

# White Seabass Fishery Management Plan 2009-2010 Annual Review



Prepared by

Department of Fish and Game  
Marine Region  
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## **White Seabass Fishery Management Plan 2009-2010 Annual Review**

### **Executive Summary**

The California Fish and Game Commission (Commission) adopted the White Seabass Fishery Management Plan (WSFMP) in June 2002. The WSFMP includes a provision for annual monitoring and assessment of the white seabass fisheries. The White Seabass Scientific and Constituent Advisory Panel (WSSCAP) was established to assist the Department of Fish and Game (Department) and the Commission with the review of the fishery assessments, management proposals, and plan amendments. The annual review includes fishery-dependent data (e.g., commercial and recreational landings and length frequencies), and fishery-independent data (e.g., recruitment information) if available, as well as documented changes within the social and economic structure of the recreational and commercial industries that utilize the white seabass resource within California. The review also includes information on the harvest of white seabass from Mexican waters and other relevant data. Based on the results of the annual review, in cooperation with the WSSCAP, the Department will provide management recommendations, if needed, to the Commission.

To assist the Commission in determining if management measures need to be modified or added, the WSFMP framework includes, and the Commission adopted, points of concern criteria to help determine when management measures are needed to address resource issues. The points of concern are:

1. catch is expected to exceed the current harvest guideline or quota;
2. any adverse or significant change in the biological characteristics of white seabass (age composition, size composition, age at maturity or recruitment) is discovered;
3. an overfishing condition exists or is imminent;
4. any adverse or significant change in the availability of white seabass forage or in the status of a dependent species is discovered;
5. new information on the status of white seabass is discovered;
6. an error in data or stock assessment is detected that significantly changes estimates of impacts due to current management.

The Department and WSSCAP met on April 20, 2011 to review the 2009-2010 fishery season (September 1 to August 31), and together agreed that none of the points of concern were met. Additional social and economic information along with the catch information from Mexico support this conclusion. As a result, the Department does not recommend any changes to the management of white seabass or to the WSFMP at this time.

## Background

The WSSCAP annually reviews current information to evaluate the status of the white seabass resource based on points of concern adopted to implement the WSFMP, and to consider whether current management measures provide adequate protection to the resource. If a resource conservation issue is found, based on the points of concern, the WSSCAP will provide its recommendation, rationale, and analysis to the Department, which will recommend to the Commission the appropriate management measure(s) to address the issue(s).

## Results

Analysis of the points of concern (Table 1) showed that none of the criteria were met in 2009-2010.

Table 1. Analysis of the points of concern.		
Criteria	Analysis	Result
Catch is expected to exceed the current harvest guideline or quota.	2009-2010 total catch = 678,262 pounds; Optimum Yield = 1.2 million pounds; Total catch is below optimum yield.	No action necessary
Any adverse or significant change in the biological characteristics of white seabass (age composition, size composition, age at maturity or recruitment) is discovered.	Recreational and commercial fishery length-frequencies showed no significant change that would indicate a problem in the fishery. No new information on age composition, age at maturity, or age at recruitment.	No action necessary
An overfishing condition exists or is imminent.	See analysis in Table 2. No overall overfishing condition noted.	No action necessary
Any adverse or significant change in the availability of white seabass forage or in the status of a dependent species is discovered.	Forage species are fairly stable in aggregate. Data indicate an increase in or steady availability for four of the forage species, and a decrease in availability for only one of the forage species.	No action necessary
New information on the status of white seabass is discovered.	No new information.	No action necessary
An error in data or stock assessment is detected that significantly changes estimates of impacts due to current management.	Minor adjustments to the recreational and commercial catch estimates were made to improve estimates. No significant errors detected.	No action necessary

Point of Concern: Expectation of optimum yield being exceeded.

The Commission established a fishing season of September 1 through August 31 of the following year. The Commission also adopted an optimum yield. The optimum yield is based on a maximum sustainable yield proxy of the unfished biomass, and is currently

set at 1.2 million pounds. In the 2009-2010 season, the total recreational and commercial harvest was 678,262 pounds, 57 percent of the allowable catch (Appendix A, Table 1).

Point of Concern: Changes in the biological characteristics of white seabass.

