



Southeast Alaska Harbor Porpoise Update

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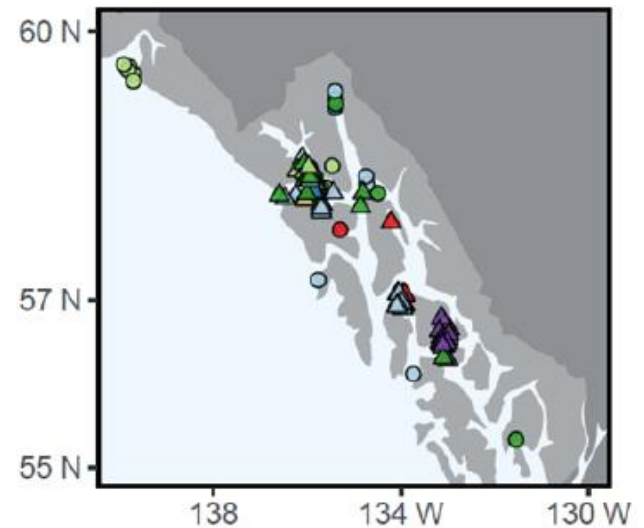
Overview of NMFS Actions

- Concerns expressed over bycatch of harbor porpoises in SEAK drift gillnet fishery for over a decade.
- Southeast Alaska harbor porpoises split into 3 stocks.
- Southern SEAK (S-SEAK) stock listed as “strategic” under MMPA, meaning the level of bycatch has the potential to deplete the population.
- SEAK salmon drift gillnet fishery listed as a Category I fishery.
- 2nd observer program recently initiated.

