area definitions used by international scientific organizations (i.e., the International Whaling Commission and the International Council for Exploration of the Sea).

Table 2 contains a summary, by species, of the information included in the stock assessments, and also indicates those assessments that have been revised since the 1998 publication. A total of 31 of the 60 Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico stock assessment reports were revised for 1999. Most proposed changes incorporate new information into mortality estimates. The revised stock assessment reports include 14 strategic and 17 non-strategic stocks. Information on human interactions (fishery and ship strikes) between the North Atlantic right whale, North Atlantic humpback whale, and Canadian east coast minke whale stocks were re-reviewed and updated. Further, the status of three western North Atlantic stocks (Atlantic spotted dolphin, pantropical spotted dolphin, and dwarf sperm whale) were changed to non-strategic because the 5-year (1993-1997) mean annual mortalities in fishing operations were below PBR. Conversely, the western North Atlantic stock of long-finned pilot whale was changed to strategic.

**Pacific Stocks**

NMFS reviewed new information pertaining to the status of all stocks within the Pacific Region (including Hawaii) and, in consultation with the Pacific Scientific Review Group, decided that there was sufficient new information to warrant the revision of assessment reports for 11 stocks (Table 3). The draft stock assessment reports for 1999 include four written by staff of the National Marine Mammal Laboratory: Oregon and Washington Coast Harbor Porpoise, Inland Washington Harbor Porpoise, Eastern North Pacific Southern Resident Killer Whale and Eastern North Pacific Transient Killer Whale. The Southwest Fisheries Science Center personnel prepared stock assessments for the following seven stocks: Hawaiian Monk Seal, Central California Harbor Porpoise, Northern California Harbor Porpoise, Eastern North Pacific Offshore Killer Whale, California/Oregon/ Washington Short-finned Pilot Whale, California/Oregon/Washington Sperm Whale, and California/Oregon/Washington-Mexico Humpback Whale.

In the draft 1999 stock assessment reports, fishery mortality sections have been updated to include information on fishery mortality, fisher self-reporting, and stranding data through 1997, where possible. New abundance estimates are available and have been included for 10 of the 11 stocks. Additional information on historic whaling has been included for sperm whales, and several distribution maps have been revised to include survey data through 1996 and to exclude data from the 1970s and early 1980s that are now considered outdated. The recovery factor was revised for four stocks (central California harbor porpoise, California/Oregon/ Washington short-finned pilot whale, eastern North Pacific southern resident killer whale and eastern North Pacific transient killer whale). The previous California/Oregon/Washington Killer Whale stock has been eliminated, based on new information on stock structure of eastern North Pacific killer whales. The animals from this stock have now been divided among two other stocks: (1) The existing Eastern North Pacific Transient stock, whose range description has been expanded southward to include California, and (2)

a new 'Eastern North Pacific Offshore' stock, ranging from Southeast Alaska to California. The Eastern North Pacific Transient Killer Whale stock, which was previously published in the stock assessment reports for the Alaska Region, has also been moved and is now included with the 1999 Pacific Region reports.

There were no changes in the status of any of the 11 Pacific Region stocks, with four remaining strategic and seven non-strategic. The four strategic stocks include three stocks of endangered species that are automatically considered strategic, and the California/Oregon/ Washington short-finned pilot whale, for which a take reduction plan has been implemented.

New information may become available during the comment period for these draft stock assessment reports. This new information may be incorporated into final stock assessment reports without additional public review and comment if incorporation of the new information does not change the status of the affected stock (e.g., strategic to non-strategic).

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Table 1--list of Alaska Marine Mammal Stocks Which Have Revised 1999 Stock Assessment Reports.

Species	Stock Area	NMFS Center	Nmin	Rmax	Fr	PBR	Total Annual Mortality	Annual Fish. Mortality	Strategic Status
Steller sea lion	Western US	AKC	<del>38,893</del> 38,067	0.12	<del>0.15</del> 0.10	<del>350</del> 228	<del>444</del> 442	<del>32</del> 30	Y
Steller sea lion	Eastern US	AKC	30,403	0.12	0.75	1,368	19	<del>15</del> 16	Y
Beluga whale	Beaufort Sea	AKC	32,453	0.04	1.0	649	<del>160</del> 184.0	0.0	N
Beluga whale	Eastern Chukchi Sea	AKC	3,710	0.04	1.0	74	<del>54</del> 68	0.0	N
Beluga whale	Eastern Bering Sea	AKC	6,439	0.04	1.0	129	<del>127</del> 122	0.0	N
Beluga whale	Bristol Bay	AKC	1,316	0.04	1.0	26	<del>20</del> 19	1	N
Beluga whale	Cook Inlet	AKC	<del>712</del> 273	0.04	<del>1.0</del> 0.5	<del>14</del> 2.7	<del>72</del> 87	0.0	Y
Baird's beaked whale	Alaska	AKC	N/A	0.04	0.5	N/A	0.0	0.0	N
Cuvier's beaked whale	Alaska	AKC	N/A	0.04	0.5	N/A	0.0	0.0	N
Stejneger's beaked whale	Alaska	AKC	N/A	0.04	0.5	N/A	0.0	0.0	N
Humpback whale	Western North Pacific	AKC	394	0.04	0.1	0.7	<del>0.0</del> 0.2	<del>0.0</del> 0.2	Y
Humpback whale	Central North Pacific	AKC	3,698	0.04	0.1	7.4	<del>1.6</del> 1.4	<del>1.2</del> 1.0	Y