Sampling of the commercial fishery for length data (Appendix A, Figure 1) was greatly improved for the 2007-2008 season due to the hiring of a dedicated person assigned to collect this data. Increased effort to sample commercially caught white seabass continued in the 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 season. The commercial fishery continues to harvest white seabass across a wide size range. In 2009/10, 100 percent of the fish sampled were larger than the minimum size limit of 28 inches (711 mm) and approximately half of the fish sampled were larger than 42 inches (1070 mm). Based on previous age-at-length information from reading otoliths and from a previously calculated weight/length relationship, those fish larger than 42 inches are likely more than 10 years old and weigh more than 24 pounds.

Sampled length frequency data for the recreational fishery are presented in Appendix A, Figure 2. In the 2009/10 season the Department prepared and distributed a brochure targeting recreational anglers to improve compliance with the recreational minimum size limit for white seabass. In the 2009/10 season four percent of the fish measured were less than the minimum size limit of 28 inches. This is a significant improvement in compliance from the previous three seasons, in which 17-19 percent of all fish measured were less than minimum legal size. Of the legal-sized fish measured from the recreational fishery approximately half of the fish measured were larger than 43 inches (1090 mm) total length.

Point of Concern: An overfishing condition exists or is imminent.

Three criteria (Table 2), all of which must be met to establish a point of concern, determine if an overfishing condition exists or is imminent. For the commercial fishery, there must be a 20 percent decline in landings in each of two consecutive seasons compared to the prior 5-season running average. Commercial landings of white seabass (Appendix A, Table 2) totaled 482,660 pounds in the 2009-2010 season; this is a 11 percent increase when compared to the prior 5-season running average (433,621 pounds). In the 2008-2009 season commercial landings totaled 414,459 pounds; this is a one percent increase compared to the prior 5-season running average (411,867 pounds). The WSSCAP and the Department agreed that the overfishing criterion for the commercial fishery was not met.

For the recreational fishery, the overfishing criterion is defined as a 20 percent decline in each of two consecutive seasons for both the number of fish and the average weight (Appendix A, Table 3). In the recreational fishery, the number of fish caught in the 2009-2010 season increased 29 percent when compared to the previous season. The average weight of fish caught in the 2009-2010 season increased 21 percent when

compared to the previous season. The WSSCAP and the Department agreed that the overfishing criterion for the recreational fishery was not met.

The final criterion for determining if an overfishing condition exists is a 30 percent decline in the recruitment index for juvenile white seabass compared to the prior 5-season running average of recruitment. The Ocean Resources Enhancement and Hatchery Program (OREHP) had routinely conducted standardized field studies four times a year (August, October, April and June) for juvenile recruitment. However, reductions in funding curtailed survey effort during the 2004-2005 through 2007-2008 seasons. In the 2008-2009 season, the Southern California Sport Fishing Enhancement Stamp fund was insufficient to cover all of the OREHP activities as well as the gill net recruitment surveys, and since then there has been a hiatus in gill net sampling. Because no white seabass recruitment surveys occurred in the 2009-2010 season, this part of the criterion could not be addressed in this report.

Based on the analysis of all three overfishing criteria, the WSSCAP and the Department agreed that the overall overfishing criterion for the fishery was not met.

Table 2. Analysis to determine if the white seabass resource is overfished (Criteria taken from California Code of Regulations, Title 14).		
Criteria	Analysis	Result
A 20 percent decline in the total annual commercial landings of white seabass for the past two consecutive seasons compared to the prior 5-season running average of landings, based on landing receipt data.	2009-2010 482,660 pounds = 11% increase 5-season average = 433,621 pounds  2008-2009 414,450 pounds = 1% increase 5-season average = 411,867 pounds	Criterion not met
A 20 percent decline in both the number of fish and the average weight of white seabass caught in the recreational fishery for the same two consecutive seasons, as determined by the best available data.	2009-2010 8,122 fish = 29% increase 23.9 pound average = 21% increase  2008-2009 6,287 fish = 17% decrease 19.8 pound average = 3% increase	Criterion not met
A 30 percent decline in recruitment indices for juvenile white seabass compared to prior 5-season running average of recruitment, as determined by the best available data.	Criterion not analyzed	N/A

Point of Concern: Any adverse or significant change in the availability of white seabass forage or in the status of a dependent species is discovered.