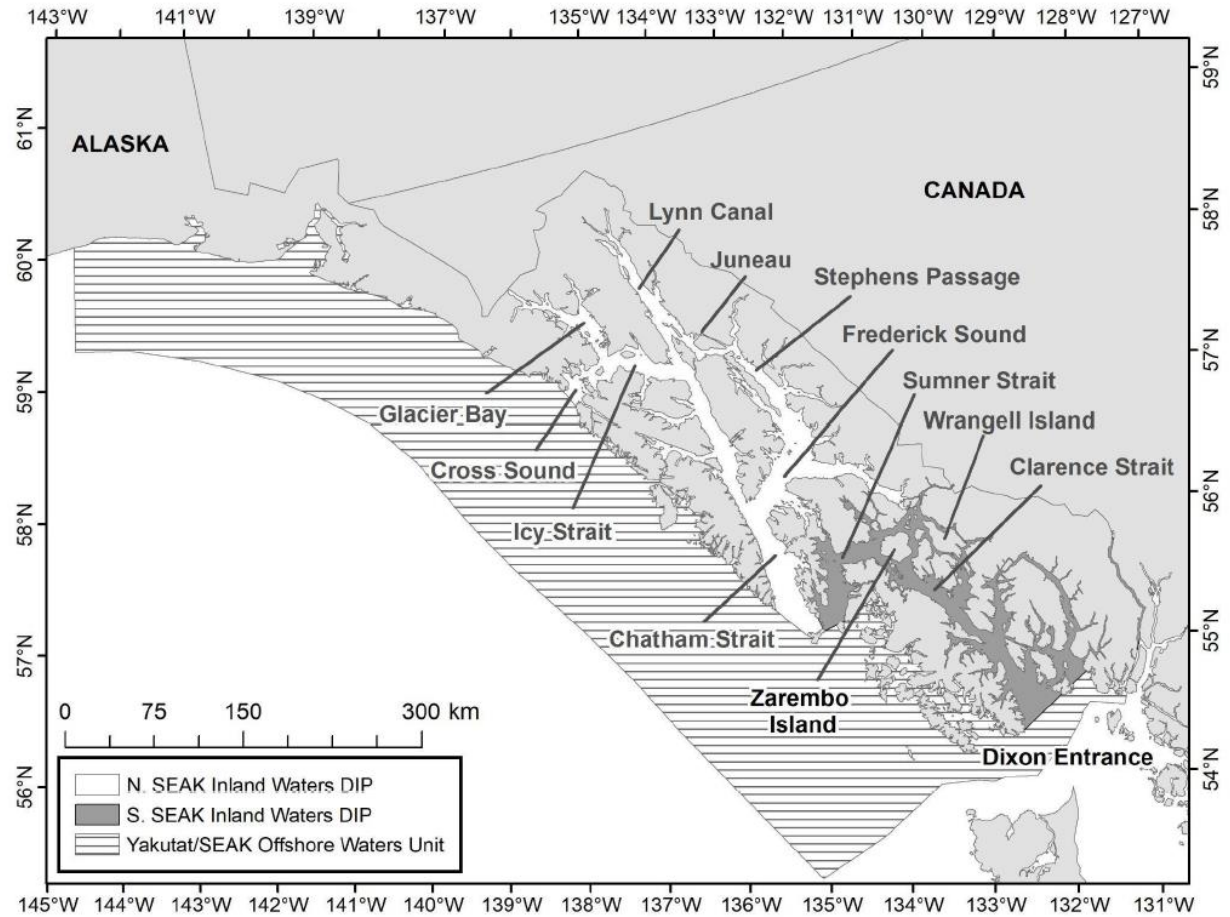


Stock Split

- Based on 3 lines of evidence:
 - Observed trends in harbor porpoise abundance;
 - Perceived areas of high harbor porpoise density; and
 - Inferred genetic differences between harbor porpoises from different geographic areas based on eDNA.
- NMFS split SEAK Harbor Porpoise into 3 separate stocks.



Revised Stock Structure in SEAK



Designation as a “Strategic” Stock

- Due to population separation, abundance for each new stock is small.
- The S-SEAK stock is the smallest of the 3 new stocks.
- Information from a 2012-2013 harbor porpoise bycatch survey indicates the PBR level for the new S-SEAK stock was exceeded.
 - This indicates that the level of bycatch has the potential to deplete the population.



Abundance, PBR, and M/SI

Proposed stock	Abundance estimate	Allowable Potential Biological Removal (PBR)/yr	Estimated human-caused mortality/serious injury/yr
N-SEAK Inland	1619 porpoises	13 porpoises	5.6 porpoises
S-SEAK Inland	890 porpoises	6.1 porpoises	7.4 porpoises
Yakutat/SEAK Offshore	Not available	Undetermined	22.2 porpoises





Implications

- The revised stock structure has led NMFS to re-classify the SEAK drift gillnet fishery as a Category I fishery under the MMPA.
 - A Category I fishery means that there is a frequent likelihood of incidental mortality and serious injury of marine mammals (50% or more of the PBR level).
- A Take Reduction Team will be convened to figure out ways to reduce the amount of harbor porpoise bycatch.



What is a Take Reduction Team

- A Take Reduction Team is a group of scientists, stakeholders, eNGOs, and agency biologists that convenes to create a take reduction plan.
- The immediate goal is to reduce bycatch within 6 months of the take reduction plan.
- The long-term goal is to reduce the incidental mortality and serious injury mortality of marine mammals from commercial fishing operations to insignificant levels.



ADF&G Engagement and Response

ADF&G disagrees with the scientific justification underpinning the stock split.

Timeline of Past Events	
Feb 2023	ADF&G receives the draft SAR from NMFS, which proposes the 3-stock structure.
4/20/2023	ADF&G submits a response letter & analysis highlighting concerns with the stock-split.
8/10/2023	NMFS finalizes the SAR, which divides SEAK harbor porpoise into 3 separate stocks.
9/12/2023	NMFS proposes to categorize the SEAK salmon drift gillnet fishery as a Category I fishery.
10/12/2023	ADF&G submits a letter in response to NMFS' listing decision, reiterating concerns.





Where do we go from here?

More data needed

ADF&G will be conducting aerial and boat-based abundance surveys and collecting additional genetic information (2024-2025) to better understand abundance & stock structure.

Alaska Marine Mammal Observer Program will be conducting a bycatch survey (2024-2026) to better understand rates of bycatch.

- ADF&G will continue to request independent review of NMFS analyses used to split the stock into 3.
- Additional data and review are necessary steps for NMFS to consider re-evaluating the stock split and Category 1 designation.

