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H.C. Andersens Boulevard 44-46  
DK-1553 Copenhagen V  
Denmark  
Telephone (+45) 33 38 67 00  
Telefax (+45) 33 93 42 15  
[www.ices.dk](http://www.ices.dk)  
[info@ices.dk](mailto:info@ices.dk)

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### Editors

Sophy McCully Phillips • Jurgen Batsleer

### Authors

Caroline Aas Tranang • Thomas Barreau • Jurgen Batsleer • Loïc Baulier • Katinka Bleeker • Guzman Diaz • Jim Ellis • Ivonne Figueiredo • Christopher Griffiths • Klara Jakobsdottir • Graham Johnston • Graham Johnston • Claudia Junge • Wendel Lleal • Pascal Lorange • Catarina Maia • Tobias Mildenberger • Tanja Miethe • Teresa Moura • Sophy McCully Phillips • Cristina Rodríguez-Cabello • Matthias Schaber • Joana Silva • Morten Vinter •



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## i Executive summary

ICES WGEF is responsible for providing assessments and advice on the state of the stocks of sharks, skates, and rays throughout the ICES area. In 2023, WGEF provided advice for 25 stocks of rays and skates distributed in the North Sea ecoregion, the Azores and Mid-Atlantic Ridge, catsharks (*Scyliorhinidae*) in the Greater North Sea, Celtic Seas and Bay of Biscay and Iberian Coast ecoregions; smooth-hounds in the Northeast Atlantic; and tope in the Northeast Atlantic.

Some of the advice changed greatly compared to previous advice as data and models were revised in a benchmark process for three stocks of skates: thornback ray and spotted ray in the greater North Sea, and blonde ray in the central and southern North Sea and eastern English Channel. For the latter, not only has the methodology been updated, but the stock's structure has also been redefined to incorporate data from the central North Sea (Subarea 4.b), drawing upon survey data, tagging data, and genetic information.

The advice resulting from the new assessment method recommend much larger catches than previously. A SPiCT assessment for thornback ray (rjc.27.3a47d) and spotted ray (rjm.27.3a47d) was conducted using removals since 1999 and two series of biomass indices since 1989. Thornback ray is estimated to be harvested well below Fmsy with a biomass just above BMSY. Using the 15th percentile of the removals at Fmsy is slightly below MSY and corresponds to a catch advice of 5274 tonnes, which is ~ 2 times higher than previous landings advice. Spotted ray is estimated to be harvested well below Fmsy with a biomass above Bmsy. The 15th percentile of the removals at Fmsy is below MSY, corresponding to a catch advice of 1517 tonnes being ~ 6 times higher compared to previous landings advice. For blonde ray (rjh.27.4bc7d) a SPiCT assessment using removals since 1999 and one series of biomass index was performed. This stock is estimated to be harvested well below Fmsy with a biomass above Bmsy. The 15th percentile of the removals at Fmsy is below MSY, corresponding to a catch advice of 1262 tonnes being ~ 6 times higher compared to previous landings advice.

WGEF applied new empirical methods for stock assessment and catch advice developed by WKLIFE X. These methods were applied to 11 category 3 stocks to provide advice within the ICES MSY framework. For three of those stocks (sho.27.89a, syc.27.8abd and syc.27.8c9a) the assessments were performed but no advice was requested. The 11 category 5 and 6 stocks were not assessed and advice was provided using the precautionary approach.

Discard estimates continue to remain uncertain due to the fact that elasmobranchs are primarily caught as bycatch in a variety of fisheries. Achieving precise and unbiased estimates would require a high level of sampling effort. However, the group has made diligent efforts to collate and harmonize discard data (from 2009 to 2022) categorized by country, fleet segment, and stock code. This has enabled the inclusion of discard data in this report for comprehensive presentation. Nevertheless, for most stocks, advice is provided in terms of landings.

Lastly, a benchmark for three Iberian stocks (rjc.27.9a, rjh.27.9a and rjn.27.9a) is proposed for 2024. It will be the first time these stocks will go through a benchmark.

## ii Expert group information

<b>Expert group name</b>	Working Group on Elasmobranch Fishes (WGEF)
<b>Expert group cycle</b>	Annual
<b>Year cycle started</b>	2022
<b>Reporting year in cycle</b>	1/1
<b>Chair(s)</b>	Sophy McCully Phillips, UK Jurgen Batsleer, The Netherlands
<b>Meeting venue(s) and dates</b>	20-29 June 2023, Lisbon, Portugal (24 participants)

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Terms of Reference

2022/2/FRSG12 The Working Group Elasmobranch Fishes (WGEF), chaired by Sophy McCully Phillips\* (UK) and Jurgen Batsleer (Netherlands), will meet:

online 7–8 June 2023 to:

- a) Compile the catch and length data for all elasmobranch stocks;

and in Lisbon, Portugal, from 20–29 June 2023 to:

- a) Address generic ToRs for Regional and Species Working Groups.
- b) Update the description of elasmobranch fisheries for deep-water, pelagic and demersal species in the ICES area and compile landings, effort and discard statistics by ICES Subarea and Division, and catch data by NEAFC Regulatory Area. Describe and prepare a first Advice draft of any emerging elasmobranch fishery with the available data on catch/landings, fishing effort and discard statistics at the finest spatial resolution possible in the NEAFC RA and ICES area(s);
- c) Evaluate the stock status for the provision of biennial advice due in 2023 for: (i) skate stocks in the North Sea ecoregion, the Azores and MAR; (ii) catsharks (Scyliorhinidae) in the Greater North Sea, Celtic Seas and Bay of Biscay and Iberian Coast ecoregions; (iii) smooth-hounds in the Northeast Atlantic; and (iv) tope in the Northeast Atlantic)
- d) Evaluate the stock status for the provision of quadrennial advice due in 2023 for the following: (i) common skate complex (blue skate (*Dipturus batis*) and flapper skate (*Dipturus intermedius*) in the Greater North Sea, and (ii) starry ray (*Amblyraja radiata*) in the Norwegian Sea and Greater North Sea, Skagerrak and Kattegat, as well as the following widely-distributed shark stocks: (i) Portuguese dogfish; (ii) Leafscale gulper shark; (iii) Kitefin shark; (iv) and the following species that are on the prohibited species list: (v) angel shark, (vi) basking shark and (vii) white skate;
- e) Collate landings and discard data from countries and fleets according to the ICES data call to follow recommendations from WKSHARK5 to: (i) address the following issues: data quality and onboard coverage; raising factors; discard retention patterns between fleets and countries; discard survival; as well as following the outcomes of WKSKATE and to make the best use of survey indices in the assessments where appropriate.
- f) Work intersessionally to draft/update stock annexes and then develop a procedure and schedule for subsequent reviews.

The assessments will be carried out on the basis of the stock annex in National Laboratories, prior to the meeting. The assessments must be available for audit on the first day of the meeting.

Material and data relevant for the meeting as specified in the 2023 ICES data call must be available to the group no later than 14 days prior to the starting date.

WGEF will report by 11 August 2023 for the attention of ACOM.

Only experts appointed by national Delegates or appointed in consultation with the national Delegates of the expert's country can attend this Expert Group.

## 1.2 Background and history

The Study Group on Elasmobranch Fishes (SGEF), having been first established in 1989 (ICES, 1989), was re-established in 1995 and had meetings or met by correspondence in subsequent years (ICES, 1995–2001). Assessments for elasmobranch species had been hampered by a lack of data. The 1999 meeting was held concurrently with an EC-funded Concerted Action Project meeting (FAIR CT98-4156) allowing greater participation from various European institutes (ICES, 1999).

Exploratory assessments were carried out for the first time at the 2002 SGEF meeting (ICES, 2002), covering eight of the nine case-study species considered by the EC-funded DELASS project (CT99-055). The success of this meeting was due largely to the DELASS project, a three-year collaborative effort involving 15 fisheries research institutes and two subcontractors (Heessen, 2003). Though much progress was made on methods, there was still much work to be done, with the paucity of species-specific landings data a major data issue.

In 2002, SGEF recommended the group be continued as a working group on Elasmobranch Fishes (WGEF). The medium-term remit of this group being to extend the methods and assessments for elasmobranchs prepared by the EC-funded DELASS project; to review and define data requirements (fishery, survey and biological parameters) for stock identification, analytical models and to carry out such assessments as are required by ICES customers. Since 2003 WGEF meets annually to continue the work on stock assessment and to support the advisory process. Further details on the history and achievements of WGEF can be found in an earlier report (ICES, 2021a).

In 2020 and 2021, WGEF met online due to COVID-19 restrictions. For the 2020 working group, data submission and processing had been altered to reduce issues in terms of data call interpretation as well as the delivery of non-uniform data sets. The WGEF 2020 data were submitted to InterCatch for the first time, extracted and processed using R-code available in TAF. Next landings data are collated to the landings spreadsheet containing the historical landings data. This process was repeated in 2021 and 2022. The incorporation of a two-day data preparatory meeting in 2023 was pivotal in the advancement of the harmonisation of fleet names, stock codes and species codes of the historic landings data. This meeting had three focus groups: 1) landings data, 2) discards data and 3) length data. Each group retrieved data submitted through InterCatch and Accessions and collated them using existing, and by developing new, code. Data were checked, missing data were identified and chased up, resulting in three data tables holding all submitted data in one place (see Section 27.4). This meant for the first time in 2023, the working group started the assessment meeting with (near) final data sets with which to run their assessments – something which was crucial in the management of workload. The incorporation of a data-preparatory meeting will remain as standard for this group going forward.

WGEF in 2023 was a full assessment meeting with stock updates for 25 stocks, of which three were benchmarked earlier in the year. The elasmobranch benchmark (WKBELASMO 2023) was held as a hybrid meeting 20–24 March 2023 to evaluate the appropriateness of data and methods to assess and provide short-term forecast of three rays stocks: thornback ray in the North Sea, Skagerrak, Kattegat, and eastern English Channel (rjc.27.3a47d); spotted ray in the North Sea, Skagerrak, Kattegat, and eastern English Channel (rjm.27.3a47d); and blonde ray in the southern North Sea and eastern English Channel (rjh.27.4c7d). Data presented during this meeting resulted in the rjh.27.4c7d stock having subarea 4.b included as part of the stock unit, so shall now be referred to as rjh.27.4bc7d. All stocks had a SPiCT assessment accepted resulting in them becoming category 2 stocks for 2023 (see ICES 2023 for the full benchmark report, and Section 27.2). The remaining 22 stocks considered the new empirical methods for stock assessment and catch advice developed by WKLIFE X (ICES, 2021b), with 11 category 3 stocks transitioning from the



conventional 2 over 5 rule to adopting the rfb or rb-rule (see Section 27.5) to provide advice within the ICES MSY framework.

### 1.3 Planning of the work of the group

Given the large number of stocks that WGEF addresses, WGEF and the ICES Secretariat have developed the following timeframe for advice.

In 2022, the following species and stocks were addressed for advice (Table 1.1). These stocks will be addressed again in 2024:

- Spurdog in the Northeast Atlantic;
- Skates and rays (Rajidae) in the Celtic Seas (ICES subareas 6 and 7 except Division 7.d);<sup>1</sup>
- Skates and rays (Rajidae) in the Bay of Biscay and Iberian Coast (ICES Subarea 8 and Division 9.a).
- Porbeagle in the Northeast Atlantic and adjacent waters<sup>2</sup>

In 2023, the following species and stocks with quadrennial advice were addressed (Table 1.2). These stocks will be addressed again in 2027:

- Common skate in the greater North Sea ecoregion
- Starry ray in the greater North Sea ecoregion
- Leafscale gulper shark in the Northeast Atlantic;
- Kitefin shark in the Northeast Atlantic;
- Portuguese dogfish in the Northeast Atlantic;
- Angel shark in the Northeast Atlantic;
- Basking shark in the Northeast Atlantic;
- Thresher sharks in the Northeast Atlantic;
- White skate in the Northeast Atlantic.

In 2023, the following species and stocks were assessed and advice drafted (Table 1.3). These stocks will be addressed again in 2025:

- Skates and rays (Rajidae) in the Greater North Sea, (including Skagerrak, Kattegat and eastern Channel) (six ICES assessment units excluding 'other rays and skates' and blonde ray in Subarea 6 and Division 4.a (North Sea and West of Scotland));
- Skates and rays (Rajidae) in the Azores and Mid-Atlantic Ridge (mainly *R. clavata*);
- Smooth-hounds in the Northeast Atlantic;
- Catshark stocks in the Northeast Atlantic (seven ICES stock assessment units);

Additionally, in 2023, the following species and stocks were addressed and advice drafted (Table 1.4), but these stocks will now move to quadrennial advice (instead of biennial as previously) and thus will be addressed again in 2027:

- Tope in the Northeast Atlantic;

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<sup>1</sup> Note: Skate stocks that straddle divisions 7.d and 7.e are included within the Celtic Sea section and advice. Skate species that straddle Division 4.c and Division 7.d are included within the North Sea section and advice.

<sup>2</sup> Porbeagle re-assessment year TBC

- Blonde ray in Subarea 6 and Division 4.a (North Sea and West of Scotland)
- Other rays and skates (Rajidae) in Subarea 4 and in divisions 3.a and 7.d (North Sea, Skagerrak, Kattegat, and eastern English Channel)

**Table 1.1. Elasmobranch stocks for which assessments and advice was provided in 2022.**

ICES stock code	Stock name	Ecoregion	Advice updated	Advice
dgs.27.nea	Spurdog ( <i>Squalus acanthias</i> ) in the Northeast Atlantic	Widely distributed	2022	Biennial
por.27.nea	Porbeagle ( <i>Lamna nasus</i> ) in the Northeast Atlantic	Widely distributed and migratory stocks	2022	Biennial <sup>3</sup>
raj.27.67a-ce-h	Other rays and skates (Rajiformes) in Subarea 6 and divisions 7.a–c and 7.e–k (Rockall, West of Scotland, Celtic Sea and western English Channel)	Celtic Seas	2022	Biennial
raj.27.89a	Other skates and rays in Subarea 8 and Division 9.a (Bay of Biscay and Atlantic Iberian waters)	Bay of Biscay and Iberian coast	2022	Biennial
rjb.27.67a-ce-k	Common skate complex (flapper skate ( <i>Dipturus batis</i> ) and blue skate ( <i>Dipturus intermedius</i> )) in Subarea 6 and divisions 7.a–c and 7.e–k (Celtic Seas and western English Channel)	Celtic Seas	2022	Biennial
rjb.27.89a	Common skate complex (Blue skate [ <i>Dipturus batis</i> ] and flapper skate [ <i>Dipturus intermedius</i> ]) in Subarea 8 and Division 9.a (Bay of Biscay and Atlantic Iberian waters)	Bay of Biscay and Iberian coast	2022	Biennial
rjc.27.6	Thornback ray ( <i>Raja clavata</i> ) west of Scotland (Subarea 6)	Celtic Seas	2022	Biennial
rjc.27.7afg	Thornback ray ( <i>Raja clavata</i> ) in Divisions 7a and 7.f-g (Irish and Celtic Sea)	Celtic Seas	2022	Biennial
rjc.27.7e	Thornback ray ( <i>Raja clavata</i> ) in Division 7.e (Western English Channel)	Celtic Seas	2022	Biennial
rjc.27.8abd	Thornback ray ( <i>Raja clavata</i> ) in divisions 8a-b and 8.d (Bay of Biscay)	Bay of Biscay and Iberian coast	2022	Biennial
rjc.27.8c	Thornback ray ( <i>Raja clavata</i> ) in Division 8.c (Cantabrian Sea)	Bay of Biscay and Iberian coast	2022	Biennial
rjc.27.9a	Thornback ray ( <i>Raja clavata</i> ) in Division 9.a (west of Galicia, Portugal, and Gulf of Cadiz)	Bay of Biscay and Iberian coast	2022	Biennial
rje.27.7de	Small-eyed ray ( <i>Raja microocellata</i> ) in the English Channel (divisions 7.d-e)	Celtic Seas	2022	Biennial
rje.27.7fg	Small-eyed ray ( <i>Raja microocellata</i> ) in divisions 7.f-g (Bristol Channel)	Celtic Seas	2022	Biennial
rjf.27.67	Shagreen ray ( <i>Leucoraja fullonica</i> ) in subareas 6–7 (West of Scotland, southern Celtic Seas, English Channel)	Celtic Seas	2022	Biennial
rjh.27.7afg	Blonde ray ( <i>Raja brachyura</i> ) in divisions 7.a and 7.f–g (Irish Sea, Bristol Channel, Celtic Sea North)	Celtic Seas	2022	Biennial
rjh.27.7e	Blonde ray ( <i>Raja brachyura</i> ) in Division 7.e (western English Channel)	Celtic Seas	2022	Biennial
rjh.27.9a	Blonde ray ( <i>Raja brachyura</i> ) in Division 9.a (Atlantic Iberian waters)	Bay of Biscay and Iberian coast	2022	Biennial
rji.27.67	Sandy ray ( <i>Leucoraja circularis</i> ) in subareas 6–7 (West of Scotland, southern Celtic Seas, English Channel)	Celtic Seas	2022	Biennial

<sup>3</sup> Porbeagle re-assessment year TBC

ICES stock code	Stock name	Ecoregion	Advice updated	Advice
rjm.27.67bj	Spotted ray ( <i>Raja montagui</i> ) in Subarea 6 and divisions 7.b.j (west of Scotland and Ireland)	Celtic Seas	2022	Biennial
rjm.27.7ae-h	Spotted ray ( <i>Raja montagui</i> ) in divisions 7.a and 7.e-h (southern Celtic Seas and western English Channel)	Celtic Seas	2022	Biennial
rjm.27.8	Spotted ray ( <i>Raja montagui</i> ) in Subarea 8 (Bay of Biscay)	Bay of Biscay and Iberian coast	2022	Biennial
rjm.27.9a	Spotted ray ( <i>Raja montagui</i> ) in Division 9.a (Atlantic Iberian waters)	Bay of Biscay and Iberian coast	2022	Biennial
rjn.27.678abd	Cuckoo ray ( <i>Leucoraja naevus</i> ) in subareas 6 and 7, and in divisions 8.a–b and 8.d (West of Scotland, southern Celtic Seas, and western English Channel, Bay of Biscay)	Celtic Seas/Biscay	2022	Biennial
rjn.27.8c	Cuckoo ray ( <i>Leucoraja naevus</i> ) in Division 8.c (Cantabrian Sea)	Bay of Biscay and Iberian coast	2022	Biennial
rjn.27.9a	Cuckoo ray ( <i>Leucoraja naevus</i> ) in Division 9.a (Atlantic Iberian waters)	Bay of Biscay and Iberian coast	2022	Biennial
rju.27.7bj	Undulate ray ( <i>Raja undulata</i> ) in divisions 7.b and 7.j (west and southwest of Ireland)	Celtic Seas	2022	Biennial
rju.27.7de	Undulate ray ( <i>Raja undulata</i> ) in Divisions 7.d-e (English Channel)	Celtic Seas	2022	Biennial
rju.27.8ab	Undulate ray ( <i>Raja undulata</i> ) in Divisions 8.a-b (northern and central Bay of Biscay)	Bay of Biscay and Iberian coast	2022	Biennial
rju.27.8c	Undulate ray ( <i>Raja undulata</i> ) in Divisions 8.c (Cantabrian Sea)	Bay of Biscay and Iberian coast	2022	Biennial
rju.27.9a	Undulate ray ( <i>Raja undulata</i> ) in Division 9.a (Atlantic Iberian waters)	Bay of Biscay and Iberian coast	2022	Biennial

**Table 1.2. Elasmobranch stocks with quadrennial assessments and advice carried out in 2023.**

ICES stock code	Stock name	Ecoregion	Advice updated	Advice
rjb.27.3a4	Common skate ( <i>Dipturus batis</i> -complex) in Subarea 4 and Division 3.a (North Sea and Skagerrak)	North Sea	2019	Quadrennial
rjr.27.23a4	Starry ray ( <i>Amblyraja radiata</i> ) in Subareas 2, 3.a and 4 (Norwegian Sea, Skagerrak, Kattegat and North Sea)	North Sea	2019	Quadrennial
agn.27.nea	Angel shark ( <i>Squatina squatina</i> ) in the Northeast Atlantic	Widely distributed and migratory stocks	2019	Quadrennial
bsk.27.nea	Basking shark ( <i>Cetorhinus maximus</i> ) in the Northeast Atlantic	Widely distributed and migratory stocks	2019	Quadrennial
cyo.27.nea	Portuguese dogfish ( <i>Centroscymnus coelolepis</i> ) in the Northeast Atlantic	Widely distributed and migratory stocks	2019	Quadrennial
guq.27.nea	Leafscale gulper shark ( <i>Centrophorus squamosus</i> ) in the Northeast Atlantic	Widely distributed and migratory stocks	2019	Quadrennial
rja.27.nea	White skate ( <i>Rostroraja alba</i> ) in the Northeast Atlantic	Widely distributed	2019	Quadrennial
sck.27.nea	Kitefin shark ( <i>Dalatias licha</i> ) in the Northeast Atlantic	Widely distributed and migratory stocks	2019	Quadrennial

thr.27.nea	Thresher sharks ( <i>Alopias</i> spp.) in Subareas 10, 12, Divisions 7.c-k, 8.d-e, and Subdivisions 5.b.1, 9.b.1, 14.b.1 (Northeast Atlantic)	Widely distributed	2019	Quadrennial
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**Table 1.3. Elasmobranch stocks with biennial assessments and advice carried out in 2023.**

ICES stock code	Stock name	Ecoregion	Advice updated	Advice
raj.27.1012	Rays and skates (mainly thornback ray) in the Azores and Mid-Atlantic Ridge	Widely distributed and migratory stocks	2021	Biennial
rjc.27.3a47d	Thornback ray ( <i>Raja clavata</i> ) in Subarea 4, and Divisions 3.a and 7.d (North Sea, Skagerrak, Kattegat and eastern English Channel)	North Sea	2021	Biennial
rjh.27.4bc7d	Blonde ray ( <i>Raja brachyura</i> ) in Divisions 4.b, 4.c and 7.d (Central and southern North Sea and eastern English Channel)	North Sea	2021	Biennial
rjm.27.3a47d	Spotted ray ( <i>Raja montagui</i> ) in Subarea 4, and Divisions 3.a and 7.d (North Sea, Skagerrak, Kattegat, and Eastern English Channel)	North Sea	2021	Biennial
rjn.27.3a4	Cuckoo ray ( <i>Leucoraja naevus</i> ) in Subarea 4 and Division 3.a (North Sea and Skagerrak and Kattegat)	North Sea	2021	Biennial
sdv.27.nea	Starry smooth-hound ( <i>Mustelus</i> spp.) in the Northeast Atlantic	Widely distributed and migratory stocks	2021	Biennial
sho.27.67	Black-mouth dogfish ( <i>Galeus melastomus</i> ) in Subareas 6 and 7 (Celtic Sea and West of Scotland)	Celtic Seas	2021	Biennial
sho.27.89a	Black-mouth dogfish ( <i>Galeus melastomus</i> ) in Subarea 8 and Division 9.a (Bay of Biscay and Atlantic Iberian waters)	Bay of Biscay and Iberian seas	2021	Biennial
syc.27.3a47d	Lesser-spotted dogfish ( <i>Scyliorhinus canicula</i> ) in Subarea 4, and Divisions 3.a and 7.d (North Sea, Skagerrak, Kattegat, and Eastern English Channel)	North Sea	2021	Biennial
syc.27.67a-ce-j	Lesser-spotted dogfish ( <i>Scyliorhinus canicula</i> ) in Subarea 6 and Divisions 7.a-c, e-j (Celtic Seas and west of Scotland)	Celtic Seas	2021	Biennial
syc.27.8abd	Lesser-spotted dogfish ( <i>Scyliorhinus canicula</i> ) in Divisions 8.a,b,d (Bay of Biscay)	Bay of Biscay and Iberian seas	2021	Biennial
syc.27.8c9a	Lesser-spotted dogfish ( <i>Scyliorhinus canicula</i> ) in Divisions 8.c and 9.a (Atlantic Iberian waters)	Bay of Biscay and Iberian seas	2021	Biennial
syt.27.67	Greater-spotted dogfish ( <i>Scyliorhinus stellaris</i> ) in Subareas 6 and 7 (Celtic Sea and West of Scotland)	Celtic Seas	2021	Biennial

**Table 1.4. Elasmobranch stocks with previously biennial assessments and advice carried out in 2023 which have changed to quadrennial assessments.**

ICES stock code	Stock name	Ecoregion	Advice updated	Advice
gag.27.nea	Tope ( <i>Galeorhinus galeus</i> ) in the Northeast Atlantic	Widely distributed and migratory stocks	2021	Biennial
raj.27.3a47d	Other skates and rays in the North Sea ecoregion (Subarea 4, and Divisions 3.a and 7.d)	North Sea	2021	Biennial
rjh.27.4a6	Blonde ray ( <i>Raja brachyura</i> ) in Division 4a and Subarea 6 (Northern North Sea and west of Scotland)	North Sea	2021	Biennial

## 1.4 ICES approach MSY

Most elasmobranch species are slow growing, with low population productivity. Some species (e.g. basking shark) are on several lists of ‘threatened’ or ‘endangered’ species. They may also be listed under international trade agreements such as the Convention on the International Trade on Endangered Species (CITES), which may place limitations on fishing for or trade in these species. Because of this,  $F_{MSY}$  is not believed to be an appropriate or achievable target in all cases, particularly in the short term. However, the ICES  $F_{MSY}$  methodology has evolved in recent years and ICES advice is provided under the Maximum Sustainable Yield framework (MSY).

