

Summary

Meeting dates:	August 7-8, 2015 Commission Meeting
Agenda item:	Coastal Pelagic Commercial Fisheries - Briefing
Presenter(s):	Michele Culver, Regional Director Lorna Wargo, Coastal Pelagic Fisheries Manager

Background summary:

Coastal forage fish, including sardine, anchovy, herring, and krill, are managed through the Pacific Fishery Management Council's (Council) Coastal Pelagic Species (CPS) fishery management plan (FMP). The Council develops and adopts West Coast-wide annual harvest limits for sardine and mackerel, and is in the process of defining overfishing limits for northern anchovy. Herring is not actively managed in the FMP, but is characterized as an "ecosystem component species;" as such, their catches are tracked and monitored, but overfishing limits are not required and have not been developed. The directed harvest of krill under the CPS FMP is prohibited.

There are annual federal surveys for sardine and formal stock assessments for sardine and mackerel. The abundance of sardine, in particular, has dropped significantly in recent years. In response, the Council closed the directed 2014-15 sardine fishery earlier this year, and is not allowing a directed fishery for the 2015-16 season. Incidental catch of sardine is allowed up to specific limits in other CPS fisheries, such as those targeting mackerel or squid, and is managed through incidental landing limits.

Schools of sardine can be found that are practically "pure" sardine; however, this has become increasingly rare in the fishery and mixed landings of sardine and mackerel have typically occurred in recent years. Because the schools are mixed—sometimes close to a 50/50 split—it is difficult to target one species without harvesting the other.

Since 2000, Washington has had a commercial purse seine fishery for sardine—it was managed as an emerging fishery through 2009 then, through legislative action, it transitioned to an established commercial fishery. It is managed consistently with the Council's FMP through regulations adopted by the Director.

At the time the Washington sardine fishery was established, there was little to no interest in having a directed mackerel fishery in Washington, so the legislation authorized a directed fishery specific to sardine. Over the past couple of years, especially as sardine harvest opportunity has declined, a few sardine industry members have expressed an interest in developing a targeted mackerel fishery off Washington.

While incidental catch of mackerel in the Washington sardine fishery is allowed, because of how our statutes are written, a directed mackerel fishery is not authorized. There are directed fisheries for multiple CPS, including both sardine and mackerel, in Oregon and California.

Through the Council process, concerns have been expressed regarding fisheries targeting forage fish species in general, and specifically sardine and mackerel, by Oceana, Pew Charitable Trusts, local conservation groups, and the public at-large. Separate from the Council process, some Washington State Legislators have an interest in the status of forage fish and its role in the broader ecosystem. We believe that it is important to consider the role of forage fish in the broader ecosystem context and that fisheries are managed to ensure that harvest is managed to provide for the long-term sustainability of the resource.

At the meeting, staff will brief the Commission on the status of current populations for CPS, the proposals for additional CPS harvest opportunity that we have received and discussed, and our proposed next steps.

Policy issue(s) you are bringing to the Commission for consideration:

None—briefing only.

Public involvement process used and what you learned:

At the meeting, Department staff will brief the Commission on our public involvement efforts and proposed process for moving forward.

Action requested:

None—briefing only.

Draft motion language:

N/A

Justification for Commission action:

N/A

Communications Plan:

At the meeting, Department staff will brief the Commission on our public involvement efforts and proposed process for moving forward.