Table 2--list of Atlantic Marine Mammal Stocks Which Have Revised 1999 Stock Assessment Reports.

Species	Stock Area	NMFS Center	Nmin	Rmax	Fr	PBR	Total Annual Mortality	Annual Fish. Mortality	Strategic Status
Harbor seal	Western North Atlantic	NEC	30,990	0.12	1.0	1,859	<del>898</del> 934	<del>898</del> 934	N
Gray seal	<del>Northwest</del> Western North Atlantic	NEC	<del>2010</del> NA	<del>0.12</del> NA	<del>1.0</del> NA	<del>122</del> NA	<del>41</del> 70	<del>41</del> 70	N
Harp seal	<del>Northwest</del> Western North Atlantic	NEC	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	394	394	N
Hooded seal	<del>Northwest</del> Western North Atlantic	NEC	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	5.6	5.6	N
Harbor porpoise	Gulf of Maine/Bay of Fundy	NEC	48,289	0.04	0.5	483	<del>1,667</del> 1,895	<del>1,667</del> 1,895	Y
Risso's dolphin	Western North Atlantic	NEC	11,140	0.04	<del>0.5</del> 0.48	<del>111</del> 107	<del>18.3</del> 7.2	<del>18.3</del> 7.2	N
Atlantic white-sided dolphin	Western North Atlantic	NEC	19,196	0.04	<del>0.5</del> 0.48	<del>192</del> 184	<del>218</del> 291	<del>218</del> 291	Y
Common dolphin	Western North Atlantic	NEC	16,060	0.04	<del>0.5</del> 0.48	<del>161</del> 154	<del>247</del> 780	<del>247</del> 780	Y
Atlantic spotted dolphin	Western North Atlantic	NEC	1,617 <sup>1</sup>	0.04	0.5	16	<del>19.9</del> 9.9 <sup>2</sup>	<del>19.9</del> 9.9 <sup>2</sup>	<del>Y</del> N
Pantropical spotted dolphin	Western North Atlantic	NEC	1,617 <sup>1</sup>	0.04	0.5	16	<del>19.9</del> 9.9 <sup>2</sup>	<del>19.9</del> 9.9 <sup>2</sup>	<del>Y</del> N
Bottlenose dolphin	Western North Atlantic, offshore	NEC	8,794 <sup>3</sup>	0.04	0.5	88	<del>58</del> 10	<del>58</del> 10	N
Bottlenose dolphin	Western North Atlantic, coastal	SEC	2,482	0.04	0.5	25	29	29	Y
Dwarf sperm whale	Western North Atlantic	SEC	N/A	0.04	N/A	N/A	<del>0.2</del> 0.0	<del>0.2</del> 0.0	<del>Y</del> N
Pygmy sperm whale	Western North Atlantic	SEC	N/A	0.04	N/A	N/A	0.00	0.00	N
Cuvier's beaked whale	Western North Atlantic	NEC	895 <sup>4</sup>	0.04	0.5	8.9	9.7	9.7 <sup>5</sup>	Y
Mesoplodon beaked whale	Western North Atlantic	NEC	895 <sup>4</sup>	0.04	0.5	8.9	9.7	9.7 <sup>5</sup>	Y