Maximum sustainable yield is a broad conceptual objective aimed at achieving the highest possible yield over the long term (an infinitely long period of time). It is non-specific with respect to: (a) the biological unit to which it is applied; (b) the models used to provide scientific advice; and (c) the management methods used to achieve MSY.

The MSY concept can be applied to an entire ecosystem, an entire fish community, or a single fish stock. The choice of the biological unit to which the MSY concept is applied influences both the sustainable yield that can be achieved and the associated management options. Implementation of the MSY concept by ICES will first be applied to individual fish stocks. Further information on the background to MSY and how it is applied to fish stocks by ICES can be found in the General Context to ICES Advice.

Since 2017, WGEF has explored several data-poor assessment methods to selected ray stocks. These methods produced promising results, but will require some adjustment to account for elasmobranch life history and fisheries dynamics. In 2018 and 2019, progress was made with applying MSY proxies to elasmobranch stocks. Following the recommendations made in 2018, WGEF further explored the application of proxy MSY reference points to elasmobranch fishes. Full information on this analysis is available in Miethe (2019, WGEF WD). In 2020, an exploratory analysis of two different production models applied to North Sea and English Channel Rajidae stocks was presented. The analysis highlighted the importance of improving the availability of catch data and as such touches on the issue of having reliable discard estimates.

In 2020, the Workshop on the Development of Quantitative Assessment Methodologies based on Life-history traits, exploitation characteristics, and other relevant parameters for data-limited stocks (WKLIFE X; ICES 2021b) developed methods for stock assessment and catch advice for stocks in ICES Categories 3 and 4, focusing on the provision of sound advice rules that are within the ICES MSY framework. WKLIFE emphasized the need to have assessment methods which accounted for the uncertainty and being more effective and precautionary compared to the two over five rule used to provide advice on elasmobranch stocks. Additional work on advice rules for stocks in Category 3 based on life-history traits (k), tested through simulation and management strategy evaluation (MSE), showed that the addition of specific multipliers based on the stock’s life-history characteristics decreases the risk of the control rule’s performance. These new advice rules for category 3 stocks are implemented from 2022 onwards.

## 1.5 Community plan of action for sharks

An Action Plan for the Conservation and Management of Sharks (EU, 2009) was adopted by the European Commission in 2009. Further details on this plan and its relevance to WGEF can be found in an earlier report (ICES, 2009).

### **The utility of the Prohibited species list on TAC and quotas regulations**

The list of prohibited species on the TACs and quotas regulations (e.g. Council Regulation (EU) 2023/194) is an appropriate measure for trying to protect the marine fish of highest conservation

importance, particularly those species that are also listed on CITES and various other conservation conventions. Additionally, there should be sufficient concern over the population status and/or impacts of exploitation that warrants such a long-term conservation strategy over the whole management area.

There are some species that would fall into this category. For example, white shark and basking shark are both listed on CITES and some European nations have given legal protection to these species. Angel shark has also been given legal protection in UK.

It should also be recognized that some species that are considered depleted in parts of their range may remain locally abundant in some areas, and such species might be able to support low levels of exploitation. From a fisheries management viewpoint, advice for a zero or near-zero TAC, or for no target fisheries, is very different from a requirement for 'prohibited species' status, especially as a period of conservative management may benefit the species and facilitate a return to commercial exploitation in the short term.

Additionally, there is a rationale that a list of prohibited species should not be changing regularly, as this could lead to confusion for both the fishing and enforcement communities. The STECF meeting on management of skates and rays has recommended issuing guidelines for the inclusion and removal of species on the prohibited species list (STECF, 2017).

In 2009 and 2010, undulate ray, *Raja undulata* was moved on to the prohibited species list. This had not been advised by ICES. Following a request from commercial fishers, the European Commission asked ICES to give advice on this listing. ICES reiterated that undulate ray would be better managed under local management measures and that there was no justification for placing undulate ray on the prohibited species list. The healthy status of one of the undulate ray stocks (rju.27.7de) assessed in 2022 and the corresponding advice for a rather high catch level confirms this view. There have been subsequent changes in the listing of this species. It was removed from the Prohibited Species List for Subarea 7 in 2014 (albeit as a species that cannot be retained or landed). In 2015, undulate ray was only maintained in the prohibited species list in subareas 6 and 10. Small TACs were established for stocks in the English Channel and Bay of Biscay in 2015 and for the stock in the Iberian ecoregion in 2016. During the 2018 meeting, the advice for 2016–2017 was recalculated following a request from France (ICES, 2018).

In 2019, the list of prohibited species in the TACs and quota regulations was amended. An extensive list of prohibited species, including white shark, basking shark and hammerhead sharks have been taken up in the regulation on the conservation of fisheries resources and the protection of marine ecosystems through technical measures (EU regulation 2019/1241).

## 1.6 Sentinel fisheries

ICES advice for several elasmobranch stocks suggests that their fisheries should, for example "*consist of an initial low (level) scientific fishery*". In discussions of such fisheries (e.g. rju.27.9a), WGEF would suggest that a 'sentinel fishery' is a science-based data collection fishery conducted by commercial fishing vessel(s) to gather information on a specific fishery over time using a commercial gear but with standardized survey protocols. Sentinel fisheries would:

- Operate with a standardized gear, defined survey area, and standardized index of effort;
- Aim to provide standardized information on those stocks that may not be optimally sampled by existing fishery-independent surveys;
- Include a limited number of vessels;
- Be subject to trip limits and other technical measures from the outset, in order to regulate fishing effort/mortality in the fishery;

- Carry scientific observers on a regular basis (e.g. for training purposes) and be collaborative programmes with scientific institutes;
- Assist in biological sampling programmes (including self-sampling and tagging schemes);
- Sampling designs, effort levels and catch retention policy should be agreed between stakeholders, national scientists and the relevant ICES assessment expert group.

## 1.7 Mixed fisheries regulations

Apart from TAC regulations, several ICES divisions have fish stocks subject to recovery plans, including the cod recovery plan, hake recovery plan, etc.

As several elasmobranch stocks, particularly skates and rays, are caught in mixed fisheries within these areas catches of elasmobranchs may be limited by restrictive effort limitations because of these plans. In general, these are not referred to within the text, but must be taken into consideration when looking at landings trends from within these areas.

## 1.8 Current ICES expert groups of relevance to the WGEF

### 1.8.1 Working Group on the Assessment of Demersal Stocks in the North Sea and Skagerrak (WGNSSK)

Several elasmobranchs are taken in North Sea demersal fisheries, including spurdog (Section 2), tope (Section 10), various skates (Section 15) and starry smooth-hound (Section 21).

WGNSSK should note that the Greater Thames Estuary is the main part of the North Sea distribution of thornback ray *Raja clavata* and may also be an important nursery ground for some small shark species, such as tope and starry smooth-hound. Thornback ray is an important species in ICES Division 4.c, and is taken as bycatch in fisheries targeting sole (e.g. trawl and gillnet), cod (e.g. trawl, gillnet and longline), as well as in targeted fisheries.

The Wash may also be an area of ecological importance for some elasmobranchs, including thornback ray and tope.

### 1.8.2 Working Group for the Celtic Seas Ecoregion (WGCSE)

Several elasmobranchs are taken in the waters covered by WGCSE, including spurdog (Section 2), tope (Section 10), various skates and rays (Section 18) and starry smooth-hound (Section 21).

WGCSE should note that common skate *Dipturus batis*-complex, which has declined in many inshore areas of northern Europe, may be locally abundant in parts of ICES Division 6.a and the deeper waters of the Celtic Sea (Division 7.h-j). Thornback ray is abundant in parts of the Irish Sea, especially Solway Firth, Liverpool Bay and Cardigan Bay. The Lleyn Peninsula is an important ground for greater-spotted dogfish *Scyliorhinus stellaris*. WGCSE should also note that the Bristol Channel is of high local importance for small-eyed ray *Raja microocellata*, as well as being an important nursery ground for some small sharks (e.g. starry smooth-hound and tope) and various skates.

Angel shark (Section 22) was formerly abundant in parts of Cardigan Bay, the Bristol Channel and Start Bay, and is now observed very rarely. Similarly, white skate (Section 23) was historically present in this ecoregion, and may be near-extirpated from most parts of the ecoregion.



### **1.8.3 Working Group on the Biology and Assessment of Deep-sea Fisheries Resources (WGDEEP)**

In 2008, WGEF met in parallel with WGDEEP in order to assess and provide advice on deep-water sharks (see sections 3–5). In February 2010, WGDEEP held a benchmark assessment of deep-water stocks (WKDEEP; ICES, 2010). Two WGEF members attended in order to carry out an assessment of the deep-water shark species *Centrophorus squamosus* and *Centroscymnus coelolepis*. Considerable progress was made in robust construction of a plausible catch and effort history for both species. A novel approach to assessing such species as deep-water sharks was presented at the meeting using a subset of the data on Portuguese dogfish and was agreed by WKDEEP to be a highly promising approach, pending the acceptable reconstruction of the aforementioned catch and effort data. Further development and possible future application of the method is to be encouraged. Several members of WGEF also attend WGDEEP, so facilitating the exchange of knowledge between the two expert groups.

### **1.8.4 International Bottom-trawl Survey Working Group (IBTSWG) and Working Group on Beam Trawl Surveys (WGBEAM)**

IBTSWG continue to provide maps of the distribution of a variety of demersal elasmobranchs from the IBTS surveys in the North Sea and western areas. WGEF consider that these plots provide useful information and hope that IBTSWG will continue to provide these plots as routine outputs in the future. WGBEAM carries out some analysis of catch rates and distribution of certain skate species from beam trawl surveys in the North Sea and Celtic Seas ecoregions. Such analyses are very useful for WGEF.

There are some inaccuracies in the identifications of some skates in various trawl surveys, as well as some recent taxonomic revisions. Hence, more collaborative studies and exchange between WGEF and WGBEAM to address such issues is encouraged.

### **1.8.5 Workshop on the Inclusion of Discard Survival in Stock Assessments (WKSURVIVE)**

The first workshop met in February 2021. Important objectives of this Workshop for WGEF is to explore the incorporation of discard survival estimates in stock assessments as well as to review the various approaches taken to integrate discard estimates in current assessments in the context of applying discard survival estimates.

One of the recurring issues in WGEF is the uncertainty in discard data as a result of the high number of discrepancies between years and inconsistent or missing data when these data are raised. Raising procedures not standardized among member states and thus are often deemed too unreliable for inclusion, despite having had two dedicated workshops on the use of discard data in stock assessments (WKSHARK 3 (ICES, 2017) and WKSHARK5 (ICES, 2020a)). However, with the transition of seven stocks from a Category 3 to Category 2, discard data are now included in the SPiCT models and therefore the advice given for these stocks in 2022/2023. Given the expected high survival of elasmobranchs, catch data (i.e. landings and estimated discards) will not equal dead removals. Hence the importance to understand the survival rate of discarded elasmobranchs in order to obtain separate estimates for dead and surviving discards.

WKSURVIVE pointed out that discard and discard survival are a major concern in many elasmobranch stocks and their inclusion should be evaluated in all assessments of skate and ray stocks and suggested to develop data-limited assessment frameworks that can accommodate the explicit inclusion of discards and discard survival.

## 1.9 Other meetings of relevance to WGEF

### 1.9.1 ICCAT

WGEF have conducted joint-meetings and assessments with ICCAT in 2008 (Madrid) and 2009 (ICES headquarters). These meetings were useful in pooling information on highly migratory pelagic shark species, including porbeagle, blue shark and shortfin mako. It is intended that these collaborations continue to usefully assess and update knowledge of pelagic shark species.

In 2022, WGEF hosted a joint ICCAT-ICES meeting on porbeagle. The meeting focused on the Northeast Atlantic stock, and discussed the benchmark and new advice outcome, as well as the process and timeline of advice provision within ICES and similarly within ICCAT. The timelines to provide final advice, and management programmes of both organisations differ. In addition, ICCAT scientists question the approach of applying a generic Harvest Control Rule (HCR) to assess elasmobranch stocks as the rule has not been tested on long-lived species. As a result this has led to inconsistent perceptions of the stock status and any associated catch advice. Consistency between the advice from each organisation is important and future alignment of process and outcomes. Further information on the joint meeting on porbeagle is found in section 6 of this report.

WGEF considers that further collaborative meetings with the ICCAT Shark Species Group should continue. There are ongoing studies analysing the genetics, tagging of several shark species and modelling approaches. Both organisations should invest time and effort to collaborate in sharing these data and knowledge in order to improve our understanding of stock structure and status of several shark species. Such collaboration may be facilitated by an MoU between ICES and ICCAT.

### 1.9.2 General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM)

WGEF consider that ICES and the GFCM would benefit from improved interaction due to the overlap in the distribution of certain stocks, and also in comparing stock assessment methods for data-limited stocks. Further information on collaboration between ICES and GFCM can be found in an earlier report (ICES, 2021a).

## 1.10 Relevant biodiversity and conservation issues

ICES work on elasmobranch fish is becoming increasingly important as a source of information to various multilateral environmental agreements concerning the conservation status of some species. Table 1.4 lists species occurring in the ICES area that are considered within these fora. An increasing number of elasmobranchs are 'prohibited' species in European fisheries regulations (EU 2019/1241, EU 2023/194), and these are summarised in Table 1.5.

Additionally, whilst not forming the basis of a legal instrument, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) conduct Red List assessments of many species, including elasmobranchs, which has been undertaken at North-East Atlantic (Gibson *et al.*, 2008), Mediterranean (Cavanagh and Gibson, 2007; Abdul Malak *et al.*, 2011) and European scales (Nieto *et al.*, 2015). IUCN listings are summarised in the relevant species sections.

### 1.10.1 OSPAR Convention

The OSPAR Convention ([www.ospar.org](http://www.ospar.org)) guides international cooperation on the protection of the marine environment of the Northeast Atlantic. It has 15 Contracting Parties and the European Commission represents the European Union. The OSPAR list of Threatened and/or Declining Species and Habitats, developed under the OSPAR Strategy on the Protection and Conservation of the Ecosystems and Biological Diversity of the Maritime Area, provides guidance on future conservation priorities and research needs for marine biodiversity at risk in the region. To date, eleven elasmobranch species are listed (Table 1.4), either across the entire OSPAR region or in areas where they were perceived as declining. Background Documents summarizing the status of these species are available (OSPAR Commission, 2010).

In 2020, ICES was requested to review and update OSPAR status assessments for stocks of listed shark, skates and rays in support of the OSPAR Quality Status Report 2023 (QSR2023) (WKSTATUS, ICES, 2020b).

### 1.10.2 Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species (CMS)

CMS recognizes the need for countries to cooperate in the conservation of animals that migrate across national boundaries, if an effective response to threats operating throughout a species' range is to be made. The Convention actively promotes concerted action by the range states of species listed on its Appendices. The CMS Scientific Council has determined that 35 shark and ray species, globally, meet the criteria for listing in the CMS Appendices (Convention on Migratory Species, 2007). Table 1.4 lists Northeast Atlantic elasmobranch species that are currently included in the Appendices.

CMS Parties should strive towards strict protection of endangered species on Appendix I, conserving or restoring their habitat, mitigating obstacles to migration and controlling other factors that might endanger them. The range states of Appendix II species (migratory species with an unfavourable conservation status that need or would significantly benefit from international cooperation) are encouraged to conclude global or regional agreements for their conservation and management.

CMS now has a Sharks MOU, comprising an Advisory Committee (AC) and Intercessional Working Group (IWG).

### 1.10.3 Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES)

CITES was established in recognition that international cooperation is essential to the protection of certain species from overexploitation through international trade. It creates an international legal framework for the prevention of trade in endangered species of wild fauna and flora, and for the effective regulation of international trade in other species which may become threatened in the absence of such regulation.

Species threatened with extinction can be listed on Appendix I, which basically bans commercial, international trade in their products. Appendix II includes "*species not necessarily threatened with extinction, but in which trade must be controlled in order to avoid utilization incompatible with their survival*". Trade in such species is monitored closely and allowed if exporting countries can provide evidence that such trade is not detrimental to wild populations of the species.

Resolution Conf. 12.6 encourages parties to identify endangered shark species that require consideration for inclusion in the Appendices if their management and conservation status does not

improve. Decision 13.42 encourages parties to improve data collection and reporting of catches, landings and trade in sharks (at species level where possible), to build capacity to manage their shark fisheries, and to take action on several species-specific recommendations from the Animals Committee (CITES, 2009).

#### **1.10.4 Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern convention)**

The Bern Convention is a regional convention that provides a binding, international legal instrument that aims to conserve wild flora, fauna and natural habitats. Appendix II (or III) lists strictly protected (or protected) species of fauna (sometimes identified for the Mediterranean Sea only). Contracting Parties should *“take appropriate and necessary legislative and administrative measures to ensure the special protection of the wild fauna species specified in Appendix II”* and *“protection of the wild fauna species specified in Appendix III”*.

**Table 1.4. Elasmobranch species listed by Multilateral Environmental Agreements. Source; OSPAR (<http://www.ospar.org/>), CITES (<https://cites.org/>), CMS (<http://www.cms.int/>) and Bern Convention ([http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/cultureheritage/nature/bern/default\\_en.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/cultureheritage/nature/bern/default_en.asp)).**

Family	Species	Multinational Environmental Agreement			
		OSPAR	CMS	CITES	Bern
Squalidae	Spurdog <i>Squalus acanthias</i>	✓	App II (northern hemisphere pop- ulations)		
Triakidae	Tope <i>Galeorhinus galeus</i>		App II		
Centrophoridae	Gulper shark <i>Centrophorus granulosus</i>	✓			
	Leafscale gulper shark <i>Centrophorus squamosus</i>	✓			
Somniosidae	Portuguese dogfish <i>Centroscymnus coelolepis</i>	✓			
Squatinae	Angel shark <i>Squatina squatina</i>	✓	App I & II		App III (Med)
Rhincodontidae	Whale shark <i>Rhincodon typus</i>		App I & II	App II	
Alopiidae	Pelagic thresher <i>Alopias pelagicus</i>		App II	App II	
	Bigeye Thresher <i>Alopias superciliosus</i>		App II	App II	
	Common Thresher <i>Alopias vulpinus</i>		App II	App II	
Cetorhinidae	Basking shark <i>Cetorhinus maximus</i>	✓	App I and II	App II	App II (Med)
Lamnidae	White shark <i>Carcharodon carcharias</i>		App I and II	App II	App II (Med)
	Shortfin mako shark <i>Isurus oxyrinchus</i>		App II		App III (Med)
	Longfin mako shark <i>Isurus paucus</i>		App II		
	Porbeagle shark <i>Lamna nasus</i>	✓	App II	App II	App III (Med)
Carcharhinidae	Silky shark <i>Carcharhinus falciformis</i>		App II	App II	
	Oceanic white-tip <i>Carcharhinus longimanus</i>		App I	App II	
	Blue shark <i>Prionace glauca</i>		App II	App II	App III (Med)
Sphyrnidae	Scalloped hammerhead <i>Sphyrna lewini</i>		App II	App II	
	Great hammerhead <i>Sphyrna mokarran</i>		App II	App II	
	Smooth hammerhead <i>Sphyrna zygaena</i>		App II	App II	

Table 1.4. (continued). Elasmobranch species listed by Multilateral Environmental Agreements.