Prey species (northern anchovy, jack mackerel, market squid, Pacific mackerel, and Pacific sardine) are highly mobile and their distributions are affected by oceanographic conditions. A review of white seabass forage species (Appendix A, Figures 3, 4, and 5) revealed some changes in availability.

Usually both Pacific mackerel and Pacific sardine have annual stock assessments conducted by the National Marine Fisheries Service and these stock assessments include annual biomass estimates. In 2010 the Pacific mackerel biomass estimate was not done, so the previous year's estimate was used to calculate the harvest guideline and allowable take. The harvest guideline and allowable take remained the same and it was assumed that there is steady availability of Pacific mackerel. Pacific mackerel biomass estimates for 2008 and 2009 were significantly higher than those of the previous three years. Pacific sardine biomass estimates have shown a decrease each year beginning in 2007.

Using commercial fishery landings as a proxy (as there are currently no biomass estimates or stock assessments for these species) there is evidence of an increase in availability of market squid and jack mackerel from the previous year. Northern anchovy landings were similar to those of the previous year.

Based on the analysis of all of the prey species, the WSSCAP and the Department agreed that this point of concern was not met.

#### Other Points of Concern:

The remaining two points of concern (Table 1) consider any new information on the status of white seabass, and any errors in data or stock assessment which were found.

There is no new information on stock status and there were no significant errors found in the data.

### **Additional Information**

The Department has used one indicator each of some basic social and economic information to characterize the commercial fishery and provided those summaries to the WSSCAP (Appendix A, Table 4). As a social information indicator, the number of commercial vessels landing white seabass has varied over time but has remained relatively stable during the four seasons prior to this one. In the 2009-2010 season, the number of vessels nearly doubled. This increase in the number of vessels occurred mostly in the hook-and-line fishery statewide. During the same four seasons, an economic information indicator of the most common ex-vessel price per pound was examined; this increased from \$3.00 in 2006/07 to \$3.50 per pound in 2007/08 and has remained steady since then. The significant increase in number of vessels thus was not related to an increase in ex-vessel price the previous season. No similar social or economic data are available for the recreational fleet.

Information about the take of white seabass in Mexican waters was considered by the WSSCAP. California commercial fishermen are prohibited by Mexican law to fish in the territorial seas of Mexico, and no landings of white seabass from Mexico by California commercial fishermen were reported in 2009-2010. Recreational anglers may fish in Mexico under the authority of a Mexican sport fishing license. During the 2009-2010 season, Commercial Passenger Fishing Vessel log book data reported 138 white seabass taken in Mexico, similar to the 141 reported taken in the prior season. No additional information about either the recreational or commercial catch of white seabass in Mexico is available.

## Appendix A – Data Analyses

Season	Recreational	Commercial	Total
2004/05	128,472	287,694	416,166
2005/06	199,083	391,301	590,384
2006/07	253,183	421,388	674,571
2007/08	150,988	653,264	804,252
2008/09	140,861	414,459	555,320
2009/10	195,602	482,660	678,262

Source: California Recreational Fisheries Survey extracted from the RecFIN database at <http://www.recfin.org/forms/est2004.html>, and California Department of Fish and Game Commercial Fisheries Information System (includes commercial landing receipt and CPFV logbook data).

Season	Pounds Landed	Prior 5-season average	Percent change from previous 5-season average
2000/01	215,692	155,568	39
2001/02	402,537	178,581	125
2002/03	483,410	246,967	96
2003/04	305,688	316,788	-4
2004/05	287,694	325,234	-12
2005/06	391,301	339,004	15
2006/07	421,388	374,126	13
2007/08	653,264	377,896	73
2008/09	414,459	411,867	1
2009/10	482,660	433,621	11