Species	Stock Area	NMFS Center	Nmin	Rmax	Fr	PBR	Total Annual Mortality	Annual Fish. Mortality	Strategic Status
Pilot whale, long-finned ( <i>Globicephala</i> sp.)	Western North Atlantic	NEC	4,968 <sup>6</sup>	0.04	<del>0.5</del> 0.48	<del>50</del> 48	<del>32</del> 87	<del>32</del> 87 <sup>7</sup>	<del>N</del> Y
Pilot whale, short-finned	Western North Atlantic	NEC	457	0.04	0.48	4.4	<del>32</del> 87	<del>32</del> 87 <sup>7</sup>	Y
Sperm whale	Western North Atlantic	NEC	1,617	0.04	0.1	3.2	0.00	0.00	Y
North Atlantic right whale	Western North Atlantic	NEC	295	0.025	0.1	0.4	<del>2.3</del> 1.8	1.0 <sup>8</sup>	Y
Humpback whale	Western North Atlantic	NEC	10,019	0.065	0.1	32.6	<del>5.7</del> 5.4	4.4 <sup>9</sup>	Y
Fin whale	Western North Atlantic	NEC	<del>1,803</del> 1,704	0.04	0.1	<del>3.4</del> 3.6	0.5	0.20	Y
Sei whale	Western North Atlantic Nova Scotia	NEC	N/A	0.04	0.1	N/A	0.00	0.00	Y
Minke whale	Canadian east coast	NEC	2,145	0.04	0.5	21	<del>0.8</del> 5.8	<del>0.8</del> 4.8	N
Blue whale	Western North Atlantic	NEC	N/A	0.04	0.1	N/A	0.00	0.00	Y
Bottlenose dolphin	Gulf of Mexico bay, sound, and estuarine	SEC	3,933	0.04	0.5	39.7	N/A	N/A	Y
Dwarf sperm whale	Northern Gulf of Mexico	SEC	N/A	0.04	N/A	N/A	0.00	0.00	<del>Y</del> N
Pygmy sperm whale	Northern Gulf of Mexico	SEC	N/A	0.04	N/A	N/A	0.00	0.00	<del>Y</del> N

1. This value includes either or both of *Stenella frontalis* or *Stenella attenuata*.
2. Mortality data are not separated by species; therefore, species-specific estimates are not available. The mortality estimate represents both Atlantic and Pantropical spotted dolphins.
3. Estimates may include sightings of the coastal form.
4. This estimate includes Cuvier's beaked whales and *Mesoplodon* spp. beaked whales.
5. This is the average mortality of beaked whales (*Mesoplodon* spp.) based on 5 years of observer data. This annual mortality rate includes an unknown number of Cuvier's beaked whales.
6. This estimate may include both long-finned and short-finned pilot whales.
7. Mortality data are not separated by species; therefore, species-specific estimates are not available. This mortality estimate represents both long-finned and short-finned pilot whales.
8. This is the average mortality of right whales based on 5 years of observer data (0.0) and additional fishery impact records (1.0).
9. This is the average mortality of humpback whales based on 5 years of observer data (0.6) and additional fishery impact records (3.8).

Table 3--list of Pacific Marine Mammal Stocks Which Have Revised 1999 Stock Assessment Reports.

Species	Stock Area	NMFS Center	Nmin	Rmax	Fr	PBR	Total Annual Mortality	Annual Fish. Mortality	Strategic Status
Monk seal	Hawaii	SWC	<del>1,366</del> 1,423	0.07	0.1	<del>4.8</del> 5.0 <sup>1</sup>	N/A	N/A	Y
Harbor porpoise	Central California	SWC	<del>3,431</del> 4,172	0.04	<del>0.48</del> 0.50	<del>33</del> 42	<del>14</del> 24	<del>14</del> 24	N
Harbor porpoise	Northern California	SWC	<del>7,640</del> 8,061	0.04	0.5	<del>76</del> 81	0.0	0.0	N
Harbor porpoise	Oregon/ Washington Coast	AKC	<del>22,046</del> 32,769	0.04	0.5	<del>220</del> 328	<del>17</del> 12	<del>17</del> 12	N
Harbor porpoise	Inland Washington	AKC	2,545	0.04	0.4	20	<del>16</del> 15	<del>16</del> 15	N
Killer whale	Eastern North Pacific Transient	AKC	<del>198</del> 336	0.04	<del>0.5</del> 0.45	<del>2.0</del> 3.0	<del>0.8</del> 2.0	<del>0.8</del> 2.0	N
Killer whale	Eastern North Pacific Offshore	SWC	209	0.04	0.5	2.1	0.0	0.0	N
Killer whale	Eastern North Pacific Southern Resident	AKC	<del>96</del> 89	0.04	<del>1.0</del> 0.5	<del>1.9</del> 0.9	0.0	0.0	N
Short-finned pilot whale	California/ Oregon/ Washington	SWC	<del>741</del> 717	0.04	<del>0.40</del> 0.48	<del>5.9</del> 6.9	13	13	Y
Sperm whale	California/ Oregon/ Washington	SWC	<del>896</del> 992	0.04	0.1	<del>1.8</del> 2.0	<del>4.5</del> 3.0	<del>4.5</del> 3.0	Y
Humpback whale	California/ Oregon/ Washington - Mexico	SWC	<del>563</del> 802	0.04	0.1	<del>0.5</del> 0.8	<del>1.8</del> 2.0	<del>1.2</del> 1.4	Y

<sup>1</sup>The Endangered Species Act takes precedence in the management of this species and, under the Act, allowable take is zero.

Dated: May 14, 1999.

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National Marine Fisheries Service.

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