Family	Species	Multinational Environmental Agreement			
		OSPAR	CMS	CITES	Bern
Pristidae	Sawfish <i>Pristidae</i>		App I and II	App I	
Rhinobatidae	Common Guitarfish <i>Rhinobatos rhinobatos</i>		App II	App II	
Glaucoستي- dae	Blackchin Guitarfish <i>Glaucoستegus cemiculus</i>			App II	
Rajidae	Common skate <i>(Dipturus batis)</i> complex	✓			
	Thornback ray <i>Raja clavata</i>	✓ ICES Divi- sion 2			
	Spotted ray <i>Raja montagui</i>	✓ North Sea			
	White skate <i>Rostroraja alba</i>	✓			App III (Med)
Mobulidae	Reef manta ray <i>Manta alfredi</i>		App I and II		
	Giant manta ray <i>Manta birostris</i>		App I and II	App II	
	Manta rays <i>Manta spp.</i>			App II	
	Longhorned mobula <i>Mobula eregoodootenkee</i>		App I and II	App II	
	Lesser devil ray <i>Mobula hypostoma</i>		App I and II	App II	
	Spinetail mobula <i>Mobula japonica</i>		App I and II	App II	
	Shortfin devil ray <i>Mobula kuhlii</i>		App I and II	App II	
	Giant devil ray <i>Mobula mobular</i>		App I and II	App II	App II (Med)
	Munk's (or pygmy) devil ray <i>Mobula munkiana</i>		App I and II	App II	
	Lesser Guinean devil ray <i>Mobula rochebrunei</i>		App I and II	App II	
	Chilean (or sicklefin) devil ray <i>Mobula tarapacana</i>		App I and II	App II	
Smoothtail mobula <i>Mobula thurstoni</i>		App I and II	App II		

**Table 1.5. Elasmobranch taxa listed as Prohibited Species on EU fisheries regulations\*. It is prohibited for EU vessels “... to fish for, to retain on board, to tranship or to land ...” these species in certain areas within EU waters (Article 13) or, for certain species listed in Article 22, within the ICCAT Convention area. Adapted from EU (2019/1241; 2023/194).**

Family	Species	Area
Centrophoridae	Leafscale gulper shark <i>Centrophorus squamosus</i>	EU waters of Division 2.a and subarea 4; EU and international waters of subareas 1 and 14
	Birdbeak dogfish <i>Deania calcea</i>	EU waters of Division 2.a and subarea 4; EU and international waters of subareas 1 and 14
Etmopteridae	Smooth lantern shark <i>Etmopterus pusillus</i>	EU waters of Division 2.a and subarea 4; EU and international waters of subareas 1, 5–8, 12 and 14
	Great lantern shark <i>Etmopterus princeps</i>	EU waters of Division 2.a and subarea 4; EU and international waters of subareas 1 and 14
Somniosidae	Portuguese dogfish <i>Centroscymnus coelolepis</i>	EU waters of Division 2.a and subarea 4; EU and international waters of subareas 1 and 14
Dalatiidae	Kitefin shark <i>Dalatias licha</i>	EU waters of Division 2.a and subarea 4; EU and international waters of subareas 1 and 14
Squatinae	Angel shark <i>Squatina squatina</i>	EU waters
Alopiidae	Bigeye thresher shark <i>Alopias superciliosus</i>	ICCAT convention area
Cetorhinidae	Basking shark <i>Cetorhinus maximus</i>	All waters
Lamnidae	White shark <i>Carcharodon carcharias</i>	All waters
	Porbeagle shark <i>Lamna nasus</i>	All waters
	Shortfin mako shark <i>Isurus oxyrinchus</i>	All waters
Triakidae	Tope <i>Galeorhinus galeus</i>	When taken by longline in EU waters of Division 2.a and subarea 4, and EU and international waters of subareas 1, 5–8, 12 and 14.
Carcharhinidae	Silky shark <i>Carcharhinus falciformis</i>	ICCAT convention area
	Oceanic whitetip shark <i>Carcharhinus longimanus</i>	ICCAT convention area
	Hammerheads (Sphyrnidae), except for <i>Sphyrna tiburo</i> )	ICCAT convention area
Pristidae	Narrow sawfish <i>Anoxypristis cuspidata</i>	All waters
	Dwarf sawfish <i>Pristis clavata</i>	All waters
	Smalltooth sawfish <i>Pristis pectinata</i>	All waters
	Large-tooth sawfish <i>Pristis pristis</i>	All waters
	Green sawfish <i>Pristis zijsron</i>	All waters
Rhinobatidae	All members of family	EU waters of subareas 1–12

Table 1.5. (continued). Elasmobranch taxa listed as Prohibited Species on EU fisheries regulations.

Family	Species	Area
Rajidae	Starry ray <i>Amblyraja radiata</i>	EU waters of Divisions 2.a, 3.a, 7.d and subarea 4
	Common skate ( <i>Dipturus batis</i> ) complex ( <i>Dipturus cf. flossada</i> and <i>Dipturus cf. intermedia</i> )	EU waters of Division 2.a and sub-areas 3–4, 6–10.
	Norwegian skate <i>Dipturus nidarosiensis</i>	EU waters of subarea 6 and Divisions 7.a-c and 7e–h and 7.k
	Thornback ray <i>Raja clavata</i>	EU waters of Division 3.a
	Undulate ray <i>Raja undulata</i>	EU waters of subareas 6 and 10
	White skate <i>Rostroraja alba</i>	EU waters of subareas 6-10
Mobulidae	Reef manta ray <i>Manta alfredi</i>	All waters
	Giant manta ray <i>Manta birostris</i>	All waters
	Longhorned mobula <i>Mobula eregoodootenkee</i>	All waters
	Lesser (or Atlantic) devil ray <i>Mobula hypostoma</i>	All waters
	Spinetail mobula <i>Mobula japanica</i>	All waters
	Shortfin devil ray <i>Mobula kuhlii</i>	All waters
	Giant devil ray <i>Mobula mobular</i>	All waters
	Munk's (or pygmy) devil ray <i>Mobula munkiana</i>	All waters
	Lesser Guinean devil ray <i>Mobula rochebrunei</i>	All waters
	Chilean (or sicklefin) devil ray <i>Mobula tarapacana</i>	All waters
	Smoothtail mobula <i>Mobula thurstoni</i>	All waters

\* excluding 15 species/families of deep-water sharks as listed in Annex I, Part D of EU 2023/194



## 1.11 Data availability

### 1.11.1 General considerations

WGEF members agree that future meetings of WGEF should continue to meet in June, as opposed to meeting earlier in the year, as (a) more refined landings data are available; (b) meeting outside the main spring assessment period should provide national laboratories with more time to prepare for WGEF, (c) it will minimize potential clashes with other assessment groups (which could result in WGEF losing the expertise of stock assessment scientists) and (d) given that there are not major year-to-year changes in elasmobranch populations (cf. many teleost stocks), the advice provided would be valid for the following year.

The group agreed that survey data should be provided as disaggregated raw data, and not as compiled indices or data. The group agreed that those survey abundance estimates that are not currently in the DATRAS database are also provided as raw data by individual countries. It is recommended to have the data and code to calculate the survey indices to be made available on TAF.

WGEF recommends that Member States provide detailed explanations of how national data for species and length compositions are raised to total catch, especially when there may be various product weights reported (e.g. gutted or dressed carcasses and livers and/or fins).

### 1.11.2 ICES Data Call

Landings data for years 2005 and later come from Data Calls (see above). WGEF uses some landings data extracted from ICES catch statistics, for time-series going back in time further than 2005. These data were mostly collated before 2005 although this task was hampered by the use by many countries of “nei” (not elsewhere identified) categories. Although strongly improving over time, for all years, the Working Group’s best estimates are still considered inaccurate for a number of reasons:

- i. Quota species may be reported as elasmobranchs to avoid exceeding quota, which would lead to over-reporting;
- ii. Fishers may not take care when completing landings data records, for a variety of reasons;
- iii. Administrations may not consider that it is important to collect accurate data for these species;
- iv. Some species could be underreported to avoid highlighting that bycatch is a significant problem in some fisheries;
- v. Some small inshore vessels may target (or have a bycatch of) certain species and the landings of such inshore vessels may not always be included in official statistics.

A Workshop to compile and refine catch and landings of elasmobranchs (WKSHARK2) was held in January 2016 (ICES, 2016), and following this, the 2016 Data Call requested a standardised approach to data submission, including for a longer period. Since 2016 data were submitted to the accessions folder using a common InterCatch format. This still resulted in considerable issues with data collation, formatting and QA that had to be addressed in the early stages of the meetings.

During the 2019 meeting, continuing issues with how the Data Call is interpreted, the non-uniformity of the dataset and as well as the many issues with species coding and stock allocations were discussed at length. A dedicated group met with the ICES Data Centre prior to the 2020 Data Call to explore options to facilitate the process of rendering a by the group accepted

landings table before the start of WGEF. The group developed a more automated process using InterCatch and an R-coding procedure available in the Transparent Assessment Framework (TAF). The procedure to obtain the landings data is described in the 2020 WGEF report (ICES, 2020c). The issue list, stock allocation file and R-code is available on github: [https://github.com/ices-taf/WGEF\\_catches](https://github.com/ices-taf/WGEF_catches).

Since 2020, the data call requested nations to upload landings and discard data into InterCatch. The use of InterCatch facilitates data processing, improve transparency and allow members to conduct initial assessments prior to the meeting, removing a serious time-constraint.

### 1.11.3 Discards data

The EU requires Member States to collect discard data on elasmobranchs. This discarding may include both regulatory discarding, when quota is limited, as well as the discarding of smaller and less marketable individuals. Whilst WGEF want to make progress from 'landings' to 'catch'-based advice, data from discard observer programmes has suffered from quality issues often related to the variety of raising procedures employed by Member States. However, to-date eight stocks now include discard data in their assessment and provision of catch advice, as they have transitioned from a Category 3 to Category 2 assessment using surplus production models.

EU countries have implemented national on-board observer programs to estimate discards of abundant commercially important species (e.g. hake, *Nephrops*, cod, sole, and plaice). The adopted sampling designs have been defined considering the métiers, seasons and areas relevant for those species. As a consequence, national sampling programmes might not be optimal for estimating precise and unbiased discards for elasmobranchs.

In 2017 and 2019, workshops were held to address the issues surrounding the use of discards in the elasmobranch assessments (ICES, 2017; 2020a). WKSARK3 reviewed i) the suitability of national sampling programs to estimate elasmobranch discards (including rare species), ii) the discard information available and iii) the procedures/methods to calculate population level estimates of discards removals for different countries (ICES, 2017). WKSARK5 investigated i) the raising method for elasmobranch fishes, ii) the data quality and onboard coverage, and iii) proposed method on how to include the data in the advisory process (ICES, 2020a).

In 2021, discard data over the period 2009 to 2020 were collected and merged into a single spreadsheet in Excel. In 2022 and 2023, discard data were added, making discard data from 2009 to 2022 available and easily accessible. It was noted that for many stocks the discard data were incomplete for many of the years. In addition, raising to national catch levels is uncertain and procedures are not standardized. Particularly problematic are the cases of species which are not landed, i.e. being either not commercial or being subject to conservation measures (e.g. zero TAC).

Overall, the main issues concerning the estimation of elasmobranch total discards are presented in the 2021 WGEF report (ICES, 2021a).

### 1.11.4 Discard survival

Owing to the apparent high survival of elasmobranchs after capture it is important to obtain separate estimates for dead and surviving discards. As a proportion of the discards would be alive, catch data (landings and estimated discards) do not equate with "dead removals" in terms of population dynamics. Understanding the survival rates of discarded individuals is therefore fundamental for informing potential exemptions from the EU landings obligation.

To date there have been only limited scientific studies on the discard survival of skates and catsharks in European fisheries, and data on the immediate, short-term survival and longer-term discard survival of these species are lacking for most fisheries. A summary of those studies was compiled in WKSHARK3 (ICES, 2017). To inform discussions on the future EU landing obligation and to improve the quantification of dead discards, WGEF recommend the need to implement scientific studies to better assess and quantify the discard survival of the main commercial skates caught by the trawl fleets, especially otter trawlers operating in the Bay of Biscay and Iberian waters, beam trawl and flyshoot fleets operating in northern Europe and for gill- and trammel net fisheries used by the inshore polyvalent fleet.

### **1.11.5 Length data**

In 2022, there was a recommendation to change the way ICES provides advice for data limited stocks (DLS) using WKLIFE X methods (ICES, 2021b). A data call was put out, requesting supporting information on life history parameters and length compositions for landings and discards as far back in time as possible. The data have been submitted to InterCatch. Before WGEF convenes, the data coordinator request ICES to extract all length data submitted as requested by the WKLIFE X Data Call. In addition, missing data were looked up in the WGEF accessions folders. All data were collated to produce a large overview table containing length data on landings and discards by country, year, species, fishing area, and fleet. Data were checked and assigned to an ICES stock code using an automated process derived from the way the WGEF landings table is constructed. The same approach was followed in 2023. The R-script and table (Excel and csv) are available on the WGEF SharePoint.

### **1.11.6 Stock structure**

This report presents the status and advice of various demersal, pelagic and deep-water elasmobranchs by individual stock component. The identification of stock structure has been based upon the best available knowledge to date (see the stock-specific sections for more details). However, it has to be emphasized that overall, the scientific basis underlying the identity of many of these stocks is currently weak. In most cases, stock identification is based on the distribution and relative abundance of the species, current knowledge of movements and migrations, reproductive mode, and consistency with management units.

WGEF considers that the stock definitions proposed in the report are limited for many species, and in some circumstances advice may refer to 'management units'.

WGEF recommends that increased research effort be devoted to clarifying the stock structure of the different demersal and deep-water elasmobranchs being investigated by ICES.

### **1.11.7 Taxonomic problems**

Incorrect species identifications or coding errors affect many relevant data sets, including commercial data and even some scientific survey data. WGEF consistently attempt to correct and report these errors when they are found. The FAO produced an updated guide to the chondrichthyan fish of the North Atlantic (Ebert and Stehmann, 2013).

## **1.12 Methods and software**

Many elasmobranchs are data-limited, and the paucity of data can extend to:

- Landings data, which are often incomplete or aggregated;

- Life-history data, as most species are poorly known with respect to age, growth and reproduction;
- Commercial and scientific datasets that are compromised by inaccurate species identification (with some morphologically similar species having very different life-history parameters);
- Lack of fishery-independent surveys for some species (e.g. pelagic species) and the low and variable catch rates of demersal species in existing bottom-trawl surveys.

Hence, the work undertaken by WGEF often precludes the formal stock assessment process that is used for many commercial teleost stocks. The analysis of survey, biological and catch data are used in most cases to evaluate the status of elasmobranch species/stocks. This limitation may be eased by new data-poor assessment approaches, which have the potential to allow some ray stocks to be moved from assessment Category 3 to Category 2. In 2022, five stocks went through a benchmarked and now use a Surplus Production model such as SPiCT and a State-Space Bayesian Model to provide advice, with a further three stocks benchmarked using SPiCT in 2023. Since 2022, ACOM has recommended the use of the WKLIFE X Empirical approaches to assess category 3 stocks within the MSY framework (ICES, 2021b).

### 1.13 InterCatch

Since 2022, InterCatch was used to submit landings and discard data. InterCatch is solely used as a database to store official landings and discard data. Landings figures are supplied by individual members, after data formatting undertaken by WGEF (e.g. allocation to stock, quality assurance, reallocation of misidentified species). These corrected data are considered to be more accurate than official statistics as regional laboratories can better provide information on local fisheries and interpretation of nominal records of various species (including errors in species coding). In the last two years landings and discard data, including length data, were requested in the InterCatch SI format and were requested to be submitted to InterCatch. However, not all nations have followed up on the data call and submitted the data to [data.call@ices.dk](mailto:data.call@ices.dk). As such, part of the landings data were retrieved from the Accessions folder.

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## 2 Spurdog in the Northeast Atlantic

### 2.1 Stock distribution

Spurdog or the piked dogfish, *Squalus acanthias* has a worldwide distribution in temperate and boreal waters, and occurs mainly in depths of 10–200 m. In the NE Atlantic, this species is found from Iceland and the Barents Sea southwards to the coast of Northwest Africa (McEachran and Branstetter, 1984).

WGEF considers that there is a single NE Atlantic stock ranging from the Barents Sea (Subarea 1) to the Bay of Biscay (Subarea 8), and that this is the most appropriate unit for assessment and management within ICES. Spurdog in Subarea 9 may be part of the NE Atlantic stock, but catches from this area are likely to consist of a mixture of *Squalus* species, with increasing numbers of *Squalus blainville* further south.

Genetic microsatellite analyses conducted by Verissimo *et al.* (2010) found no differences between east and west Atlantic spurdog. The authors suggested this could be accomplished by transatlantic migrations of a very limited number of individuals. Further information on the stock structure and migratory pattern of Northeast Atlantic spurdog can be found in the Stock Annex. Nonetheless, recent studies undertaken by Thorburn *et al.* (2018) suggest subpopulations across the UK.

### 2.2 The fishery

#### 2.2.1 History of the fishery

Spurdog has a long history of exploitation in the Northeast Atlantic (Pawson *et al.*, 2009) and WGEF estimates of total landings are shown in Figure 2.1 and Table 2.1a. Spurdog has historically been exploited by France, Ireland, Norway and the UK (Table 2.2). The main fishing grounds for the NE Atlantic stock of spurdog are the North Sea (Subarea 4), West of Scotland (Division 6.a) and the Celtic Seas (Subarea 7) and, during the decade spanning the late 1980s to 1990s, the Norwegian Sea (Subarea 2) (Table 2.3). Outside these areas, landings have generally been low. In recent years the fishery has changed significantly in line with restrictive management measures, which have included more restrictive quota, a maximum landing length and bycatch regulations.

Further details of the historical development of the fishery are provided in the Stock Annex. Further general information on the mixed fisheries exploiting this stock and changes in effort can be found in ICES (2009a, b) and STECF (2009).

#### 2.2.2 The fishery in 2022

The zero TAC for spurdog for EU vessels, introduced in 2011, has resulted in a major change in the magnitude and spatial distribution of reported landings. Between 2005 and 2017, landings declined across all ICES subareas, slightly increasing in 2018–2022.

Since 2011 Norwegian landings, which are significantly higher than landings from other countries, have been fluctuating between 217–409 tonnes; with 321 tonnes in 2022.

Since 2016, UK reported landings have greatly increased with 150 and 120 tonnes in 2021 and 2022 respectively. For UK, traditionally one of the major fishing countries of spurdog (prior to

2009), this was a major increase from a level close to zero that has been seen since the zero TAC was introduced in 2011. For other countries which landed spurdog, see Table 2.2.

Discard estimates are available from some countries from 2005 (Table 2.1b) and are highly variable across years and countries with between 20 and 4781 tonnes between 2005 and 2021; with the maximum of 4090 tonnes being reported by the UK England in 2017.

Commercial fishermen in various areas, including the southern North Sea, the Celtic Sea, and in the south- and mid-Norwegian coastal areas, continue to report that spurdog can be seasonally abundant on their fishing grounds.

### 2.2.3 ICES advice applicable

In 2020, ICES advised that “when the MSY approach is applied, catches in 2023 and 2024 should be no more than 17 353 tonnes and 17 855 tonnes respectively. Any possible provision for the landing of bycatch should be part of a management plan, including close monitoring of the stock and fisheries”.

### 2.2.4 Management applicable

The following table summarises ICES advice and actual management applicable for NE Atlantic spurdog during 2001–2023.

Year	Single-stock exploitation boundary (tonnes)	Basis	TAC NE Atlantic	TAC (IIa(EC) and IV) (tonnes)	TAC IIIa , I, V, VI, VII, VIII, XII and XIV (EU and international waters) (tonnes)	TAC IIIa(EC) (tonnes)	TAC I, V, VI, VII, VIII, XII and XIV (EU and international waters) (tonnes)	WG landings (NE Atlantic stock) (tonnes)
2000	No advice	-		9470				15 890
2001	No advice	-		8870	-	-	-	16 693 <sup>(1)</sup>
2002	No advice	-		7100	-	-	-	11 020
2003	No advice	-		5640	-	-	-	12 246
2004	No advice	-		4472	-	-	-	9365
2005	No advice	-		1136	-	-	-	7100
2006	F=0	Stock depleted and in danger of collapse		1051	-	-	-	4015
2007	F=0	Stock depleted and in danger of collapse		841 <sup>(2)</sup>	2828	-	-	2917
2008	No new advice	No new advice		631 <sup>(2,3)</sup>	-	-	2004 <sup>(2)</sup>	1798
2009	F=0	Stock depleted and in danger of collapse		316 <sup>(3,4)</sup>	-	104 <sup>(4)</sup>	1002 <sup>(4)</sup>	1980



Year	Single-stock exploitation boundary (tonnes)	Basis	TAC NE Atlantic	TAC (IIa(EC) and IV) (tonnes)	TAC IIIa , I, V, VI, VII, VIII, XII and XIV (EU and international waters) (tonnes)	TAC IIIa(EC) (tonnes)	TAC I, V, VI, VII, VIII, XII and XIV (EU and international waters) (tonnes)	WG landings (NE Atlantic stock) (tonnes)
2010	F=0	Stock depleted and in danger of collapse		0 <sup>(5)</sup>		0 <sup>(5)</sup>	0 <sup>(5)</sup>	892
2011	F=0	Stock depleted and in danger of collapse		0 <sup>(6)</sup>		0	0 <sup>(6)</sup>	435
2012	F=0	Stock below possible reference points		0 <sup>(6)</sup>		0	0 <sup>(6)</sup>	453
2013	F=0	Stock below possible reference points		0		0	0	335
2014	F=0	Stock below possible reference points		0		0	0	383
2015	F=0	Stock below possible reference points		0		0	0	263
2016	F=0	Stock below possible reference points		0		0	0 (270 <sup>(7)</sup> )	373
2017	F=0	Stock below possible reference points		0		0	270 <sup>(7)</sup>	296
2018	F=0	Stock below possible reference points		0		0	270 <sup>(7)</sup>	363
2019	F=0	Stock below possible reference points		0		0	270 <sup>(7)</sup>	455
2020	F=0	Stock below possible reference points		0		0	270 <sup>(7)</sup>	526
2021	F=0	Stock below possible reference points		0		0	270 <sup>(7)</sup>	539
2022	F=0	Stock below possible reference points		0		0	270 <sup>(7)</sup>	474
2023	F=0	Above MSY Btrigger, Bpa, and Blim	17 353					
2024	F=0	Above MSY Btrigger, Bpa, and Blim	17 855					

(<sup>1</sup>) The WG estimate of landings in 2001 may include some misreported deep-sea sharks or other species. (<sup>2</sup>) Bycatch quota. These species shall not comprise more than 5% by live weight of the catch retained on board. (<sup>3</sup>) For Norway: including catches taken with longlines of tope shark (*G. galeus*), kitefin shark (*D. licha*), bird beak dogfish (*D. calcea*),

leafscale gulper shark (*C. squamosus*), greater lantern shark (*E. princeps*), smooth lanternshark (*E. spinax*) and Portuguese dogfish (*C. coelolepis*). This quota may only be taken in zones IV, VI and VII. <sup>(4)</sup> A maximum landing size of 100 cm (total length) shall be respected. <sup>(5)</sup> Bycatches are permitted up to 10% of the 2009 quotas established in Annex Ia to Regulation (EC) No. 43/2009 under the following conditions: catches taken with longlines of tope shark (*G. galeus*), kitefin shark (*D. licha*), bird beak dogfish (*D. calceus*), leafscale gulper shark (*C. squamosus*), greater lantern shark (*E. princeps*), smooth lantern shark (*E. pusillus*) and Portuguese dogfish (*C. coelolepis*) and spurdog (*S. acanthias*) are included (Does not apply to IIIa); a maximum landing size of 100 cm (total length) is respected; the bycatches comprise less than 10% of the total weight of marine organisms on board the fishing vessel. Catches not complying with these conditions or exceeding these quantities shall be promptly released to the extent practicable. <sup>(6)</sup> Catches taken with longlines of tope shark (*G. galeus*), kitefin shark (*D. licha*), bird beak dogfish (*D. calcea*), leafscale gulper shark (*C. squamosus*), greater lanternshark (*E. princeps*), smooth lanternshark (*E. pusillus*), Portuguese dogfish (*C. coelolepis*) and spurdog (*S. acanthias*) are included. Catches of these species shall be promptly released unharmed to the extent practicable. <sup>(7)</sup> Spurdog shall not be targeted in the areas covered by this TAC. When accidentally caught in fisheries where spurdog is not subject to the landing obligation, specimens shall not be harmed and shall be released immediately, as required by Articles 12 (13 in 20180 and 41 (45 in 2018) of this Regulation. By derogation from Article 12 of this Regulation, a vessel engaged in the by-catch avoidance programme, a small TAC was introduced (see conditions in section 2.2.4 text below).