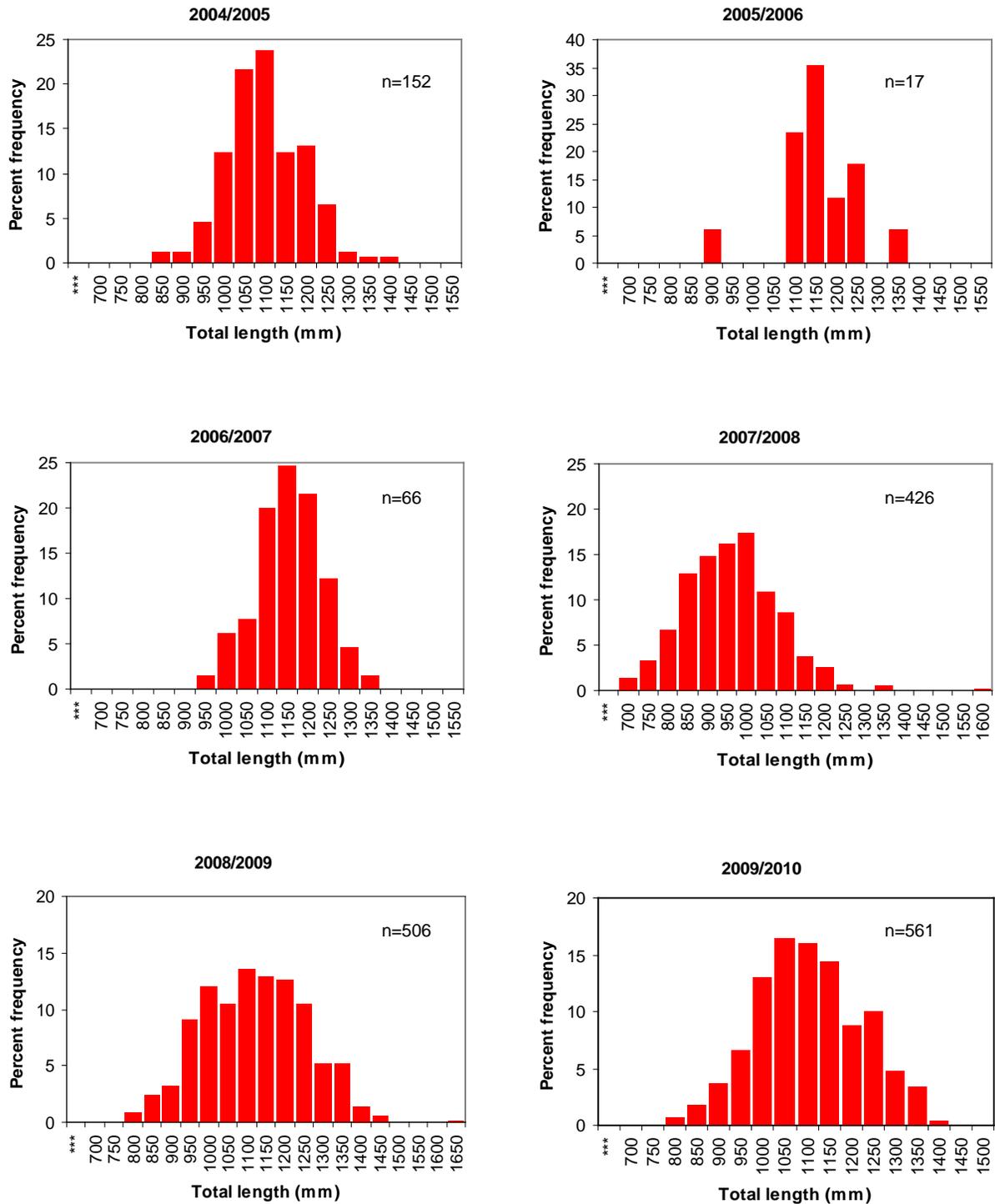
Source: California Department of Fish and Game Commercial Fisheries Information System (includes commercial landing receipt data).

Season	Total number of fish caught	Percent change in number of fish from prior season	Average weight in pounds	Percent change in weight from prior season
2004/05	8,179	NA	15.4	NA
2005/06	10,934	34	13.1	-15
2006/07	7,249	-34	18.5	41
2007/08	7,593	5	19.3	4
2008/09	6,287	-17	19.8	3
2009/10	8,122	29	23.9	21

Source: California Recreational Fisheries Survey extracted from the RecFIN database at <http://www.recfin.org/forms/est2004.html>, and California Department of Fish and Game Commercial Fisheries Information System (includes Commercial Passenger Fishing Vessel logbook data).