Since 2023, ICES advises that when the MSY approach is applied, catches in 2023 and 2024 should be no more than 17 353 tonnes and 17 855 tonnes, respectively. This is the first spurdog non-zero quota advice since 2009.

In all EU regulated areas, a zero TAC for spurdog was retained for 2019. In July 2016, an in-year amendment to EU quota regulations (Council Regulation (EU) 2016/1252 of 28 July 2016) introduced a small TAC (270 t) for Union and international waters of subareas 1, 5–8, 10 and 12, with this TAC to be allocated to vessels participating in bycatch avoidance programmes. This regulation states that “*a vessel engaged in the by-catch avoidance programme that has been positively assessed by the STECF may land not more than 2 tonnes per month of picked dogfish that is dead at the moment when the fishing gear is hauled on board. Member States participating in the by-catch avoidance programme shall ensure that the total annual landings of picked dogfish on the basis of this derogation do not exceed the amounts indicated below. They shall communicate the list of participating vessels to the Commission before allowing any landings. Member States shall exchange information about avoidance areas*”.

This derogation was not denoted for TAC areas for EU waters of 3.a or EU waters of 2.a and 4. In these areas, no EU landings were permitted.

In 2007, Norway introduced a general ban on target fisheries for spurdog in the Norwegian economic zone and in international waters of ICES subareas 1–14, with the exception of a limited fishery for small coastal vessels. Bycatch could be landed and sold as before. All directed fisheries were banned from 2011, although there is still a bycatch allowance. From October 2011, bycatch should not exceed 20% of total landings on a weekly basis. Since 4 June 2012, bycatch must not exceed 20% of total landings over the period 4 June–31 December 2012. From 1 January 2013, bycatch must not exceed 15% of total landings on a half calendar year basis. Live specimens can be released, whereas dead specimens must be landed. From 2011, the regulations also include recreational fisheries. Norway has a 70 cm minimum landing size (first introduced in 1964).

Since 1 January 2008, fishing for spurdog with nets and longlines in Swedish waters has been forbidden. In trawl fisheries, there is a minimum mesh size of 120 mm and the species may only be taken as a bycatch. In fisheries with hand-held gear only one spurdog was allowed to be caught and kept by each angler during a 24-hour period.

Many of the mixed fisheries which caught spurdog in the North Sea, West of Scotland and Irish Sea were subject to effort restrictions under the cod long-term plan (EC 1342/2008).

## 2.3 Catch data

### 2.3.1 Landings

Total annual landings of NE Atlantic spurdog are given in Table 2.1a and illustrated in Figure 2.1. Preliminary estimates of landings for 2022 were 474 t. Total landings split by nation are given in Table 2.2.

### 2.3.2 Discards

Discards from some countries have been provided following the data call for the WKNSEA benchmark 2021 (ICES, 2021 and associated WDs) and also for the WGEF data call in 2022. Total discards from 2005-2022 can be found in Table 2.1b.

Further information on discards can be found in the Stock Annex and in the WKNSEA benchmark 2021 (ICES, 2021 and associated WDs).

### 2.3.3 Discard survival

Low mortality has been reported for spurdog caught by trawl when tow duration was < 1 h, with overall mortality of about 6% (Mandelman and Farrington, 2007; Rulifson, 2007), with higher levels of mortality (ca. 55%) reported for gillnet-caught spurdog (Rulifson, 2007).

Only limited data on at-vessel mortality are available for European waters (Bendall *et al.*, 2012), and there are no published data on post-release mortality.

### 2.3.4 Quality of the catch data

In addition to the problems associated with obtaining estimates of the historical total landings of spurdog, due to the use of generic dogfish landings categories, anecdotal information suggests that widespread misreporting by species may have contributed significantly to the uncertainties in the overall level of spurdog landings.

Underreporting may have occurred in certain ICES areas when vessels were trying to build up a track record of other species, for example deep-water species. It has also been suggested that over-reporting may have occurred in the case where other elasmobranch stocks with highly restrictive quotas have been recorded as spurdog. It is not possible to quantify the amount of under and over-reporting that may have occurred. The introduction of UK and Irish legislation requiring registration of all fish buyers and sellers should mean that such misreporting problems have declined since 2006.

It is not known whether the 5% bycatch ratio limit (implemented in 2008) or the maximum landing length (implemented in 2009) led to misreporting (although the buyers and sellers legislation should deter this) or increased discarding.

Given the zero or very small TAC from 2011 to 2022, recent catch data are highly uncertain. Whilst data from discard observer programmes may allow catches to be estimated, estimation of dead discards will be more problematic.

Some nations may now be reporting landings of spurdog under more generic codes (e.g. *Squalus* sp., Squalidae and Squaliformes) as well as for *Squalus acanthias*.

## 2.4 Commercial catch composition

### 2.4.1 Length composition

Since 2005, two gear groupings were selected as representing the two main types of fishing activity, namely “trawls & other” and “nets & hooks”. The catch length frequencies which formed the basis of the “trawls & other” fleet are shown in Figure 2.2a; these length frequencies were combined by first expressing them as proportions by length category (according to the established life-stage-based length bins used for spurdog), and then combining them by using weighted averaging using the relative contribution by nation to the fleet (Table 2.4 gives an example of these weights from ICES, 2022). For the “nets & hooks” fleet, catch length frequencies from gillnet and trammel nets were combined with equal weighting (Figure 2.2b)

### 2.4.2 Sex ratio

No new data, a sex-ratio of 0.5 is assumed for assessment (see stock annex).

### 2.4.3 Quality of data

Length frequency samples prior to 2005 are only available for UK landings and these are aggregated into broader length categories and have been used in the previously presented assessments. Prior to 2005, no data were available from Norway, France or Ireland who were the other main exploiters of this stock. The availability of length data from 2005 onwards has improved following the Data Call associated with the 2021 benchmark (ICES, 2021).

## 2.5 Commercial catch-effort data

No commercial CPUE is used for assessment (see stock annex).

## 2.6 Fishery-independent information

### 2.6.1 Availability of survey data

Fishery-independent survey data are available for most regions within the stock area. Beam trawl surveys are not considered appropriate for this species, due to the low catchability of spurdog in this gear type.

The international bottom trawl surveys (IBTS) have higher catchability and the gears are considered suitable for this species. The spatial coverage of the North and Celtic Seas IBTS represents a large part of the stock range, as shown for an example year, 2013, in Figure 2.5. For further details of these surveys and gears used see ICES (2010). A description of the current groundfish surveys included in the spurdog assessment can be found in the Stock Annex and ICES 2021. In addition, bottom trawl data on spurdog from the Norwegian Shrimp survey (NO-shrimp-Q1) is available and used (details in Stock Annex and ICES 2021). Its coverage is shown in Figure 2.6. All survey data are combined per quarter for the assessment (Q1, Q3, Q4), see Stock Annex.

Additional Norwegian data on spurdog include the annual bottom trawl Coastal survey (from 1995 and ongoing) and a longline survey (from 2021 and ongoing). The NOcoast-Aco-Q4 covers the areas from 62°N to the Russian border in the north in October–November (Q4). The target species are coastal cod, saithe and haddock, but data is collected for other demersal fish,

elasmobranchs and deep-water shrimps as well (Mehl et al. 2017). Spurdog is mainly caught south of 66°N. A Campelen Shrimp trawl with 40 mm mesh size was used from 1995–1998, whereas mesh size was 20 mm for later years. More details can be found in Vollen, 2014 WD and Junge *et al.* 2020, WD.

The spurdog longline survey in Norwegian waters covers 58–65 °N and started in October 2021 (again in Sep/Oct 2022). This survey is specifically designed for spurdog and covers its distribution area along the Norwegian coast. The pilot survey in 2021 consisted of 280 successful longline stations each with 180 hooks. Spurdog was caught between 20 and 300 m at 34% of stations (Figure 2.7). The length-weight relationship per sex from the 2021 survey is shown in Figure 2.8 (Vollen et al. 2021, survey report IMR; Andrade et al. presentation to WGEF in 2022).

## 2.6.2 Length–frequency distributions

Proportions by length category for the three combined survey indices included in the assessment are shown in Figure 2.11.

Previously presented length frequencies are displayed in the Stock Annex, in the WGEF report 2022 (ICES 2022) and the WKNSEA report (ICES 2021).

## 2.6.3 CPUE

Spurdog survey data are typically characterised by highly variable catch rates due to occasional large hauls and a significant proportion of zero catches. All survey data are combined per quarter for the assessment (Q1, Q3, Q4), see Stock Annex. Summarised CPUEs per quarter are shown in Figure 2.41.

Future studies of survey data could usefully sex-specific and juvenile abundance trends. In the absence of accurate catch data, fishery-independent trawl surveys will be increasingly important to monitor stock recovery.

## 2.6.4 Statistical modelling

Statistical modelling of survey data is carried out with the ‘surveyIndex’ R package (Berg, et al. 2014) using the delta-lognormal approach with the full model (for both the presence-absence and positive parts of the model) defined as follows:

$$g(\mu_i) = Year_i + Gear_i + U(Ship_i) + s_1(lon_i, lat_i) + s_2(depth_i) + s_3(timeofday_i) + \log(HaulDur_i)$$

where  $g$  is the logit link function for the binomial model (1/0 response), and the lognormal for the positive observations (implemented by log-transforming the response variable and using a normal distribution with identity link function). The model includes an offset to account for the effects of haul duration. Further details of the modelling approach, including the final models used for each of the combined survey indices (Q1, Q3 and Q4) and the surveys included in these combined indices, can be found in the stock annex and the 2021 benchmark report (ICES 2021; see also WD1 to this benchmark report).

Figure 2.18 shows biomass maps for the combined surveys by quarter, and Figure 2.19 the estimated biomass indices based on the delta-lognormal modelling approach by quarter, with 95% confidence bounds. For Q1 surveys, the estimated distribution map shows the highest biomass to be to the north and west of Scotland, with some indication of higher biomass in the coastal waters of Norway and the central North Sea (Figure 2.18), while the estimated index shows a steep decline at the start of the time series with a gradual increase since the mid-2000s (Figure

2.19). For Q3 surveys, the estimated distribution map shows areas of highest biomass to be in the central and northwestern North Sea, in addition to along the Swedish coastline (no coverage west of Scotland, Figure 2.18), while the estimated index shows no obvious temporal trend, although perhaps reaches a minimum in the early 2000s (Figure 2.19). For the Q4 surveys, the estimated distribution map shows high biomass to the west of Scotland, but also in the Irish Sea and to the south in the Celtic Sea (no coverage of the North Sea, Figure 2.18), while the estimated index shows a significant and sharp increase since around 2010 (Figure 2.19).

## 2.7 Life-history information

The biological parameters currently used in the assessment can be found in the Stock Annex.

## 2.8 Exploratory assessments and previous analyses

### 2.8.1 Previous assessments

Exploratory assessments undertaken in 2006 included the use of a delta-lognormal GLM-standardized index of abundance and a population dynamic model. This has been updated at subsequent meetings. The results from these assessments indicate that spurdog abundance had declined, and that the decline was driven by high exploitation levels in the past, coupled with biological characteristics that make this species particularly vulnerable to such intense exploitation (ICES, 2006). More recent assessments have indicated that spurdog biomass is increasing again (e.g. ICES, 2020a, ICES, 2022a).

### 2.8.2 Simulation of effects of maximum landing length regulations

Earlier demographic studies on elasmobranchs indicate that low fishing mortality on mature females may be beneficial to population growth rates (Cortés, 1999; Simpfendorfer, 1999). Hence, measures that afford protection to mature females may be an important element of a management plan for the species. As with many elasmobranchs, female spurdog attain a larger size than males, and larger females are more fecund.

Preliminary simulation studies of various Maximum Landing Length (MLL) scenarios were undertaken by ICES (2006) and suggested that there are strong potential benefits to the stock by protecting mature females. However, improved estimates of discard survivorship from various commercial gears are required to better examine the efficacy of such measures.

## 2.9 Stock assessment

### 2.9.1 Introduction

An initial benchmark assessment of the model was carried out in 2011. A summary of review comments and response to it were provided in Appendix 2a of the 2011 WGEF report (ICES, 2011), and is reproduced in an Appendix to the Stock Annex. The model is described in detail in the Stock Annex, and in De Oliveira *et al.* (2013).

In 2011, WGEF updated the model based on the benchmark assessment. Subsequent update assessments were carried out in 2014, 2016, 2018 and 2020. A second benchmark was held in early 2021 (ICES, 2021), and the assessment model presented here adopts the configuration approved during this benchmark in 2021.

No assessment was carried out in 2023, sections below summarize the 2022 assessment.

## 2.9.2 Benchmark in 2021

A benchmark for spurdog was held in 2021 as part of WKNSEA (ICES 2021). Spurdog is currently the only elasmobranch stock assessed as an ICES category 1 stock. The assessment model is an integrated age-length-based assessment that includes catch data back to 1905 and survey indices covering major areas of the stock distribution (see stock annex)

### 2.9.2.1 Summary of benchmark

In February 2021, a benchmark for spurdog was held as part of WKNSEA (ICES 2021).

The spurdog assessment is currently the only elasmobranch category 1 assessment, with an integrated age-length-based assessment that includes catch data back to 1905. Survey indices included in the assessment prior to the benchmark in 2021 only covered a relatively small part (primarily divisions 6.a and 4.a) of the entire stock distribution area. Therefore, one of the main aims of the benchmark was to improve spatial coverage by including a number of eligible surveys in the assessment. Furthermore, the inclusion of new fecundity data along with improved information on growth was on the issue list. Finally, inclusion of fleet-based data (including length distributions), and better catch information since 2010 was to be addressed and a data-call was set up to request this information. Four main topics were considered in this benchmark (i) catch data (landings, discards and commercial size and sex composition), (ii) survey indices (biomass indices and size and sex composition), (iii) biological parameters, and (iv) reference points.

Based on the discussion on spatial and temporal coverage of the various surveys in DATRAS and those made available as part of the data call, the workshop agreed to derive three separate biomass indices, one per quarter (Q1, Q3, Q4). Data extraction and manipulation made use of the 'DATRAS' R package while statistical modelling has been carried out using the 'surveyIndex' R package (Berg et al., 2014). It implements a GAM modelling framework allowing for a variety of different model assumptions including 'delta' models with lognormal and gamma distributions for positive observations. In addition to the survey indices (and estimated CVs), the number of individuals by sex (sample size) and proportion at length by year (and sex) were calculated for use in the stock assessment. Details on the input data, analysis and results are found in the WD by Dobby (2021). This results in the following indices to be used in the assessment:

- A modelled Q1 index by sex, based on four survey time-series: NO-shrimp, NS-IBTS, SWC-IBTS, SCOWCGFS [1985–present].
- Q3 index by sex, based on a single survey: NS-IBTS [1992–present]
- A modelled Q4 index by sex, based on five survey time-series: SWC-IBTS, SCOWCGFS, NIGFS, IE-IGFS, EVHOE [2003–present].

Fecundity data used to inform the model were improved from having two data years (1960, 2005) to include 14 data years covering the time period 1921–2020.

Commercial catch length data were requested as part of the data-call for the benchmark, and this resulted in the definition of two commercial fleet types from 2005 onwards ("nets & hooks" and "trawls & other"), with commercial proportions by length category data compiled from 2007 onwards and used to estimate the selectivity for these two fleet types. The commercial fleet types prior to 2005 were kept as before ("target" and "non-target"), with associated data (as before) to

estimate selectivities for these. The model has therefore been extended to reflect four commercial selectivity types, as described above.

For reference points  $B_{lim}$  was set to 20% of  $B_0$  because the model goes back to 1905 when reporting of landings were relatively low and well before the high exploitation in the 1950s and onwards. For detailed descriptions, please see the benchmark report (ICES, 2021).

### 2.9.2.2 Issues uncovered during WGEF 2022

When preparing data for the assessment presented below, some errors were discovered with input data preparation for the 2021 benchmark assessment. These are summarised as follows:

- a. unraised sampling data were erroneously included when preparing the fishery length composition data for both the “nets & hooks” and “trawls & other” categories from 2007 onwards – these unraised data have now been removed;
- b. when preparing the “trawls & other” fishery length composition data, a misalignment of years occurred due to missing years of data from Sweden, which meant that length compositions were incorrectly combined and allocated to the wrong years – this has now been corrected;
- c. when preparing the discards data for 2007 onwards, a formatting issue in Excel meant that some discards data (e.g. for England and Wales) were omitted – these data have now been included.

In addition to these issues, there was an effort to update landings and discards data for elasmobranchs from 2005 onwards during the WKSHARK series of meetings (see e.g. ICES, 2020b). The decision from the 2021 benchmark was to use updated data from 2007 onwards, given information available at the time, but for the assessment presented below, updated landings and discards were included from 2005 onwards to be consistent with the work done within WKSHARK. However, length composition data used in the assessment were not updated to include 2005 and 2006, but these should be considered for inclusion during a future benchmark.

When preparing the discard data, it was clear that there were substantial gaps in the discard data for UK (England & Wales): there were no discard data for gillnets and trammel nets for the years 2011, 2013-2015, while surrounding years had anything from 683 t (2016) to 4472 t (2012). It was therefore decided to fill these gaps by allocating the average UK (England & Wales) discards for gillnets and trammel nets for the years 2010, 2012, 2016-19 (2425 t) to these missing years, and this was included in the assessment.

A comparison of selected results from the 2021 benchmark (“benchmark21”) and a subsequent update to account for the issues mentioned above (corrections to input data, updated data for 2005 onwards, infilling for missing data: “update21”) is given in Figures 2.20-2.22. Figure 2.20 indicates a markedly different likelihood profile for benchmark21 and update21 for the parameter  $Q_{fec}$ , which reflects the extent of density-dependence in the stock-recruit relationship, and hence productivity – update21 has a higher optimum  $Q_{fec}$  value, indicating that the stock is more productive than previously thought. Figure 2.21 indicates the model fits to the survey index data, and these also show substantial differences. Finally, Figure 2.22 compares summary plots, including reference points, and these show quite a different perception, where during the benchmark the stock was still thought to be below the biomass reference points, but with subsequent updates, the perception is somewhat different, with the stock above biomass reference points. The basis for the assessment presented below is the update (“update21”); although  $Q_{fec}$  is estimated, the other fecundity parameters ( $a_{fec}$  and  $b_{fec}$ ) are not, and the approach used was to set these to their update21 values (since that would have been the equivalent of the benchmark had there not been the data issues), and this is the approach adopted. Figure 2.23 shows the likelihood profile for  $Q_{fec}$ ,  $a_{fec}$ ,  $b_{fec}$  and MSYR (the MSY rate) for the update21 assessment. The fixed values of  $a_{fec}$  and  $b_{fec}$  used in the assessment, taken from update21 (Figure 2.23), are given in Table 2.12b.



### 2.9.3 Life-history parameters and input data

Calculation of the life-history parameters  $M_a$  (instantaneous natural mortality rate),  $l_a^s$  (mean length-at-age for animals of sex  $s$ ),  $w_a^s$  (mean weight-at-age for animals of sex  $s$ ), and  $P_a^m$  (proportion females of age  $a$  that become pregnant each year) are summarised in Table 2.6, and described visually in Figure 2.24.

Landings data used in the assessment are given in Tables 2.7a and b. The assessment requires the definition of fleets with corresponding exploitation patterns, and the only information currently available to provide this comes from Scottish and English & Wales data for the period up to (and including) 2004 (Table 2.7a), and from Swedish, Scottish and Irish bottom trawl data, and England & Wales gillnet and trammel net data for the period 2005 onwards (Table 2.7b). Four fleets are therefore defined: two operating up to (and including) 2004 and allocated to landings data, namely a “non-target” fleet (Scottish data), and a “target” fleet (England & Wales data); two operating from 2005 onwards and allocated to catch data, namely a “trawls & other” fleet (Swedish, Scottish and Irish bottom trawl data), and a “nets & hooks” fleet (England & Wales gillnet and trammel net data). Several targeting scenarios were explored in order to show the sensitivity of model results to these allocations (ICES, 2011), and these results can be found in previous reports (e.g. ICES, 2020a). In order to take the model back to a virgin state, the average proportion of the first two fleets for 1980–1984 were used to split landings data prior to 1980.

Three abundance indices (biomass catch rate) were derived on the basis of applying a delta-lognormal GLM model to several surveys (following WKNSEA, 2021), and these are given in Table 2.8 along with the corresponding CVs. The proportions-by-length category data derived from these surveys, along with the actual sample sizes these data are based on, are given in Tables 2.9a-c separately for females and males.

Table 2.10 lists the proportion-by-length-category data for the four commercial fleets considered in the assessment, along with the raised sample sizes or catch (see Table caption for details). Because these raised sample sizes/catch do not necessarily reflect the actual sample sizes the data are based on (as they have been raised to landings), these sample sizes have been ignored in the assessment (by setting  $n_{pcom,j,y} = \bar{n}_{pcom,j}$  in equation 10b of the Stock Annex); a sensitivity test conducted in ICES (2010) showed a lack of sensitivity to this assumption.

The fecundity data (see Ellis and Keable, 2008, and the 2021 benchmark report, ICES, 2021, for sampling and other details) are given as pairs of values reflecting length of pregnant female and corresponding number of pups, and are listed in Tables 2.11a-n for the several periods (1921, 1960, 1978, 1987, 1988, 1997, 2005, 2010, 2014, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020).