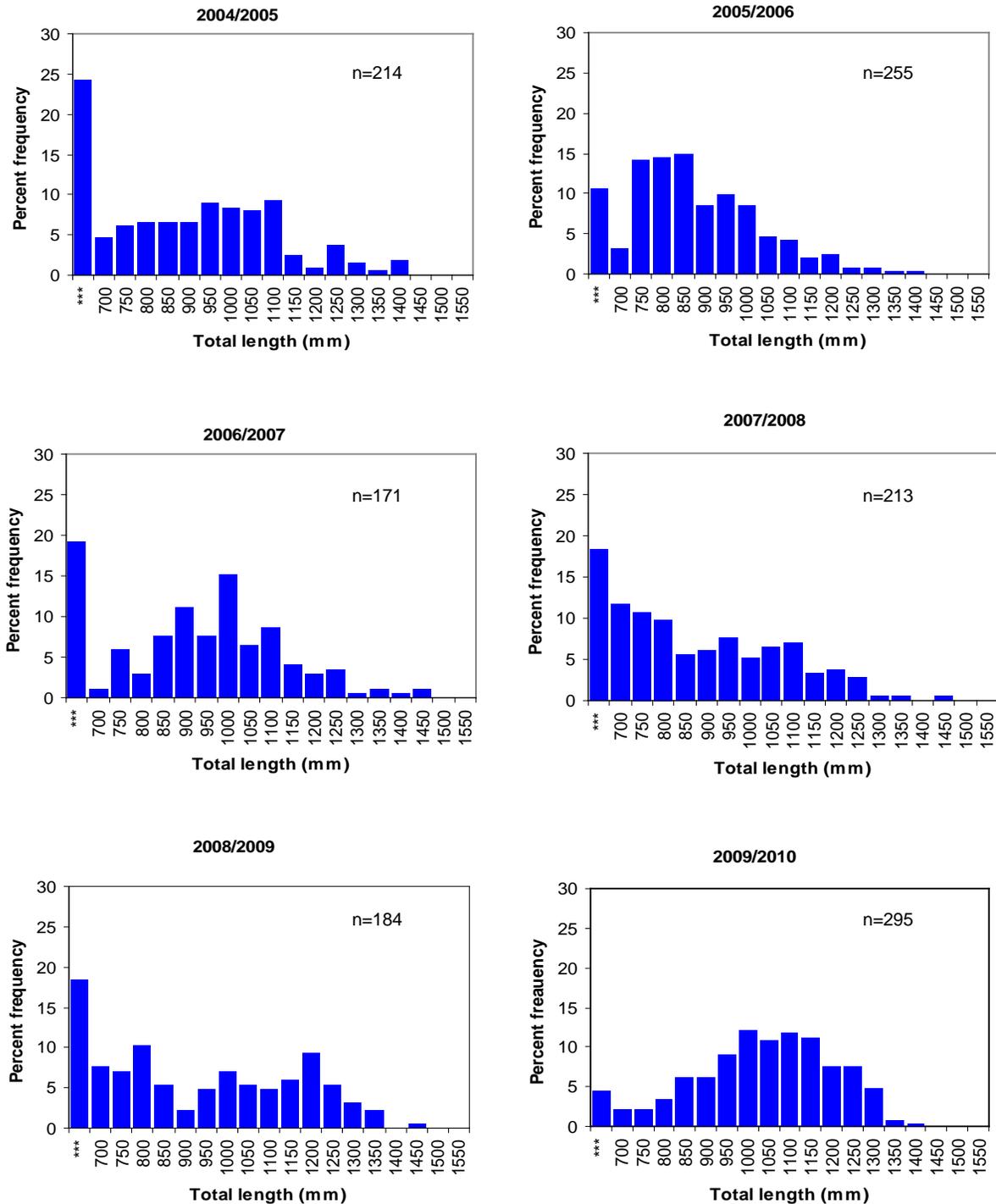
Table 4. Sociological and Economic Factors		
Season	Total number of vessels landing white seabass	Most common ex-vessel price per pound
2000/01	190	\$2.50
2001/02	216	\$2.25
2002/03	157	\$2.50
2003/04	117	\$2.50
2004/05	77	\$2.50
2005/06	95	\$3.00
2006/07	97	\$3.00
2007/08	96	\$3.50
2008/09	93	\$3.50
2009/10	183	\$3.50

Source: California Department of Fish and Game Commercial Fisheries Information System (includes commercial landing receipt).