### 2.9.4 Summary of model runs in WGEF 2022

The starting point for the baseline assessment is the “update21” assessment, which is the equivalent of the 2021 benchmark assessment (“benchmark21”), but with updates to some of the input data to deal with corrections, updates, and missing data (see section 2.9.2.2). Furthermore, the values for the parameters  $a_{fec}$  and  $b_{fec}$  are taken from “update21” (Figure 2.23; see Table 2.12b), and the model fitted, including estimation of  $Q_{fec}$ .

Category	Description	Figures	Tables
Base case run	Results for baseline assessment, including model fits and estimation.	2.25-2.31	2.12–15

Retrospective	A 6-year retrospective analysis, using the baseline assessment and omitting one year of data each time	2.32
Projections	Projections under different harvest rate scenarios	2.36
Comparison	Comparison of the baseline assessment with the previous assessment (WGEF 2020) and the “update21” assessment (equivalent of benchmark 2021 assessment, but with corrections, updates and infilling for missing data).	2.37
<b>Sensitivity</b>		
$Q_{fec}$	A comparison with an alternative $Q_{fec}$ values that fall within the 95% probability interval of Figure 2.23	2.33
Leave-out runs	A comparison of the baseline assessment with an assessment (“Q1 only”) that omits the Q3 and Q4 survey indices, keeping only the Q1 index, along with likelihood profiles for the “Q1 only” assessment to highlight difference with the “update21” assessment profiles (Figure 2.23) on which the baseline assessment is based	2.34-2.35

### 2.9.5 Results of the 2022 baseline assessment

#### Model fits

Fecundity data available for several periods present an opportunity to estimate the extent of density-dependence in pup-production ( $Q_{fec}$ ). However, estimating this parameter along with the fecundity parameters  $a_{fec}$  and  $b_{fec}$  was not possible because these parameters are confounded. The approach therefore was to plot the likelihood surface for a range of fixed  $a_{fec}$  and  $b_{fec}$  input values, while estimating  $Q_{fec}$ , and the results are shown in Figure 2.23 for the “update21” assessment. The likelihood profiles were not repeated for the baseline assessment because they result in unrealistically high  $Q_{fec}$  values (optimum around 5, compared to around 3 from the “update21” assessment; results not shown), implying a highly productive resource, and likely resulting from conflicts in the underlying data. The periods of fecundity data are essential for the estimation of  $Q_{fec}$ , and further information that would help with the estimation of this parameter would be useful. Figure 2.23d indicates a near-linear relationship between  $Q_{fec}$  and  $MSYR$  (defined in terms of the biomass of all animals  $\geq l_{mat00}^f$ ), so additional information about  $MSYR$  levels typical for this species could be used for this purpose (but has not yet been attempted).

The value of  $Q_{fec}$  estimated for the baseline assessment (3.060) corresponds to the optimum shown in Figures 2.23a and b for  $a_{fec}$  and  $b_{fec}$ , respectively. Lower  $Q_{fec}$  values correspond to lower productivity, and vice-versa, higher values to higher productivity.

Figure 2.25 shows the model fits to the Q1, Q3 and Q4 survey indices; the Q4 index shows a much steeper increase compared to the Q1 and Q3 indices, a sharp increase that the model struggles to deal with, and this is likely driving the perception of a more productive stock than previously thought. Figures 2.26 shows the model fits to the four sets of commercial proportion-by-length-category data (one for each commercial fleet), and to the three sets of survey proportion-by-length-category data (one for each survey index), the survey data fitted separately for females and males. Model fits to the survey index and commercial proportion data appear to be reasonable, with a close fit to the average proportion-by-length-category for the commercial fleets, but also with a poorer fit to the survey data, and some very high residuals.

The model fits to the fecundity data are shown in Figures 2.27, showing marked changes in fecundity over time, which is related to value estimated for  $Q_{fec}$ . Figures 2.28 compare the deterministic and stochastic modelled recruitment, and plot the estimated normalised recruitment

residuals; the latter shows predominantly positive residuals, which is likely linked to the attempts of the model to fit to the steep increase in the Q4 survey index.

### Estimated parameters

Model estimates of the total number of pregnant females in the virgin population ( $N_0^{f.preg}$ ), the extent of density-dependence in pup production ( $Q_{fec}$ ), survey catchability for each survey ( $q_{sur}$ ), and current (2022) total biomass levels relative to 1905 and 1955 ( $B_{depl05}$  and  $B_{depl55}$ ), are shown in Table 2.12a (for the “base case” and alternative  $Q_{fec}$  estimates) together with estimates of precision. Estimates of the natural mortality parameter  $M_{pup}$ , the fecundity parameters  $a_{fec}$  and  $b_{fec}$ ,  $B_0$ ,  $B_{lim}$ , MSY-related estimates ( $HR_{MSY}$ ,  $MSY$ ,  $B_{MSY}$ ,  $MSY B_{trigger}$  and  $MSYR$ ), and other harvest rates of interest ( $HR_{pa}$ ,  $HR_{lim}$ ) are given in Table 2.12b. Table 2.13 provides a correlation matrix for some of the key estimable parameters (only the last five years of recruitment deviations are shown). Correlations between estimable parameters are generally low, apart from those associated with scale (strongly negative between  $N_0^{f.preg}$  and  $Q_{fec}$ , and between  $Q_{fec}$  and  $q_{sur}$ , and positive between  $N_0^{f.preg}$  and  $q_{sur}$ ) and among some selectivity parameters.

Estimated commercial- and selectivity-at-age patterns are shown in Figures 2.29, and reflect the differing proportions of animals of different size categories in the survey data when compared to the commercial catch data (e.g. a general tendency to select smaller animals in surveys and larger animals in commercial catches), and amongst the commercial fleets and surveys themselves (see also Figures 2.26). It should be noted that females grow to larger lengths than males, so that females are able to grow out of the second highest length category, whereas males, with an  $L_{\infty}$  of < 85 cm (Table 2.6) are not able to do so (hence the commercial selectivity remains unchanged for the two largest length categories for males). The divergence of survey selectivity for females compared to males is a reflection of the separate selectivity parameters for females/males in the largest length category (70+ for surveys).

A plot of recruitment vs. the number of pregnant females in the population, effectively a stock–recruit plot, is given in plot b of Figure 2.28 together with the replacement line (the number of recruiting pups needed to replace the pregnant female population under no harvesting). This plot illustrates the importance of the  $Q_{fec}$  parameter in the model: a  $Q_{fec}$  parameter equal to 1 would imply the expected value of the stock–recruit point lies on the replacement line, which implies that the population is effectively incapable of replacing itself. A further exploration of the behaviour of  $Q_y$  and  $N_{pup,y}$  (equations 2a and b in the Stock Annex) is shown in Figure 2.30.

### Time-series trends

Model estimates of total biomass ( $B_y$ ), recruitment ( $R_y$ ) and mean fishing proportion ( $HR_{5-30,y}$ ) are shown in Figure 2.31, together with approximate 95% probability intervals; observed annual catch ( $C_y = \sum_j C_{j,y}$ ) is also shown. They indicate a strong decline in spurdog total biomass, particularly since the 1950s, to a low around the early- to mid-2000s (20% of pre-exploitation levels), which appears to be driven by relatively high exploitation levels, given the biological characteristics of spurdog.  $HR_{5-30,y}$  appears to have declined in recent years, with  $B_y$  increasing again to 45% of pre-exploitation levels in 2022 ( $B_{depl05}$  in Table 2.12a). The fluctuations in recruitment towards the end of the time-series are driven by information in the proportion-by-length-category data. Table 2.14 provides a stock summary (recruitment, total biomass, catches and  $HR_{5-30,y}$ ).

## 2.9.6 Retrospective analysis

A six year retrospective analysis (the baseline model was re-run, each time omitting a further year in the data) was performed, and is shown in Figure 2.32 for the total biomass ( $B_y$ ), mean fishing proportion ( $HR_{5-30,y}$ ) and recruitment ( $R_y$ ). Mohn’s rho values are given in the top right of

each of these plots, and these are very low, although there are some retrospective lines that fall outside the probability intervals (black hashed lines) for the full data line (2021).

### 2.9.7 Sensitivity analyses

Two sets of sensitivity analyses were carried out, as listed in the text table above.

#### a) $Q_{fec}$

The  $a_{fec}$  and  $b_{fec}$  values that provided the optimum for the “update21” assessment ( $Q_{fec}=3.060$ ; plots a-c in Figures 2.23) was selected for the baseline assessment. This sensitivity test compares it to the runs for which the  $a_{fec}$  and  $b_{fec}$  input values provide the lower bound of the 95% probability interval ( $Q_{fec}=2.275$ ) and upper bound ( $Q_{fec}=3.803$ ). Model results are fairly sensitive to these options (Figures 2.33, Tables 2.12a–b), which is unsurprising because  $Q_{fec}$  reflects the productivity of the stock.

#### b) Leave-out runs

The leave-out runs tests the impact of only including the Q1 survey, to be similar to the assessment prior to the benchmark. Figure 2.34 indicates a large impact of including the Q3 and Q4 surveys (compare “include all” and “Q1 only”), with the “Q1 only” indicating only a very minor recovery in the stock in recent years, and “include all” showing a much stronger recovery. A big driver for this is the estimation of  $Q_{fec}$ , which is much lower for the former compared to the latter (compare Figure 2.35 to Figure 2.23).

### 2.9.8 Projections

The baseline assessment (see Tables 2.12) is used as a basis for future projections under a variety of catch options. These are based on:

- $HR_{MSY}$ , which assumes a harvest rate set at that  $HR_{MSY} = 0.043$ ;
- Zero catch (for comparison purposes);
- $HR_{sq}$ , which assumes a harvest rate set at the same harvest rate as 2021 (0.031) and that assumed for the intermediate year, 2022;
- $HR_{pa}$ , which assumes a harvest rate set at  $HR_{pa} = 0.049$ ;
- $HR_{lim}$ , which assumes a harvest rate set at  $HR_{lim} = 0.067$ .

Results are given in Tables 2.15, expressed as total biomass in future relative to the total biomass in 2022, and are illustrated in Figures 2.36. All scenarios result in increasing stock size, albeit at different rates, apart from fishing at  $HR_{lim}$ .

### 2.9.9 Conclusion

A benchmark for spurdog was held in 2021, during which there was a substantial improvement in data available for the assessment, including survey indices and associated length compositions covering a much larger area of the stock distribution, fecundity data spanning a much wider timeframe, fleet-based length data covering more countries than just the UK, and improved catch information since 2005. However, mistakes in the input data, subsequent updates to landings and discards data, including infilling for missing discards data (see Section 2.9.2.2) meant that the benchmark assessment had to be re-run, presented here as the “update21” assessment – as with the benchmark assessment, this assessment only uses data up to and including 2019. This was the basis for the baseline assessment in 2022 put forward.

Sensitivity tests show the model to be sensitive to the range of  $Q_{fec}$  values that fall within the 95% probability interval for corresponding fecundity parameters. The leave-out runs also highlight

the influence of especially the Q4 survey index on the perception of productivity of the stock, leading to a substantially higher estimate of  $Q_{fec}$  (and hence higher productivity) compared to past assessment. Summary plot of the final assessments (the baseline assessment), showing catches and estimates of recruitment, mean fishing proportion (with  $HR_{MSY} = 0.043$ ) and total biomass (with  $B_{lim} = 240\,569$  t and  $MSY\ B_{trigger} = 336\,796$  t), together with estimates of precision, are given in Figure 2.31 and Table 2.14.

Results from the current model confirm that spurdog abundance has declined, and that the decline is driven by high exploitation levels in the past, coupled with biological characteristics that make this species particularly vulnerable to such intense exploitation. The assessment also confirms that the stock is recovering from a low in the early- to mid-2000s, and is now well above  $MSY\ B_{trigger}$ .

A comparison of the 2022 assessment with the 2020 assessment and the “update21” assessment is provided in Figure 2.37 and shows an upward trend in recruitment and total biomass in recent years.

## 2.10 Quality of assessments

Whilst the current assessment model has been benchmarked twice (ICES, 2011, 2021) and published (De Oliveira et al. 2013), there are a number of issues to consider regarding input data and the assessment mode itself, as summarised below.

### 2.10.1 Catch data

The WG has provided estimates of total landings of NE Atlantic spurdog, and from 2005 onwards estimates of discards, and has used these together with length frequency distributions in the assessment of this stock. However, there are still concerns over the quality of these data as a consequence of:

- uncertainty in the historical level of catches because of landings being reported by generic dogfish categories;
- uncertainty over the accuracy of the landings data because of species misreporting;
- missing discards data for some countries and métiers (e.g. for UK-England & Wales gill-nets and trammel nets).

### 2.10.2 Survey data

Survey data are particularly important indicators of abundance trends in stocks. However, it should be highlighted that

- spurdog survey data are difficult to interpret because of the typically highly skewed distribution of catch-per-unit effort.
- annual survey length frequency distribution data (aggregated over all hauls) may be dominated by data from single large haul.

These problems have been dealt with by adopting appropriate statistical modelling approaches when analysing survey data (see above).

### 2.10.3 Biological information

As well as good commercial and survey data, the analytical assessments require good information on the biology of NE Atlantic spurdog. In particular, the WG would like to highlight the need for:

- updated and validated growth parameters, in particular for larger individuals;
- better estimates of natural mortality.

An area of future improvement for the spurdog model is including variation in the age-length relationship in the model. The lack of progress in this regard during the 2021 benchmark (given the need to focus on other areas considered of higher priority, such as the substantial improvement in the data now included in the model) meant that it was not possible to explore sensitivity to alternative growth parameterisations. This was because the alternative growth models proposed meant that there were no longer animals in the smallest length classes, leading to zero values which were not possible to deal with during this benchmark. The growth parameters used for the final model therefore remains the values used in the previous assessment and reported in Table 1 (see also De Oliveira et al., 2013).

### 2.10.4 Assessment

As with any stock assessment model, the exploratory assessment relies heavily on the underlying assumptions, particularly with regard to life-history parameters (e.g. natural mortality and growth), and on the quality and appropriateness of input data. The inclusion of several periods of fecundity data has provided valuable information that allows estimation of  $Q_{fec}$ , and projecting the model back in time is needed to allow fecundity data sets to be fitted. Nevertheless, the likelihood surface does not have a well-defined optimum, and additional information, such as on appropriate values of MSYR for a species such as spurdog, would help with this problem. Further refinements of the model are possible, such as including variation in growth. Selectivity curves also cover a range of gears over the entire catch history, and more appropriate assumptions (depending on available data) could be considered.

In summary, the model may be appropriate for providing an assessment of spurdog, though it could be further developed if the following data were available:

- Further refinements of selectivity parameters disaggregated by gear for the main fisheries (i.e. for various trawl, long line and gillnets);
- Improved estimates for biological data (e.g. growth parameters, reproductive biology and natural mortality);
- Information on likely values of MSYR for a species such as spurdog.

## 2.11 Reference points

The spurdog model is an integrated assessment model that includes a function that relates pup production to mature females, and it is therefore possible to estimate reference points (such as  $B_{MSY}$ ) from within the model (in much the same way that is done for biomass dynamic models) without relying on an approach such as EqSim. Furthermore, the model commences in 1905, when reported landings were relatively low, and well before the period of high exploitation experienced from the 1950s onwards, and so the model is considered to provide a reasonably reliable estimate of  $B_0$  (the virgin total biomass level). Reference points are directly based on assessment outputs, which means that reference points are updated every time the assessment is re-run. For the basis for current reference points, including the equations for how some of them are

derived, please refer to the stock annex. For current estimates of reference points, please see Table 2.12b.

## 2.12 Conservation considerations

In 2007, the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species categorized spurdog globally as 'Vulnerable' (Finucci *et al.* 2020), although the most recent assessment of spurdog in European waters lists spurdog as 'Endangered' (Ellis *et al.* 2015; Nieto *et al.*, 2015).

## 2.13 Management considerations

### Perception of state of stock

All analyses presented in previous reports of WGEF have indicated that the NE Atlantic stock of spurdog declined over the second half of the 20th century, but now appears to be increasing. The current stock size is thought to be ca. 45% of virgin biomass (Table 2.12a).

Although spurdog are less frequently caught in groundfish surveys than they were 20 years ago, there is some suggestion that spurdog are now being more frequently seen in survey hauls, and survey catch rates are starting to increase (Figure 2.25).

### Stock distribution

Spurdog in the ICES area are considered to be a single stock, ranging primarily from Subarea 1 to Subarea 8, although landings from the southern end of its range may also include other *Squalus* species.

### Biological considerations

Spurdog is a long-lived and slow growing species which has a high age-at-maturity and is particularly vulnerable to high levels of fishing mortality. Furthermore, females are thought to have restricted movement (Thorburn *et al.*, 2015). Population productivity is low, with low fecundity and a protracted gestation period. In addition, they form size- and sex-specific shoals and therefore aggregations of large fish (i.e. mature females) are easily exploited by target longline and gillnet fisheries.

Updated age and growth studies are required. For Norwegian waters, see Albert *et al.*, 2019 and Section 2.14.

### Fishery and technical considerations

Those fixed gear fisheries that capture spurdog should be reviewed to examine the catch composition, and those taking a large proportion of mature females should be strictly regulated.

During 2009 and 2010, a maximum landing length (MLL) was established in EC waters to deter targeting of mature females (see Section 2.10 of ICES, 2006 for simulations on MLL). Those fisheries taking spurdog that are lively may have problems measuring fish accurately, and investigations to determine an alternative measurement (e.g. pre-oral length) that has a high correlation with total length and is more easily measured on live fish are required. Dead spurdog may also be more easily stretched on measuring, and understanding such post-mortem changes is required to inform on any levels of tolerance, in terms of enforcement.

There is limited information on the distribution of gravid females with term pups and new-born spurdog pups, though they have been reported to occur in Scottish waters, in the Celtic Sea and off Ireland. The lack of accurate data on the location of pupping and nursery grounds, and their importance to the stock, precludes spatial management for this species at the present time.

## 2.14 Additional recent information

### 2.14.1 Developing an abundance index for spurdog in Norwegian waters

In Norwegian waters, from where more than 80% of the current landings originate, there is now a dedicated annual longline survey for spurdog since 2021 and the development of an abundance index is ongoing. In addition, bycatch data (until 2022) from the Norwegian Reference fleet is available.

### 2.14.2 Recent life-history information

The most recent update of biological data for *S. acanthias* in the Northeast Atlantic are from Norwegian waters (Albert *et al.*, 2019). A total of 3948 bycaught individuals were sampled throughout the period from 2014–2018, within the ICES divisions 2.a, 4.a, and 3.a. Overall, females accounted for 56% of the samples, but the sex compositions of individual catches were highly skewed.

The sampled spurdog varied in length from 41 to 95 cm and 53 to 121 cm for males and females, respectively. The mean lengths of both males and females were larger in the northern area of the study.

The age composition was similar for both sexes, observed from the age of 3 up to the mid-30s with dominance of individuals <15 years of age. Median age for both sexes was 11 years, with an interquartile range of 9–14 and 8–17 for females and males, respectively.

The youngest and smallest mature females were 7 years and 68 cm, while the oldest and largest immature ones were 26 years and 100 cm. Mean age of late gravid females was 15.3 years, with an interquartile range of 12–16 years; estimated 50% maturity was 9.5 years and 77.8 cm. For males, very few immatures were recorded making estimation of 50% maturity uncertain.

Near-term females had a range of 1–19 pups and a mean of 7.2 pups. Difference between left and right uteri was a maximum of two pups for 92% of the near-term females. Mean pup length of near-term females was 24 cm, with 10 and 90 percentiles of 19 and 27 cm, respectively. Both the number and mean size of pups of near-term females increased with maternal length.

## 2.15 References

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## 2.16 Tables and Figures

**Table 2.1a. Northeast Atlantic spurdog. WG estimates of total landings of NE Atlantic spurdog (1905-2022).**

Year	Landings (tonnes)	Year	Landings (tonnes)	Year	Landings (tonnes)
1905	7 248	1944	8 151	1983	37 046
1906	2 200	1945	6 776	1984	35 193
1907	1 428	1946	10 895	1985	38 674
1908	1 409	1947	16 893	1986	30 910
1909	2 022	1948	19 491	1987	42 355
1910	1 563	1949	23 010	1988	35 569
1911	1 957	1950	24 750	1989	30 278
1912	3 199	1951	35 301	1990	29 906
1913	4 050	1952	40 550	1991	29 562
1914	2 641	1953	38 206	1992	29 046
1915	2 602	1954	40 570	1993	25 636
1916	534	1955	43 127	1994	20 851
1917	339	1956	46 951	1995	21 318
1918	451	1957	45 570	1996	17 294
1919	2 659	1958	50 394	1997	15 347
1920	4 396	1959	47 394	1998	13 919
1921	5 321	1960	53 997	1999	12 384
1922	5 401	1961	57 721	2000	15 890
1923	5 655	1962	57 256	2001	16 693
1924	6 355	1963	62 288	2002	11 020
1925	6 719	1964	60 146	2003	12 246
1926	7 277	1965	49 336	2004	9 365
1927	8 395	1966	42 713	2005	7 101
1928	9 522	1967	44 116	2006	4 015
1929	9 320	1968	56 043	2007	2 917
1930	11 914	1969	52 074	2008	1 798
1931	11 838	1970	47 557	2009	1 980
1932	16 726	1971	45 653	2010	893
1933	20 244	1972	50 416	2011	435
1934	20 378	1973	49 412	2012	453
1935	22 266	1974	45 684	2013	336
1936	20 925	1975	44 119	2014	383
1937	23 930	1976	44 064	2015	263
1938	18 196	1977	42 252	2016	373
1939	20 119	1978	47 235	2017	296

1940	9 428	1979	38 201	2018	363
1941	8 740	1980	40 968	2019	455
1942	10 625	1981	39 961	2020	526
1943	8 181	1982	32 402	2021	539

**Table 2.1a (continued) Northeast Atlantic spurdog. WG estimates of total landings of NE Atlantic spurdog (1905-2022).**

Year	Landings (tonnes)	Year	Landings (tonnes)	Year	Landings (tonnes)
2022	474				

**Table 2.1b. Northeast Atlantic spurdog. WG estimates of discards of NE Atlantic spurdog (2005–2022).**

Year	Landings (tonnes)
2005	20
2006	22
2007	34
2008	46
2009	96
2010	1523
2011	2597
2012	4757
2013	2939
2014	2915
2015	3016
2016	1580
2017	4781
2018	2371
2019	3165
2020	1026
2021	639
2022	4160

**Table 2.2. Northeast Atlantic spurdog. WG estimates of total landings by nation (1980–2022); “-” = no data available, “.” = zero catch, “+” = <0.5 tonnes Data from 2005 onwards revised during WKSHARK2. From 2005 Scottish landings data are combined with those from England and Wales, and presented as UK (combined).**

Country	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
Belgium	1097	1085	1110	1072	1139	920	1048	979	657	750	582	393	447	335	396	391
Denmark	1404	1418	1282	1533	1217	1628	1008	1395	1495	1086	1364	1246	799	486	212	146
Faroe Islands	0	22	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	2	3	25	137	203	310
France	17 514	19 067	12 430	12 641	8356	8867	7022	11 174	7872	5993	4570	4370	4908	4831	3329	1978
Germany	43	42	39	25	8	22	41	48	27	24	26	6	55	8	21	100
Iceland	36	22	14	25	5	9	7	5	4	17	15	53	185	108	97	166
Ireland	108	476	1268	4658	6930	8791	5012	8706	5612	3063	1543	1036	1150	2167	3624	3056
Netherlands	217	268	183	315	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Norway	5925	3941	3992	4659	4279	3487	2986	3614	4139	5329	8104	9633	7113	6945	4546	3940
Poland	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Portugal	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	5	3	2	128	188	250	323	190	256
Russia	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Spain	0	0	8	653	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sweden	399	308	398	300	256	360	471	702	733	613	390	333	230	188	95	104
UK (E&W)	9229	9342	8024	6794	8046	7841	7047	7684	6952	5371	5414	3770	4207	3494	3462	2354
UK (Sc)	4994	3970	3654	4371	4957	6749	6267	8043	8075	8024	7768	8531	9677	6614	4676	8517
Total	40 968	39 961	32 402	37 046	35 193	38 674	30 910	42 355	35 569	30 278	29 906	29562	29046	25636	20851	21318

**Table 2.2 (continued). Northeast Atlantic spurdog. WG estimates of total landings by nation (1980–2022); “-” = no data available, “.” = zero catch, “+” = <0.5 tonnes Data from 2005 onwards revised during WKSHARK2. From 2005 Scottish landings data are combined with those from England and Wales, and presented as UK (combined)**

Country	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Belgium	430	443	382	354	400	410	23	11	13	21	17	11	12	7	1	0	0	0	-	-
Denmark	142	196	126	131	146	156	107	232	219	150	121	76	78	82	14	26	30	19	10	27
Faroe Islands	51	218	362	486	368	613	340	224	295	225	271	241	144	462	179	104	-	-	-	-
France	1607	1555	1286	998	4342	4304	2569	1705	1062	946	702	505	368	412	164	84	34	13	19	2
Germany	38	21	31	54	194	304	121	98	138	140	7	3	5	2	1	1	1	1	1	+
Iceland	156	106	80	57	107	199	276	200	142	76	82	43	68	102	62	53	51	6	19	8
Ireland	2305	2214	1164	904	905	1227	1214	1416	1076	1022	859	651	137	175	26	13	37	34	18	2
Netherlands	0	0	0	0	28	39	27	10	25	31	23	25	18	5	7	1	4	3	0	1
Norway	2748	1567	1293	1461	1643	1424	1091	1119	1054	1016	790	615	711	543	540	247	285	250	313	217
Poland	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Portugal	120	100	46	21	2	3	4	4	9	5	9	10	4	3	2	3	2	2	1	2
Russia	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Spain	0	0	28	95	372	363	306	135	17	43	47	85	42	23	7	7	6	2	1	4
Sweden	154	196	140	114	123	238	0	275	244	169	147	93	75	80	5	0	-	-	-	-
UK (com- bined)*	2670	3066	4480	4461	3654	4516	2823	3109	1729	3481	1209	799	280	546	64	1	3	6	0	-
UK (Sc)*	6873	5665	4501	3248	3606	2897	2120	3708	3342											
Total	17 294	15 347	13 919	12 384	15 890	16 693	11 020	12 246	9365	7101	4015	2917	1798	1980	893	435	453	336	383	263

**Table 2.2 (continued). Northeast Atlantic spurdog. WG estimates of total landings by nation (1980–2022); “-” = no data available, “.” = zero catch, “+” = <0.5 tonnes. Data from 2005 onwards revised during WKSHARK2. From 2005 Scottish landings data are combined with those from England and Wales, and presented as UK (combined).**

Country	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Belgium	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Denmark	24	27	19	21	32	20	23
Faroe Islands	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
France	1	3	1	-	-	-	-
Germany	2	+	1	+	-	+	+
Iceland	8	4	2	1	3	1	2
Ireland	34	1	24	11	3	-	9
Netherlands	1	1	6	+	+	-	-
Norway	270	222	271	370	409	367	321
Poland	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Portugal	1	1	1	.	-	-	-
Russia	-	-	-	-	-	-	n.a
Spain	1	.	.	-	+	-	-
Sweden	+	+	+	+	-	+	+
UK (combined)*	30	37	38	52	79	151	120
UK (Sc)*						-	
Total	373	296	363	455	526	539	474



**Table 2.3. Northeast Atlantic spurdog. WG estimates of landings by ICES Subarea (1980–2022). Data from 2005 onwards revised during WKSHARK2.**

Subarea or Division	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
Baltic	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	3	0	0	0	0	0
1 and 2	138	20	28	760	40	120	137	417	1559	2808	4296	6614	5063	5102	3124	2725	1853	582
3 and 4	20 544	16 181	11 965	11 572	10 557	11 136	8986	11 653	10 800	10 423	11 497	9264	10 505	6591	4360	7347	5299	4977
5	45	27	18	27	5	22	9	41	6	73	182	133	336	335	364	484	217	320
6	4590	4011	5052	7007	8491	12422	8107	9038	7517	6406	5407	6741	6268	5927	5622	5164	4168	3412
7.a	2722	4013	4566	4001	6336	6774	6458	7305	5569	3389	2801	2527	2669	2700	2313	1185	1650	1534
7.b-c	704	925	424	1777	2178	1699	1197	2401	1579	893	369	293	316	2009	1175	1004	603	450
7.d-f	6693	8210	5989	4664	2450	1280	1644	2892	2120	1634	1339	1122	852	785	800	760	852	646
7.g-k	4793	5479	3881	6924	4902	4965	3864	8106	6175	4477	3736	2495	2622	1745	2680	2034	2229	2984
8	739	1095	479	312	234	257	507	497	242	174	273	367	406	435	406	602	408	418
9	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4	1	2	4	4	2	5	7	5	2	2
10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
12	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	12
14	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	1	0	0	0	0
Other or unspecified	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	12	10
Total	40 968	39 961	32 402	37 046	35 193	38 674	30 910	42 355	35 569	30 278	29 906	29 562	29 046	25 636	20 851	21 318	17 294	15 347

**Table 2.3 (continued) Northeast Atlantic spurdog. WG estimates of landings by ICES Subarea (1980–2022). Data from 2005 onwards revised during WKSHARK2.**

Subarea or Division	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Baltic	0	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1 and 2	607	779	894	462	357	440	423	682	499	312	337	230	190	93	131	74	122	105
3 and 4	3895	2705	2475	2516	1904	2395	2163	1177	789	628	642	635	400	183	189	198	203	140
5	442	545	879	1406	808	583	677	244	204	161	86	103	63	53	51	6	28	8
6	2831	2715	5977	5624	3169	3398	2630	1581	830	619	169	263	69	3	1	0	0	+0
7.a	1771	2153	1599	1878	1529	2021	938	589	413	272	73	97	3	1	10	4	2	+
7.b-c	854	1037	1028	816	527	588	432	332	268	299	48	97	7	1	1	0	0	0
7.d-f	443	411	438	555	295	268	278	285	168	172	124	196	78	71	33	17	8	+
7.g-k	2656	1822	2161	2846	2130	2339	1739	2005	746	386	245	288	63	14	29	30	16	2
8	308	171	405	469	269	134	56	138	87	58	70	65	15	12	3	3	2	2
9	2	3	19	8	11	5	14	5	10	11	5	6	5	5	5	3	2	6
10	0	18	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
12	104	22	14	41	22	74	12	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
14	0	0	0	63	0	0	0											
Other or unspecified	6	4	1	2	0	0	0	59	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>13 919</b>	<b>12 384</b>	<b>15 890</b>	<b>16 693</b>	<b>11 020</b>	<b>12 246</b>	<b>9365</b>	<b>7101</b>	<b>4015</b>	<b>2917</b>	<b>1798</b>	<b>1980</b>	<b>893</b>	<b>435</b>	<b>453</b>	<b>336</b>	<b>383</b>	<b>263</b>

**Table 2.3 (continued) Northeast Atlantic spurdog. WG estimates of landings by ICES Subarea (1980–2022). Data from 2005 onwards revised during WKSHARK2.**

Subarea or Division	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Baltic	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1 and 2	150	127	164	183	280	277	203
3 and 4	165	123	128	208	156	110	140
5	8	4	2	0	3	1	2
6	5	1	3	0	5	+	6
7.a	2	0	+	+	+	-	+
7.b-c	3	0	0	0	0	-	-
7.d-f	1	14	19	14	29	26	17
7.g-k	36	24	45	49	53	125	107
8	1	1	+	0	+	+	+
9	2	1	1	0	0	-	-
10	0	0	0	0	0	-	-
12	0	0	0	0	0	-	-
14	0	0	1	0	0	-	-
Other or unspecified	0	0	0	0	0	-	-
Total	373	296	363	455	526	539	474

**Table 2.4. Northeast Atlantic spurdog. Relative proportion (by tonnage) of Swedish, Irish and British catches of spurdog taken by bottom trawls. These relative proportions are used as weights when combining the bottom trawl length composition data.**

	Sweden	Ireland	GBR
2007	7%	35%	57%
2008	14%	40%	46%
2009	7%	19%	74%
2010	7%	43%	51%
2011	6%	46%	48%
2012	10%	31%	59%
2013	12%	21%	67%
2014	28%	12%	59%
2015	4%	20%	76%
2016	6%	28%	66%
2017	21%	41%	37%
2018	2%	40%	59%
2019	9%	18%	73%
2020	0%	51%	49%
2021	0%	3%	97%
average	9%	30%	61%

**Table 2.6. Northeast Atlantic spurdog. Description of life-history equations and parameters.**

Parameters	Description/values	Sources
Instantaneous natural mortality at age $a$ :		
$M_a$	$M_a = \begin{cases} M_{pup} e^{-a \ln(M_{pup}/M_{adult})/a_{M1}} & a < a_{M1} \\ M_{adult} & a_{M1} \leq a \leq a_{M2} \\ M_{til} / [1 + e^{-M_{gam}(a-(A+a_{M2})/2)}] & a > a_{M2} \end{cases}$	
$a_{M1}, a_{M2}$	4, 30	expert opinion
$M_{adult}, M_{til}, M_{gam}$	0.1, 0.3, 0.04621	expert opinion
$M_{pup}$	Calculated to satisfy balance equation	supplementary material of De Oliveira et al. 2013
Mean length-at-age $a$ for animals of sex $s$		
$L_a^s$	$L_a^s = L_\infty^s (1 - e^{-\kappa^s (a - t_0^s)})$	
$L_\infty^f, L_\infty^m$	110.66, 81.36	average from literature
$\kappa^f, \kappa^m$	0.086, 0.17	average from literature
$t_0^f, t_0^m$	-3.306, -2.166	average from literature
Mean weight at age $a$ for animals of sex $s$		
$W_a^s$	$W_a^s = a^s (L_a^s)^{b^s}$	
$a^f, b^f$	0.00108, 3.301	Bedford <i>et al.</i> (1986)
$a^m, b^m$	0.00576, 2.89	Coull <i>et al.</i> (1989)
$l_{mat00}^f$	Female length at first maturity 70 cm	average from literature
Proportion females of age $a$ that become pregnant each year		
$P_a''$	$P_a'' = \frac{P_{max}''}{1 + \exp\left[-\ln(19) \frac{l_a^f - l_{mat50}^f}{l_{mat95}^f - l_{mat50}^f}\right]}$	
where $P_{max}''$ is the proportion very large females pregnant each year, and $l_{matx}^f$ the length at which $x\%$ of the maximum proportion of females are pregnant each year		
$P_{max}''$	0.5	average from literature
$l_{mat50}^f, l_{mat95}^f$	80 cm, 87 cm	average from literature

**Table 2.7a. Northeast Atlantic spurdog. Landings used in the old assessment (1905-2004), with the allocation to “Non-target” and “Target”. Estimated Scottish selectivity (based on fits to proportions by length category data for the period 1991–2004) is assumed to represent “non-target” fisheries, and estimated England and Wales selectivity (based on fits to proportions by length category data for the period 1983–2001) “target” fisheries. The allocation to “Non-target” and “Target” shown below is based on categorising each nation as having fisheries that are “non-target”, “target” or a mixture of these from 1980 onwards. An average for the period 1980–1984 is assumed for the “non-target”/“target” split prior to 1980, while all landings from 2008 onwards are assumed to come from “non-target” fisheries. Landings are used as catch in the assessment.**

Year	Non-target	Target	Total	Year	Non-target	Target	Total	Year	Non-target	Target	Total
1905	3503	3745	7248	1939	9723	10396	20119	1973	23880	25532	49412
1906	1063	1137	2200	1940	4556	4872	9428	1974	22078	23606	45684
1907	690	738	1428	1941	4224	4516	8740	1975	21322	22797	44119
1908	681	728	1409	1942	5135	5490	10625	1976	21295	22769	44064
1909	977	1045	2022	1943	3954	4227	8181	1977	20420	21832	42252
1910	755	808	1563	1944	3939	4212	8151	1978	22828	24407	47235
1911	946	1011	1957	1945	3275	3501	6776	1979	18462	19739	38201
1912	1546	1653	3199	1946	5265	5630	10895	1980	20770	20198	40968
1913	1957	2093	4050	1947	8164	8729	16893	1981	20953	19009	39962
1914	1276	1365	2641	1948	9420	10071	19491	1982	16075	16327	32402
1915	1258	1344	2602	1949	11120	11890	23010	1983	17095	19951	37046
1916	258	276	534	1950	11961	12789	24750	1984	15047	20147	35194
1917	164	175	339	1951	17060	18241	35301	1985	17048	21626	38674
1918	218	233	451	1952	19597	20953	40550	1986	15138	15772	30910
1919	1285	1374	2659	1953	18464	19742	38206	1987	19558	22798	42356
1920	2125	2271	4396	1954	19607	20963	40570	1988	17292	18277	35569
1921	2572	2749	5321	1955	20843	22284	43127	1989	15355	14924	30279
1922	2610	2791	5401	1956	22691	24260	46951	1990	14390	15516	29906
1923	2733	2922	5655	1957	22023	23547	45570	1991	14034	15529	29563
1924	3071	3284	6355	1958	24355	26039	50394	1992	15711	13335	29046
1925	3247	3472	6719	1959	22905	24489	47394	1993	12268	13369	25637
1926	3517	3760	7277	1960	26096	27901	53997	1994	9238	11613	20851
1927	4057	4338	8395	1961	27896	29825	57721	1995	12104	9214	21318
1928	4602	4920	9522	1962	27671	29585	57256	1996	10026	7269	17295
1929	4504	4816	9320	1963	30103	32185	62288	1997	9158	6190	15348
1930	5758	6156	11914	1964	29068	31078	60146	1998	8509	5410	13919
1931	5721	6117	11838	1965	23843	25493	49336	1999	7233	5152	12385
1932	8083	8643	16726	1966	20642	22071	42713	2000	9283	6608	15891
1933	9784	10460	20244	1967	21320	22796	44116	2001	9513	7180	16693
1934	9848	10530	20378	1968	27085	28958	56043	2002	6169	5001	11170
1935	10761	11505	22266	1969	25166	26908	52074	2003	7167	5080	12247
1936	10113	10812	20925	1970	22983	24574	47557	2004	5718	3648	9366
1937	11565	12365	23930	1971	22063	23590	45653				
1938	8794	9402	18196	1972	24365	26051	50416				

**Table 2.7b. Northeast Atlantic spurdog. Catch from 2005 onwards used in the assessment, with the allocation to “Trawls & other” and “Nets & hooks”. Estimated selectivity for “Trawls & other” is based on fits to proportions by length category data for available Scottish, Swedish and Irish bottom trawl data for the period 2007-present, and estimated selectivity for “Nets & hooks” is based on fits to proportions by length category data for available England and Wales gillnets and trammel nets data for the period 2007-present (although in this case, the year 2021 is omitted due to the lack of sufficient samples for that year). The allocation to “Trawls & other” and “Nets & hooks” shown below is based on assigning gears to these two broad categories for all landings and discards data. Note that infilling was required for the years 2011, 2013-2015 due to missing discards data for gillnets and trammel nets for England and Wales (average of 2010, 2012, 2016-2019 used for the missing years, equating to 2425 t discards added for England and Wales in each of the missing years), but this only affects “Nets & hooks”.**

Year	Trawls & other	Nets & hooks	Total
2005	2890	4222	7112
2006	2186	1832	4018
2007	1562	1363	2925
2008	975	862	1837
2009	1203	861	2064
2010	675	1734	2409
2011	302	2722	3024
2012	399	4805	5204
2013	598	2672	3270
2014	536	2759	3295
2015	638	2635	3273
2016	984	967	1951
2017	726	4349	5075
2018	699	2034	2733
2019	795	2826	3621
2020	746	722	1468
2021	673	505	1178

**Table 2.8. Northeast Atlantic spurdog. Delta-lognormal GLM-standardised index of abundance (with associated CVs), based on combined indices for Q1, Q3 and Q4.**

Year	Q1 index	CV	Q3 index	CV	Q4 index	CV
1985	5902	0.22				
1986	4124	0.21				
1987	3518	0.23				
1988	2690	0.24				
1989	2704	0.25				
1990	5014	0.24				
1991	3423	0.23				
1992	1045	0.29	1983	0.30		
1993	1560	0.25	2092	0.30		
1994	1856	0.25	434	0.38		
1995	1758	0.30	340	0.48		
1996	2308	0.28	765	0.43		
1997	1187	0.32	3388	0.36		
1998	1123	0.31	1349	0.34		
1999	1990	0.29	1042	0.35		
2000	607	0.38	567	0.45		
2001	1728	0.30	894	0.50		
2002	1464	0.30	260	0.56		
2003	943	0.30	244	0.59	7151	0.13
2004	790	0.39	385	0.49	6027	0.13
2005	995	0.30	773	0.48	6506	0.13
2006	1372	0.30	381	0.47	6448	0.13
2007	1028	0.26	582	0.42	5507	0.12
2008	948	0.32	648	0.39	6230	0.13
2009	436	0.33	1522	0.44	5137	0.15
2010	519	0.28	861	0.38	7300	0.22
2011	1146	0.29	1331	0.38	5850	0.15
2012	722	0.33	885	0.38	9487	0.14
2013	1976	0.25	594	0.40	6080	0.17
2014	1761	0.24	782	0.42	9608	0.13
2015	683	0.30	1819	0.31	10024	0.13
2016	1714	0.27	1372	0.33	18939	0.12
2017	1969	0.23	918	0.31	25587	0.13
2018	1610	0.26	1035	0.34	17194	0.12
2019	1576	0.25	642	0.32	24875	0.10
2020	2235	0.23	842	0.28	30142	0.10
2021	2695	0.22	1324	0.29	40510	0.09

**Table 2.9a. Northeast Atlantic spurdog. Scottish survey proportions-by-length category for females (top) and males (bottom) for the Q1 combined index, with the actual sample sizes given in the second column.**

	<i>n<sub>psur,y</sub></i>	16–31	32–54	55–69	70+
<i>Females</i>					
1985	244	0.0721	0.1934	0.0930	0.0352
1986	212	0.0406	0.0657	0.1546	0.1315
1987	101	0.0304	0.0761	0.1167	0.0439
1988	1894	0.0012	0.5886	0.0032	0.0010
1989	351	0.0466	0.3616	0.0150	0.0451
1990	516	0.0278	0.2170	0.1250	0.0176
1991	963	0.0992	0.2044	0.0495	0.0103
1992	119	0.1233	0.2651	0.0437	0.0271
1993	84	0.0923	0.2935	0.0730	0.0430
1994	1606	0.0287	0.3199	0.0215	0.0093
1995	2210	0.2164	0.2731	0.0041	0.0032
1996	174	0.0718	0.2656	0.0635	0.0263
1997	16	0.1013	0.2025	0.1013	0.0253
1998	216	0.0662	0.3080	0.0728	0.0372
1999	134	0.0894	0.2336	0.0547	0.0615
2000	33	0.0787	0.3148	0.0197	0.0787
2001	43	0.0123	0.2441	0.0862	0.0615
2002	54	0.0609	0.2348	0.1304	0.1566
2003	189	0.0277	0.3117	0.0554	0.0492
2004	24	0.0426	0.2340	0.0851	0.0639
2005	39	0.1250	0.2059	0.0882	0.0588
2006	39	0.0795	0.1324	0.1192	0.1457
2007	71	0.1124	0.2469	0.0787	0.1181
2008	135	0.1229	0.2610	0.0330	0.0454
2009	163	0.0968	0.3226	0.0183	0.0244
2010	3491	0.0087	0.3560	0.1972	0.0013
2011	171	0.0399	0.1835	0.0830	0.0751
2012	723	0.0136	0.3334	0.0088	0.0039
2013	129	0.0907	0.1782	0.1044	0.0925
2014	431	0.0347	0.1385	0.1071	0.0224
2015	74	0.0754	0.2439	0.0526	0.0311
2016	198	0.1018	0.1925	0.0762	0.1384
2017	686	0.0847	0.2982	0.0295	0.0331
2018	139	0.0614	0.2714	0.1089	0.0639
2019	549	0.0676	0.3174	0.0796	0.0676
2020	326	0.1514	0.1456	0.0691	0.1651
2021	1690	0.0335	0.0892	0.2763	0.3838