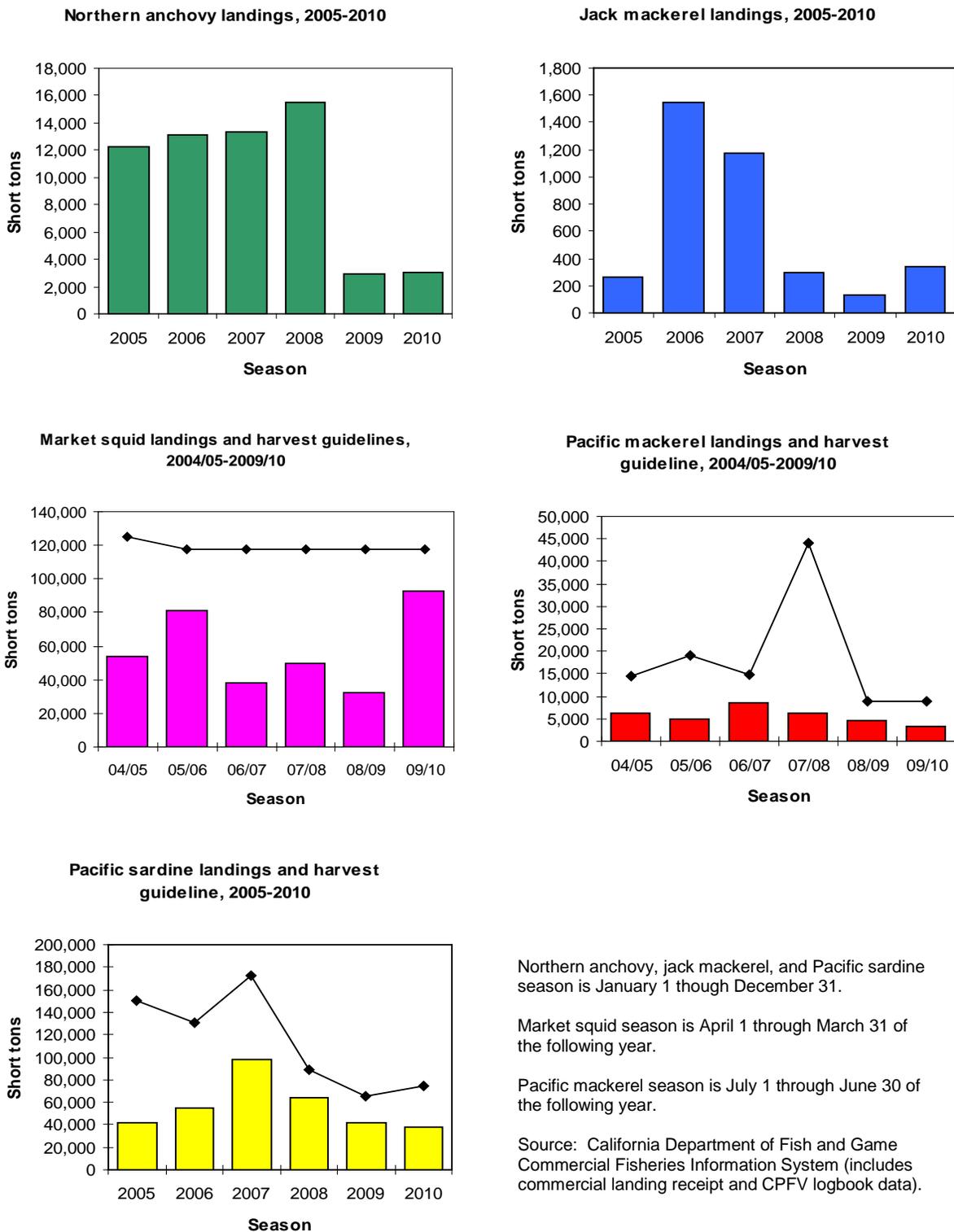
\*\*\*all sub-legal fish were grouped together  
 Source: Department of Fish and Game Market Sampling Program

Figure 1. Commercial white seabass sampled length frequencies, 2004/05 – 2009/10.