	$n_{psur,y}$	16–31	32–54	55–69	70+
<i>Males</i>					
1985	1841	0.0432	0.1324	0.1909	0.2398
1986	654	0.0288	0.0957	0.3372	0.1458
1987	714	0.0406	0.0457	0.1316	0.5149
1988	1135	0.0010	0.3948	0.0082	0.0021
1989	431	0.0489	0.3917	0.0391	0.0520
1990	978	0.0427	0.1541	0.2111	0.2048
1991	1445	0.0787	0.2017	0.2168	0.1394
1992	127	0.1477	0.1808	0.0407	0.1717
1993	71	0.0959	0.2691	0.0344	0.0988
1994	2380	0.0268	0.5444	0.0184	0.0311
1995	1857	0.1588	0.3405	0.0026	0.0013
1996	218	0.0657	0.3734	0.0942	0.0394
1997	22	0.1899	0.1266	0.0759	0.1772
1998	219	0.0355	0.3431	0.0692	0.0680
1999	200	0.1401	0.2683	0.0479	0.1045
2000	36	0.0393	0.2525	0.0787	0.1377
2001	92	0.0246	0.1538	0.1087	0.3087
2002	36	0.0783	0.1696	0.0522	0.1174
2003	216	0.0216	0.3674	0.1259	0.0411
2004	32	0.0426	0.2340	0.0638	0.2341
2005	47	0.1250	0.1912	0.0588	0.1470
2006	57	0.0132	0.2252	0.1192	0.1655
2007	66	0.0675	0.1462	0.1162	0.1141
2008	146	0.1460	0.2653	0.0495	0.0770
2009	207	0.0897	0.3437	0.0308	0.0737
2010	2487	0.0063	0.2986	0.1150	0.0167
2011	309	0.0351	0.2135	0.2451	0.1248
2012	945	0.0248	0.5835	0.0128	0.0193
2013	196	0.1050	0.1513	0.1032	0.1747
2014	1084	0.0411	0.1774	0.3485	0.1302
2015	144	0.0590	0.2493	0.1059	0.1828
2016	215	0.0936	0.1813	0.1178	0.0984
2017	903	0.0877	0.3520	0.0534	0.0614
2018	231	0.0508	0.2128	0.1056	0.1252
2019	610	0.0541	0.2369	0.1003	0.0764
2020	435	0.1668	0.1148	0.0725	0.1148
2021	887	0.0293	0.0897	0.0559	0.0422

**Table 2.9b. Northeast Atlantic spurdog. Scottish survey proportions-by-length category for females (top) and males (bottom) for the Q3 combined index, with the actual sample sizes given in the second column.**

	<i>n<sub>psur,y</sub></i>	16–31	32–54	55–69	70+
<i>Females</i>					
1992	32	0.00001	0.0118	0.1118	0.4824
1993	13	0.0294	0.0294	0.0882	0.3235
1994	15	0.0864	0.1481	0.0494	0.1975
...	...	...	...	...	...
2008	48	0.0685	0.2785	0.0183	0.0182
2009	28	0.0276	0.0552	0.1380	0.3671
2010	16	0.0303	0.2730	0.0910	0.00002
2011	47	0.0658	0.1343	0.0987	0.1534
2012	31	0.1177	0.0941	0.0244	0.1359
2013	52	0.0688	0.0854	0.0142	0.5124
2014	26	0.0046	0.0107	0.0076	0.0137
2015	53	0.0765	0.1756	0.1778	0.0810
2016	25	0.0882	0.1730	0.0799	0.1531
2017	92	0.0915	0.2063	0.0819	0.0546
2018	64	0.0210	0.0374	0.0187	0.1560
2019	51	0.0539	0.3695	0.0551	0.0368
2020	92	0.1072	0.2403	0.0277	0.0920
2021	208	0.0265	0.0718	0.1242	0.2376
<i>Males</i>					
1992	31	0.00001	0.0941	0.0588	0.2411
1993	19	0.00001	0.0882	0.1471	0.2941
1994	18	0.0494	0.2716	0.0741	0.1235
...	...	...	...	...	...
2008	71	0.0731	0.4201	0.0274	0.0959
2009	18	0.0276	0.0819	0.0267	0.2760
2010	25	0.0607	0.2118	0.1213	0.2118
2011	92	0.0658	0.1316	0.0987	0.2517
2012	56	0.1088	0.1314	0.1181	0.2697
2013	26	0.0488	0.0569	0.0712	0.1424
2014	725	0.0046	0.0122	0.0948	0.8517
2015	58	0.0720	0.1708	0.1351	0.1111
2016	34	0.0333	0.1065	0.0799	0.2862
2017	102	0.0819	0.2245	0.0546	0.2048
2018	302	0.0327	0.0491	0.0397	0.6452
2019	53	0.0613	0.2769	0.0546	0.0919
2020	85	0.1265	0.2543	0.0647	0.0872
2021	255	0.0198	0.0743	0.1064	0.3393

**Table 2.9c. Northeast Atlantic spurdog. Scottish survey proportions-by-length category for females (top) and males (bottom) for the Q4 combined index, with the actual sample sizes given in the second column.**

	<i>n<sub>psur,y</sub></i>	16–31	32–54	55–69	70+
<i>Females</i>					
2003	266	0.0308	0.1273	0.0958	0.3883
2004	139	0.0083	0.1312	0.1240	0.2768
2005	611	0.0161	0.1193	0.3550	0.1340
2006	227	0.0403	0.1498	0.1032	0.3193
2007	213	0.0411	0.1706	0.1018	0.2493
2008	1247	0.0058	0.0273	0.0240	0.8685
2009	135	0.0181	0.1726	0.1498	0.1878
2010	386	0.0325	0.1685	0.0381	0.4706
2011	170	0.0224	0.1020	0.0704	0.1534
2012	1207	0.0234	0.0670	0.0448	0.6601
2013	399	0.0183	0.1314	0.1651	0.4121
2014	601	0.0622	0.2164	0.0530	0.2263
2015	302	0.0673	0.1489	0.0862	0.1924
2016	1469	0.0555	0.1795	0.1270	0.1671
2017	1090	0.0606	0.3157	0.0549	0.1139
2018	1761	0.0375	0.3582	0.0711	0.1058
2019	2319	0.0372	0.2077	0.0828	0.2354
2020	1743	0.0425	0.1890	0.1109	0.2149
2021	2564	0.0670	0.2131	0.0728	0.1841
<i>Males</i>					
2003	322	0.0668	0.1017	0.0810	0.1083
2004	261	0.0083	0.1494	0.1336	0.1686
2005	457	0.0221	0.0794	0.2021	0.0719
2006	221	0.0229	0.1178	0.1342	0.1125
2007	313	0.0178	0.1836	0.1154	0.1206
2008	332	0.0036	0.0280	0.0143	0.0285
2009	251	0.0331	0.1452	0.1023	0.1910
2010	268	0.0118	0.1554	0.0400	0.0830
2011	458	0.1189	0.1837	0.1541	0.1950
2012	593	0.0102	0.0682	0.0426	0.0838
2013	312	0.0133	0.0691	0.0755	0.1152
2014	619	0.0511	0.2332	0.0485	0.1092
2015	378	0.0416	0.1726	0.1079	0.1831
2016	1713	0.0504	0.1850	0.1172	0.1185
2017	1432	0.0336	0.2637	0.0528	0.1047
2018	1620	0.0218	0.2510	0.0668	0.0879
2019	2112	0.0303	0.2146	0.0701	0.1219
2020	1730	0.0420	0.1825	0.1096	0.1085
2021	2949	0.0683	0.1978	0.0728	0.1240

**Table 2.10. Northeast Atlantic spurdog. Commercial proportions-by-length category (males and females combined), for each of the two fleets (“Non-target”, “target”, “Trawls & other”, “Nets & hooks”), with raised sample sizes given in the second column, except for “Trawls & other” which gives the combined catch tonnage (landings + discards) associated with Swedish, Scottish and Irish bottom trawl length compositions.**

	$n_{pcom,i,y}$	16–54	55–69	70–84	85+
<i>Non-target (Scottish) commercial proportions</i>					
1991	6167824	0.0186	0.4014	0.5397	0.0404
1992	6104263	0.0172	0.1844	0.7713	0.0272
1993	4295057	0.0020	0.2637	0.7106	0.0236
1994	3257630	0.0301	0.3322	0.5857	0.0520
1995	5710863	0.0112	0.2700	0.6878	0.0309
1996	2372069	0.0069	0.4373	0.5416	0.0142
1997	3769327	0.0091	0.3297	0.5909	0.0702
1998	3021371	0.0330	0.4059	0.5286	0.0325
1999	1869109	0.0145	0.3508	0.5792	0.0556
2000	1856169	0.00001	0.1351	0.7683	0.0967
2001	1580296	0.0021	0.2426	0.7022	0.0531
2002	1264383	0.0529	0.3106	0.5180	0.1186
2003	1695860	0.0011	0.2673	0.5729	0.1587
2004	1688197	0.0106	0.2292	0.6893	0.0708
<i>Target (England &amp; Wales) commercial proportion</i>					
1983	243794	0.0181	0.4010	0.4778	0.1030
1984	147964	0.0071	0.2940	0.4631	0.2359
1985	97418	0.0015	0.1679	0.6238	0.2068
1986	63890	0.0004	0.1110	0.6410	0.2476
1987	116136	0.0027	0.1729	0.5881	0.2362
1988	168995	0.0085	0.0973	0.5611	0.3332
1989	109139	0.0011	0.0817	0.5416	0.3757
1990	39426	0.0168	0.1349	0.5369	0.3115
1991	42902	0.0013	0.1039	0.5312	0.3637
1992	23024	0.0003	0.1136	0.4847	0.4013
1993	15855	0.0012	0.1741	0.4917	0.3331
1994	14279	0.0026	0.2547	0.3813	0.3614
1995	48515	0.0007	0.1939	0.4676	0.3378
1996	16254	0.0082	0.3258	0.4258	0.2402
1997	22149	0.0032	0.1323	0.4082	0.4563
1998	21026	0.0007	0.1075	0.4682	0.4236
1999	9596	0.0037	0.1521	0.5591	0.2851
2000	10185	0.0001	0.0729	0.4791	0.4480
2001	17404	0.0024	0.1112	0.4735	0.4128
<i>Trawls &amp; other (Swedish, Scottish and Irish bottom trawls) commercial proportion</i>					
2007	288	0.0820	0.3020	0.4960	0.1200
2008	204	0.3310	0.1652	0.3852	0.1186

	$n_{pcom,j,y}$	16–54	55–69	70–84	85+
2009	534	0.2118	0.1760	0.5050	0.1074
2010	404	0.1884	0.2028	0.4630	0.1456
2011	140	0.4566	0.2406	0.2440	0.0588
2012	316	0.7264	0.0514	0.1210	0.1010
2013	264	0.3764	0.3558	0.1602	0.1076
2014	446	0.1554	0.3448	0.4128	0.0870
2015	456	0.2336	0.3402	0.3596	0.0668
2016	212	0.5084	0.2288	0.1734	0.0892
2017	648	0.3818	0.2236	0.3270	0.0676
2018	564	0.4158	0.1584	0.3608	0.0650
2019	708	0.4262	0.2306	0.2724	0.0708
2020	358	0.0948	0.3430	0.4916	0.0706
2021	396	0.1658	0.4044	0.3680	0.0618
<i>Nets &amp; hooks (England &amp; Wales gillnets and trammel nets) commercial proportion</i>					
2007	187	0.00001	0.0838	0.5411	0.3751
2008	232	0.0092	0.1416	0.5585	0.2906
2009	2841	0.0041	0.0201	0.8979	0.0779
2010	514	0.0167	0.2994	0.5655	0.1183
2011	405	0.00001	0.1191	0.6006	0.2802
2012	796	0.00001	0.0148	0.8659	0.1192
2013	381	0.00001	0.0223	0.5456	0.4321
2014	305	0.0424	0.0214	0.2066	0.7296
2015	186	0.00001	0.1716	0.5764	0.2520
2016	5979	0.0011	0.0480	0.6472	0.3037
2017	1224	0.0045	0.0887	0.5272	0.3797
2018	2689	0.0106	0.1307	0.4225	0.4361
2019	967	0.0010	0.0468	0.5506	0.4015
2020	1002	0.0010	0.0459	0.4473	0.5058

**Table 2.11a. Northeast Atlantic spurdog. Fecundity data for 1921, given as length of pregnant female (I<sup>f</sup>) and number of pups (P<sup>f</sup>). Total number of samples is 81.**

I <sup>f</sup>	P <sup>f</sup>	I <sup>f</sup>	P <sup>f</sup>	I <sup>f</sup>	P <sup>f</sup>	I <sup>f</sup>	P <sup>f</sup>	I <sup>f</sup>	P <sup>f</sup>	I <sup>f</sup>	P <sup>f</sup>	I <sup>f</sup>	P <sup>f</sup>	I <sup>f</sup>	P <sup>f</sup>	I <sup>f</sup>	P <sup>f</sup>	I <sup>f</sup>	P <sup>f</sup>	I <sup>f</sup>	P <sup>f</sup>	I <sup>f</sup>	P <sup>f</sup>
72	2	77	2	77	3	77	5	82	2	82	4	82	6	87	2	87	3	87	4	92	3	97	2
72	3	77	2	77	3	77	5	82	2	82	4	82	7	87	2	87	3	87	5	92	3	97	3
72	3	77	2	77	3	82	1	82	2	82	4	82	7	87	2	87	3	87	6	92	4	97	7
72	3	77	2	77	3	82	1	82	3	82	5	87	1	87	2	87	3	87	7	92	4	97	11
72	4	77	2	77	4	82	2	82	3	82	5	87	2	87	2	87	3	87	7	92	5		
72	4	77	2	77	4	82	2	82	4	82	5	87	2	87	2	87	3	92	3	92	7		
77	2	77	2	77	4	82	2	82	4	82	6	87	2	87	3	87	3	92	3	92	8		

**Table 2.11b. Northeast Atlantic spurdog. Fecundity data for 1960 (Ellis and Keable, 2008), given as length of pregnant female (I<sup>f</sup>) and number of pups (P<sup>f</sup>). Total number of samples is 783.**

I <sup>f</sup>	P <sup>f</sup>	I <sup>f</sup>	P <sup>f</sup>	I <sup>f</sup>	P <sup>f</sup>	I <sup>f</sup>	P <sup>f</sup>	I <sup>f</sup>	P <sup>f</sup>	I <sup>f</sup>	P <sup>f</sup>	I <sup>f</sup>	P <sup>f</sup>	I <sup>f</sup>	P <sup>f</sup>	I <sup>f</sup>	P <sup>f</sup>	I <sup>f</sup>	P <sup>f</sup>	I <sup>f</sup>	P <sup>f</sup>	I <sup>f</sup>	P <sup>f</sup>
73	3	84	4	86	3	87	7	88	3	89	4	90	1	91	7	93	3	94	5	96	10	101	11





**Table 2.11g. Northeast Atlantic spurdog. Fecundity data for 2005 (Ellis and Keable, 2008), given as length of pregnant female (l f) and number of pups (P'). Total number of samples is 179.**

l f	P'	l f	P'	l f	P'	l f	P'	l f	P'	l f	P'	l f	P'	l f	P'	l f	P'	l f	P'	l f	P'	l f	P'
84	6	92	5	94	11	97	7	98	11	100	7	101	10	102	13	103	14	105	11	107	12	109	15
87	8	92	8	95	7	97	8	98	12	100	8	101	12	102	13	103	15	105	12	107	12	109	16
89	3	92	8	95	9	97	8	98	12	100	9	101	13	102	13	103	16	105	13	107	12	109	18
89	5	92	9	95	10	97	12	98	12	100	9	101	13	102	13	103	16	105	15	107	15	110	10
89	5	92	9	95	11	97	12	98	12	100	9	101	14	102	15	104	11	105	15	107	16	110	13
89	6	93	3	96	7	97	12	98	12	100	10	101	14	102	16	104	12	105	15	107	17	110	15
89	6	93	4	96	7	97	14	98	13	100	11	101	17	102	17	104	13	105	16	108	12	111	19
89	8	93	5	96	10	97	14	98	13	100	12	102	3	102	17	104	14	105	16	108	13	112	12
90	4	93	9	96	10	98	5	98	16	100	12	102	5	103	11	104	14	105	17	108	14	112	16
90	7	93	11	96	11	98	7	99	8	100	12	102	10	103	11	104	14	105	19	108	14	112	17
90	9	94	5	96	11	98	7	99	10	100	14	102	12	103	11	104	14	106	7	108	16	113	15
90	9	94	6	97	5	98	7	99	11	101	6	102	12	103	11	104	15	106	14	108	16	113	21
91	6	94	8	97	6	98	8	99	11	101	9	102	12	103	13	104	17	106	16	109	10	114	14
91	6	94	9	97	7	98	10	99	11	101	10	102	13	103	14	105	5	106	16	109	13	116	16
92	3	94	9	97	7	98	10	99	12	101	10	102	13	103	14	105	8	107	11	109	13		

**Table 2.11h. Northeast Atlantic spurdog. Fecundity data for 2010, given as length of pregnant female (l f) and number of pups (P'). Total number of samples is 1.**

l f	P'
98	10

**Table 2.11i. Northeast Atlantic spurdog. Fecundity data for 2014, given as length of pregnant female (l f) and number of pups (P'). Total number of samples is 109.**

l f	P'	l f	P'	l f	P'	l f	P'	l f	P'	l f	P'	l f	P'	l f	P'	l f	P'	l f	P'	l f	P'	l f	P'
86	3	93	8	98	2	100	4	102	6	103	5	104	4	105	16	107	11	109	12	111	13		
89	7	94	6	98	3	100	6	102	7	103	7	104	10	106	1	107	12	109	12	111	17		
90	7	94	7	98	4	100	7	102	8	103	8	104	11	106	5	107	15	109	14	111	19		
90	7	95	7	98	8	100	11	102	10	103	10	104	14	106	8	107	15	109	17	113	17		
91	2	95	7	98	9	101	6	102	11	103	10	104	15	106	8	108	5	110	4	114	15		
91	4	96	2	98	9	101	8	102	12	103	11	104	16	107	2	108	8	110	12	115	12		
92	3	96	8	98	10	101	9	102	13	103	12	104	17	107	3	108	8	110	13	116	7		
92	5	97	8	99	8	101	11	102	15	103	12	105	8	107	4	108	13	111	1	116	7		
92	6	97	11	99	12	101	14	103	2	103	12	105	12	107	10	109	2	111	7	122	14		
92	6	98	1	99	12	102	3	103	4	103	15	105	14	107	11	109	11	111	10				

**Table 2.11j. Northeast Atlantic spurdog. Fecundity data for 2016, given as length of pregnant female (l f) and number of pups (P'). Total number of samples is 92.**

l f	P'	l f	P'	l f	P'	l f	P'	l f	P'	l f	P'	l f	P'	l f	P'	l f	P'	l f	P'	l f	P'	l f	P'
75	3	79	6	82	6	83	8	87	4	89	3	90	3	93	1	94	6	98	8	102	7	107	13
76	5	79	7	82	6	84	5	87	6	89	6	91	6	93	2	95	4	99	15	103	7	111	9
76	6	80	1	82	6	85	8	87	8	89	6	91	9	93	5	95	7	100	12	103	10	112	12
77	4	81	5	82	6	85	9	88	5	89	6	91	9	93	6	95	12	100	12	103	11	114	19
78	4	81	5	83	2	86	3	88	5	89	6	92	2	93	6	96	2	101	9	103	13		
78	4	81	5	83	3	86	6	88	5	89	7	92	4	93	9	96	7	101	10	104	7		
78	5	81	6	83	5	86	9	88	9	89	8	92	7	94	2	96	8	102	6	104	10		
78	6	81	7	83	7	87	2	89	3	89	9	92	9	94	3	96	9	102	7	107	11		



**Table 2.11k. Northeast Atlantic spurdog. Fecundity data for 2017, given as length of pregnant female (l<sup>f</sup>) and number of pups (P'). Total number of samples is 297.**

l <sup>f</sup>	P'	l <sup>f</sup>	P'	l <sup>f</sup>	P'	l <sup>f</sup>	P'	l <sup>f</sup>	P'	l <sup>f</sup>	P'	l <sup>f</sup>	P'	l <sup>f</sup>	P'	l <sup>f</sup>	P'	l <sup>f</sup>	P'	l <sup>f</sup>	P'	l <sup>f</sup>	P'
72	3	79	4	83	4	85	6	87	4	88	9	91	4	93	6	95	10	97	10	100	8	107	9
72	4	79	6	83	5	85	6	87	4	89	2	91	5	93	6	95	11	97	10	100	9	107	11
73	2	80	2	83	6	85	8	87	4	89	5	91	5	93	6	95	11	97	11	100	9	107	12
73	4	80	5	83	7	85	9	87	5	89	5	91	6	93	7	95	12	97	13	100	11	107	13
75	3	80	5	84	3	86	3	87	5	89	6	91	6	93	7	95	15	97	13	100	13	108	1
75	5	80	5	84	3	86	3	87	5	89	6	91	7	93	8	96	3	98	2	101	5	108	7
75	5	80	5	84	4	86	3	87	6	89	6	91	7	93	9	96	4	98	5	101	7	108	10
75	7	81	2	84	4	86	3	87	6	89	6	91	7	93	9	96	4	98	5	101	7	108	14
76	3	81	3	84	4	86	4	87	6	89	6	91	7	93	13	96	6	98	5	101	7	108	14
76	3	81	4	84	5	86	4	87	7	89	8	91	7	94	6	96	7	98	7	101	10	108	14
76	4	81	4	84	5	86	5	88	2	89	8	91	7	94	6	96	7	98	8	101	14	108	15
77	1	81	5	84	5	86	5	88	3	89	8	91	7	94	6	96	7	98	10	102	5	109	6
77	3	81	7	84	5	86	6	88	4	89	10	91	8	94	6	96	7	98	11	102	7	110	1
77	3	82	3	84	5	86	6	88	4	90	3	91	8	94	7	96	7	98	14	102	10	110	12
77	4	82	3	84	6	86	6	88	4	90	5	91	9	94	8	96	9	98	14	102	12	110	13
77	4	82	5	84	6	86	7	88	5	90	5	92	2	94	8	96	9	99	7	102	13	112	12
77	5	82	5	84	6	86	7	88	5	90	5	92	3	94	8	96	9	99	8	102	14	112	13
77	6	82	5	84	6	86	8	88	5	90	6	92	3	94	12	96	10	99	9	103	12	112	15
78	4	82	5	84	7	87	2	88	6	90	6	92	5	95	4	96	11	99	9	105	12	112	16
78	5	82	5	84	7	87	3	88	6	90	6	92	6	95	5	97	6	99	10	105	12	113	3
78	5	83	2	84	7	87	3	88	6	90	6	92	7	95	7	97	6	99	10	105	12	113	19
79	2	83	3	84	8	87	4	88	6	90	6	92	8	95	8	97	6	99	12	105	13	121	14
79	3	83	3	85	3	87	4	88	7	90	8	92	8	95	8	97	8	100	7	105	16		
79	4	83	3	85	4	87	4	88	8	90	9	92	9	95	8	97	8	100	8	106	11		
79	4	83	4	85	5	87	4	88	9	90	13	92	9	95	10	97	9	100	8	106	14		