\*\*\*all sub-legal fish were grouped together  
 Source: Sampler examined landed catch data from California Recreational Fisheries Survey extracted from the RecFIN database at <http://www.recfin.org/forms/est2004.html>.

Figure 2. Recreational white seabass sampled length frequencies, 2004/05 – 2009/10.



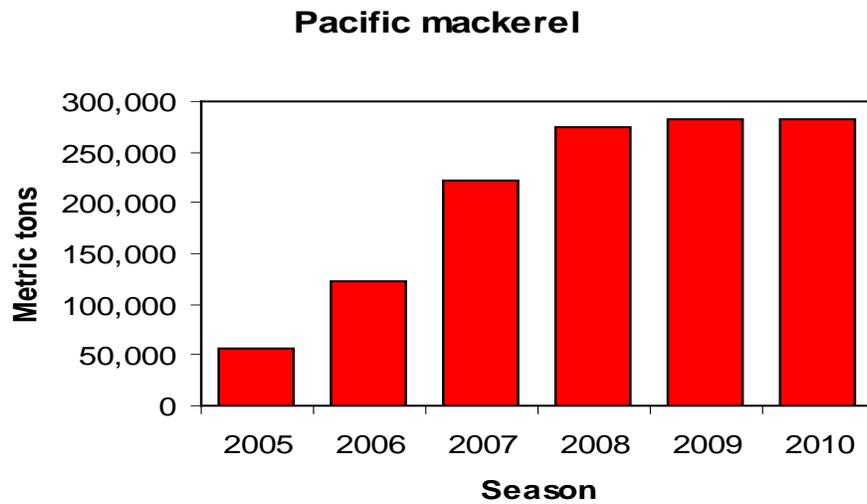
Northern anchovy, jack mackerel, and Pacific sardine season is January 1 through December 31.

Market squid season is April 1 through March 31 of the following year.

Pacific mackerel season is July 1 through June 30 of the following year.

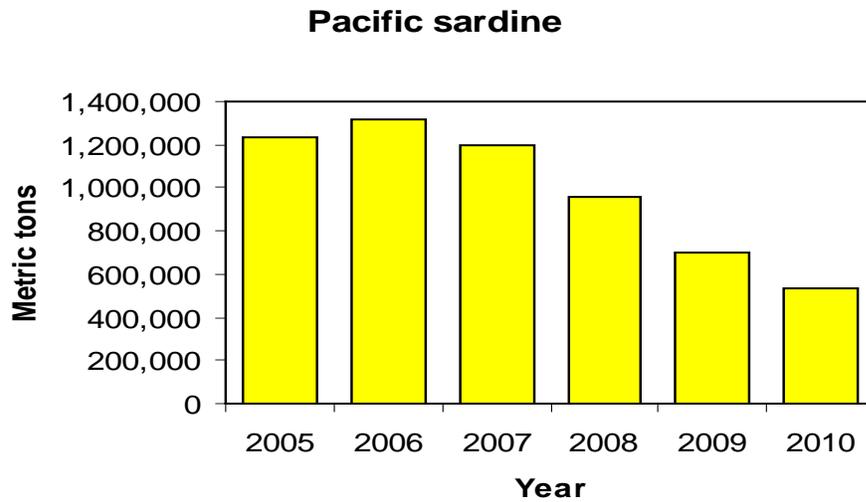
Source: California Department of Fish and Game Commercial Fisheries Information System (includes commercial landing receipt and CPFV logbook data).

Figure 3. Harvest guidelines and commercial catch of white seabass forage species.



Source: Pacific Fishery Management Council. 2010. Status of the Pacific coast coastal pelagic species fishery and recommended acceptable biological catches. Stock assessment and fishery evaluation – 2010.

Figure 4. Biomass estimates for Pacific mackerel in metric tons, 2005/06 – 2010/11.



Source: Pacific Fishery Management Council. 2010. Status of the Pacific coast coastal pelagic species fishery and recommended acceptable biological catches. Stock assessment and fishery evaluation – 2010.

Figure 5. Biomass estimates for Pacific sardine in metric tons, 2005 – 2010.