**Table 2.11l. Northeast Atlantic spurdog. Fecundity data for 2018, given as length of pregnant female (l<sup>f</sup>) and number of pups (P'). Total number of samples is 43.**

l <sup>f</sup>	P'	l <sup>f</sup>	P'	l <sup>f</sup>	P'	l <sup>f</sup>	P'	l <sup>f</sup>	P'	l <sup>f</sup>	P'	l <sup>f</sup>	P'	l <sup>f</sup>	P'		
81	4	85	3	89	6	90	6	91	9	93	8	94	10	99	6	101	10
81	5	85	6	89	7	91	6	92	3	93	8	95	7	99	7	102	10
82	5	86	5	89	8	91	6	92	7	93	9	96	7	100	7	112	13
84	2	86	5	90	5	91	7	92	9	94	6	97	11	100	9		
84	6	87	6	90	6	91	8	93	5	94	9	99	2	100	11		

**Table 2.11m. Northeast Atlantic spurdog. Fecundity data for 2019, given as length of pregnant female (l<sup>f</sup>) and number of pups (P'). Total number of samples is 25.**

l <sup>f</sup>	P'	l <sup>f</sup>	P'	l <sup>f</sup>	P'	l <sup>f</sup>	P'	l <sup>f</sup>	P'
88	5	95	5	98	6	102	15	105	13
89	9	95	6	100	9	102	15	105	15
90	8	96	6	101	11	103	13	106	13
93	10	97	8	101	14	105	12	108	18
95	2	97	13	102	10	105	12	109	17

**Table 2.11n. Northeast Atlantic spurdog. Fecundity data for 2020, given as length of pregnant female (l<sup>f</sup>) and number of pups (P'). Total number of samples is 26.**

l <sup>f</sup>	P'	l <sup>f</sup>	P'	l <sup>f</sup>	P'	l <sup>f</sup>	P'	l <sup>f</sup>	P'		
92	5	99	10	101	12	104	11	106	12	109	11
95	11	100	10	103	13	104	14	106	15		
97	9	100	12	104	4	105	13	107	12		
97	12	101	6	104	7	106	11	107	15		
99	8	101	11	104	8	106	11	109	8		

**Table 2.12a. Northeast Atlantic spurdog. Estimates of key model parameters, with associated Hessian-based estimates of precision (CV expressed as a percentage) for the baseline assessment, and two sensitivity tests for alternative estimates for  $Q_{fec}$ .**

	$Q_{fec} = 3.060$ Baseline assessment		$Q_{fec} = 2.275$		$Q_{fec} = 3.803$	
$N_0^{f.preg}$	71043	1.6%	86609	1.3%	61275	1.6%
$Q_{fec}$	3.060	2.0%	2.275	1.6%	3.803	1.7%
Q1 $q_{sur}$	0.0085	13%	0.0089	14%	0.0091	11%
Q3 $q_{sur}$	0.0067	12%	0.0069	14%	0.0074	10%
Q4 $q_{sur}$	0.0487	15%	0.0498	16%	0.0553	12%
$B_{dep105}$	0.449	14%	0.313	15%	0.514	11%
$B_{dep155}$	0.514	13%	0.381	14%	0.551	10%

**Table 2.12b. Northeast Atlantic spurdog. Estimates of other estimates of interest for the baseline assessment, and two sensitivity tests for alternative estimates for  $Q_{fec}$ .**

	$Q_{fec} = 3.060$ Baseline assessment	$Q_{fec} = 2.275$	$Q_{fec} = 3.803$
$M_{pup}$	0.516	0.658	0.406
$a_{fec}$	-6.010	-7.739	-4.892
$b_{fec}$	0.0969	0.1246	0.0790
$B_{lim}$	240569	294960	206631
$MSY B_{trigger} = B_{pa}$	336796	412944	289284
$B_{MSY}$	847325	930757	797426
$B_0$	1202840	1474800	1033160
$HR_{msy}$	0.0430	0.0288	0.0549
$HR_{pa}$	0.0485	0.0328	0.0617
$HR_{lim}$	0.0670	0.0456	0.0845
$MSY$	27677	21351	31941
$MSYR$	0.0327	0.0229	0.0401
$-\ln L_{tot}$	5079	5094	5071



**Table 2.14. Northeast Atlantic spurdog. Baseline assessment. Summary table of estimates: recruitment (thousands of pups), total biomass (t) and fishing proportion or harvest rate (with selectivity averaged over ages 5–30); and WG estimates of catch (t) used in the assessment. The final recruitment value is taken directly from the estimated stock-recruit relationship.**

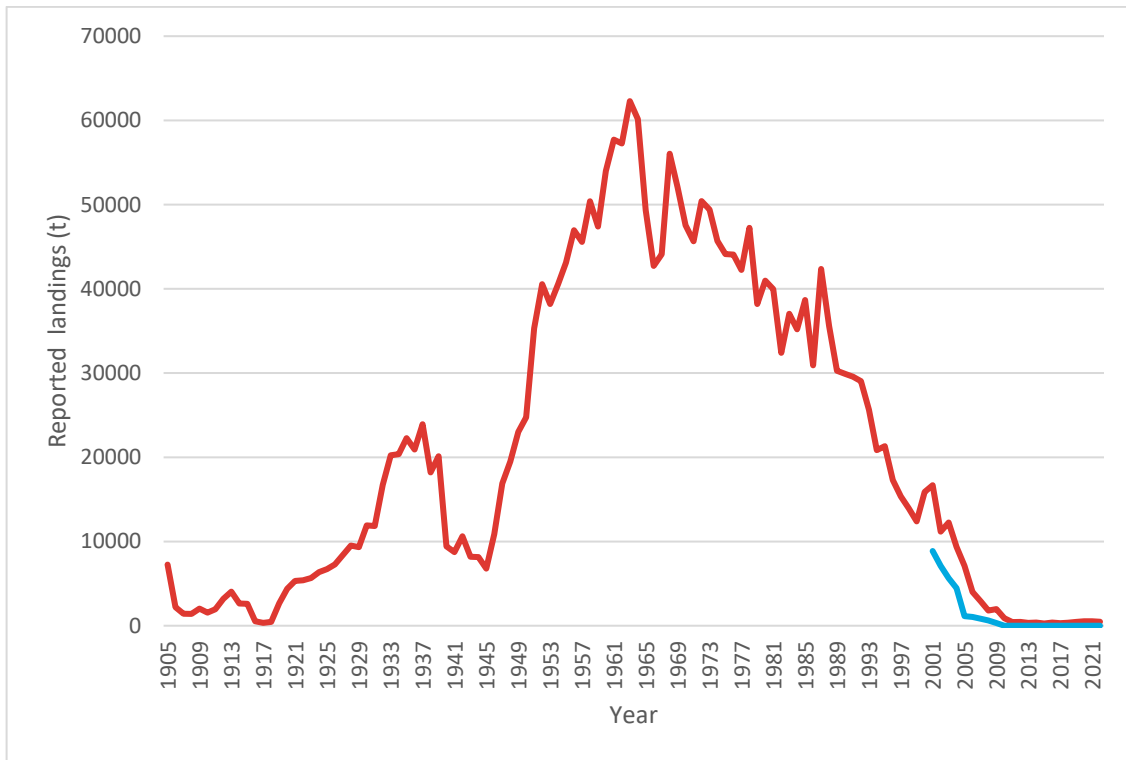
	R (thousand pups)	B <sub>tot</sub> (t)	Catch (t)	HR (5–30)
1980	137718	498816	40968	0.1337
1981	121306	483609	39962	0.1342
1982	113371	468454	32402	0.1140
1983	109089	459689	37046	0.1339
1984	110993	445241	35194	0.1325
1985	101772	430989	38674	0.1482
1986	97316	411799	30910	0.1204
1987	100837	399484	42356	0.1704
1988	73235	373256	35569	0.1514
1989	74039	352864	30279	0.1329
1990	78548	337154	29906	0.1368
1991	91486	321947	29563	0.1401
1992	80651	306159	29046	0.1405
1993	74843	290122	25637	0.1340
1994	60804	276352	20851	0.1160
1995	83700	268383	21318	0.1171
1996	62109	258755	17295	0.0983
1997	66920	253052	15348	0.0890
1998	72474	249330	13919	0.0817
1999	80365	247340	12385	0.0738
2000	87511	247396	15891	0.0946
2001	73961	243309	16693	0.1022
2002	79729	238878	11170	0.0718
2003	79208	240236	12247	0.0779
2004	81926	240941	9366	0.0592
2005	87968	245140	7112	0.0404
2006	73198	250868	4018	0.0215
2007	77087	259705	2926	0.0150
2008	104080	271053	1837	0.0090
2009	136833	285741	2064	0.0094
2010	93159	298310	2409	0.0115
2011	142638	313429	3024	0.0145
2012	127135	328007	5204	0.0240
2013	120104	340781	3270	0.0142
2014	118944	356020	3295	0.0137
2015	186704	375667	3273	0.0131

	R (thousand pups)	B <sub>tot</sub> (t)	Catch (t)	HR (5–30)
2016	245802	400644	1951	0.0068
2017	167090	424577	5076	0.0186
2018	149075	445023	2733	0.0093
2019	144579	468062	3621	0.0118
2020	145486	490739	1468	0.0042
2021	145880	515588	1178	0.0031
2022	153816	540266		

**Table 2.15. Northeast Atlantic spurdog. Baseline assessment. Assessment projections under different future catch options. Estimates of begin-year total biomass relative to the total biomass in 2022 are shown, assuming that the catch in 2022 is 1240 tons (status quo HR). Point estimates are given in the upper third of the table with corresponding lower and upper values (reflecting  $\pm 2$  standard deviations) given in the middle and bottom third of the table. The “+x yrs” in the first column is relative to 2022 (so “+3 yrs” indicates 2025).**

	Medium-term projections				
	HR <sub>msy</sub>	zero	HR <sub>sq</sub>	HR <sub>pa</sub>	HR <sub>lim</sub>
average catch*	20296	0	2242	21747	25311
<b>Point estimates</b>					
+ 3 yrs	1.07	1.13	1.13	1.06	1.03
+ 5 yrs	1.09	1.22	1.21	1.07	1.01
+ 10 yrs	1.13	1.45	1.43	1.10	0.98
+ 30 yrs	1.31	2.26	2.19	1.20	0.87
<b>Point estimates -2 standard deviations</b>					
+ 3 yrs	1.04	1.11	1.11	1.03	1.00
+ 5 yrs	1.05	1.18	1.17	1.03	0.97
+ 10 yrs	1.05	1.36	1.34	1.02	0.90
+ 30 yrs	1.11	1.79	1.78	1.01	0.72
<b>Point estimates +2 standard deviations</b>					
+ 3 yrs	1.09	1.16	1.15	1.08	1.06
+ 5 yrs	1.13	1.26	1.25	1.11	1.06
+ 10 yrs	1.21	1.54	1.51	1.18	1.06
+ 30 yrs	1.50	2.74	2.61	1.38	1.03

\* "average catch" is the average for the projection period 2023–2051



**Figure 2.1. Northeast Atlantic spurdog. WG estimates of total international landings of NE Atlantic spurdog (1903–2022, red line) and TAC (blue line). Restrictive management (e.g. through quotas and other measures) is only thought to have occurred since 2007.**

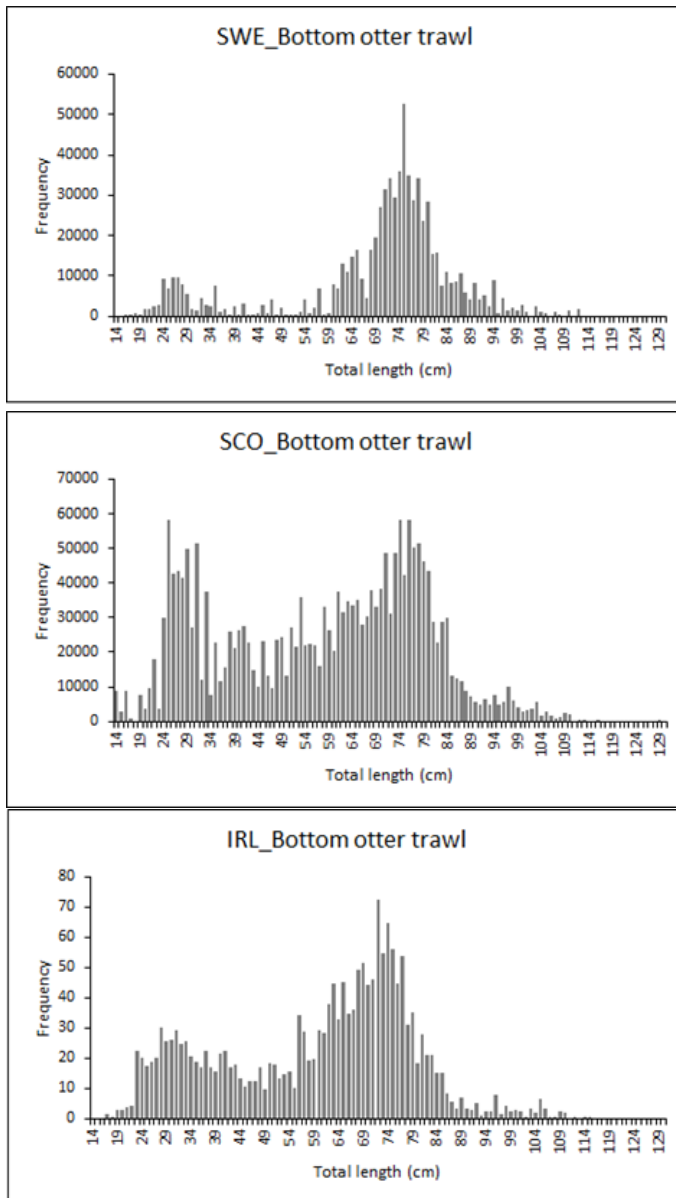


Figure 2.2a. Northeast Atlantic spurdog catches, 2005-2022. Length frequency information used as a basis for compiling the proportion by length category data for the “trawls & other” gear category.

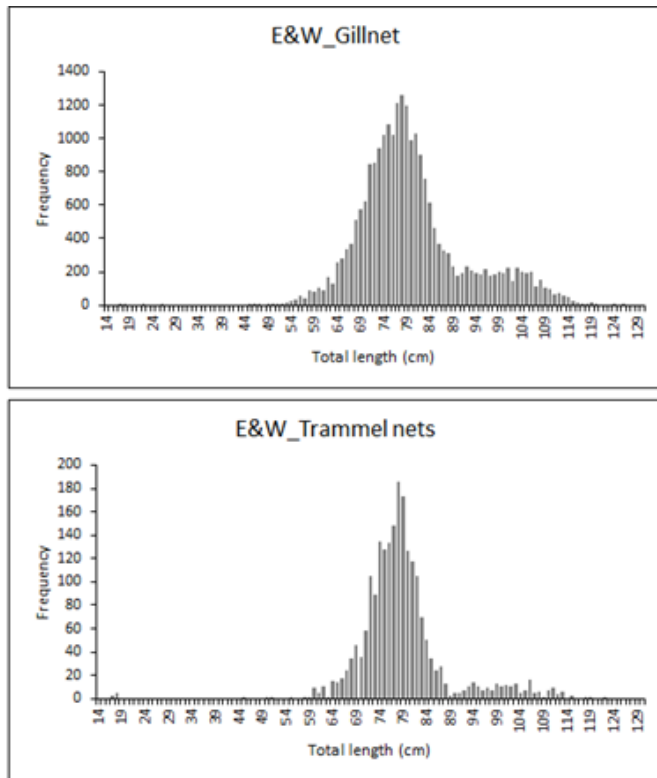


Figure 2.2b. Northeast Atlantic spurdog catches, 2005-2022. Length frequency information used as a basis for compiling the proportion by length category data for the “nets & hooks” gear category. These data were simply combined with equal weighting.

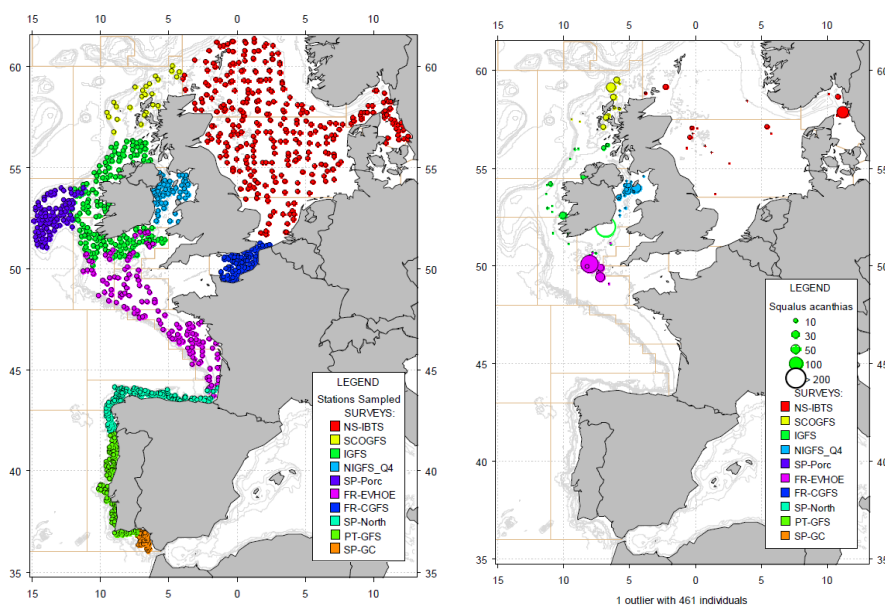
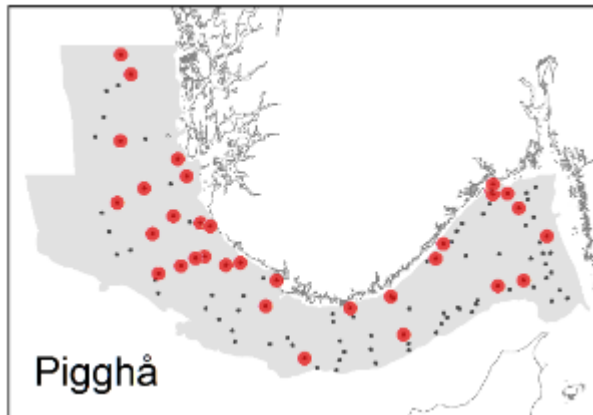


Figure 2.5. Northeast Atlantic spurdog. Overall spatial coverage of the IBTS (left) all surveys combined and (right) captures of spurdog (number per hour, bottom) as reported in the 2013 summer/autumn IBTS. The catchability of the different



gears used in the NE Atlantic surveys is not constant; therefore, the map does not reflect proportional abundance in all the areas but within each survey (From ICES, 2014).



## Rekepredatorer 2020

### Fangstrate (kg/nm)



Figure 2.6. Northeast Atlantic spurdog. Map of survey area on Norwegian south coast (Norwegian Deep and Skagerrak) with stations for 2020 for the Shrimp ("Reke") survey. Red circles indicate catches of spurdog ("pigghå"; circle area is proportional to catch rate, that is kg per nautical mile,. Source: Søvik G and Thangstad TH. 2021.

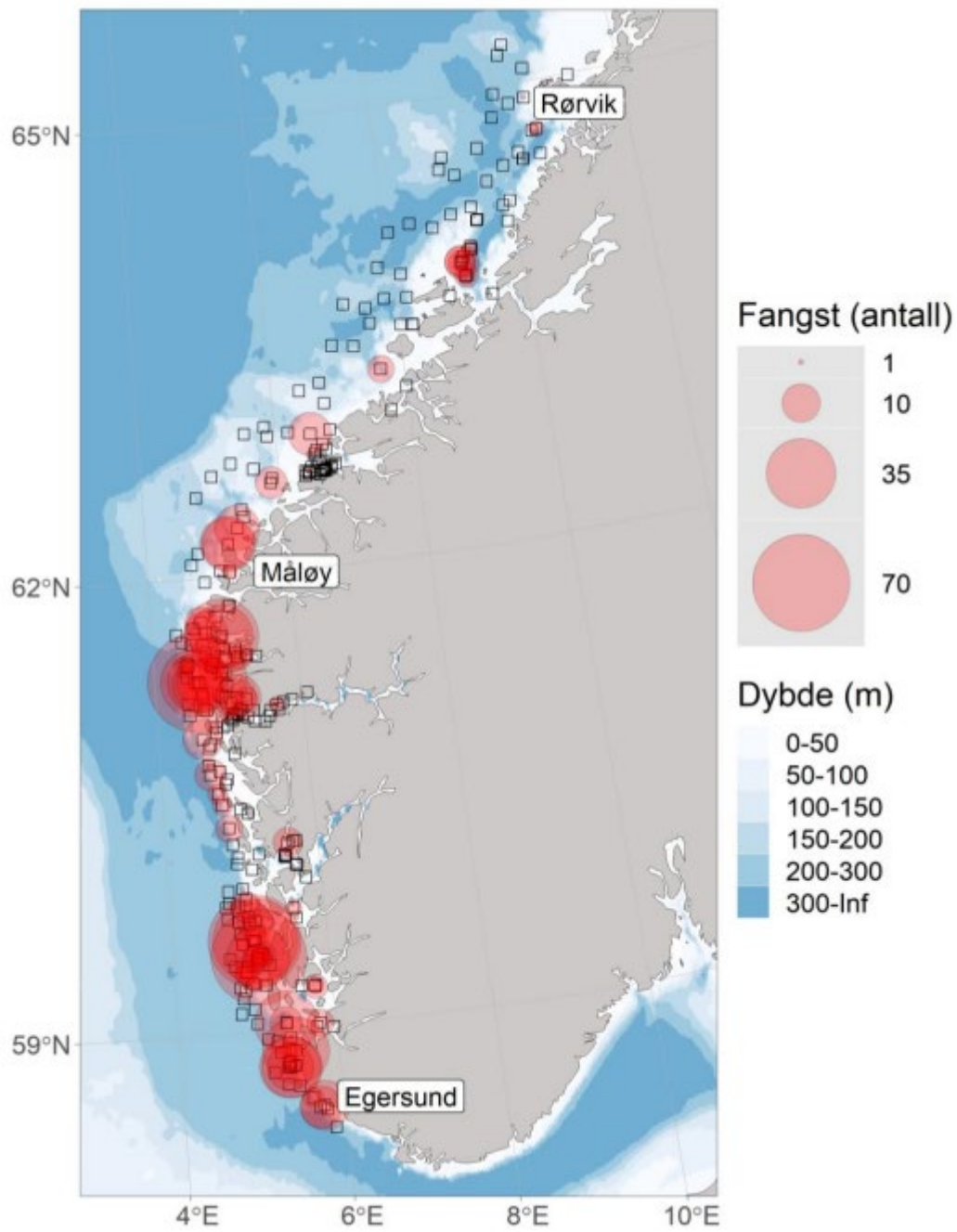


Figure 2.7. North East Atlantic spurdog. Survey coverage and spurdog catches in the 2021 Norwegian longline spurdog survey. Black squares are stations, red bubbles are spurdog catches with the area representing number of individuals caught per station.

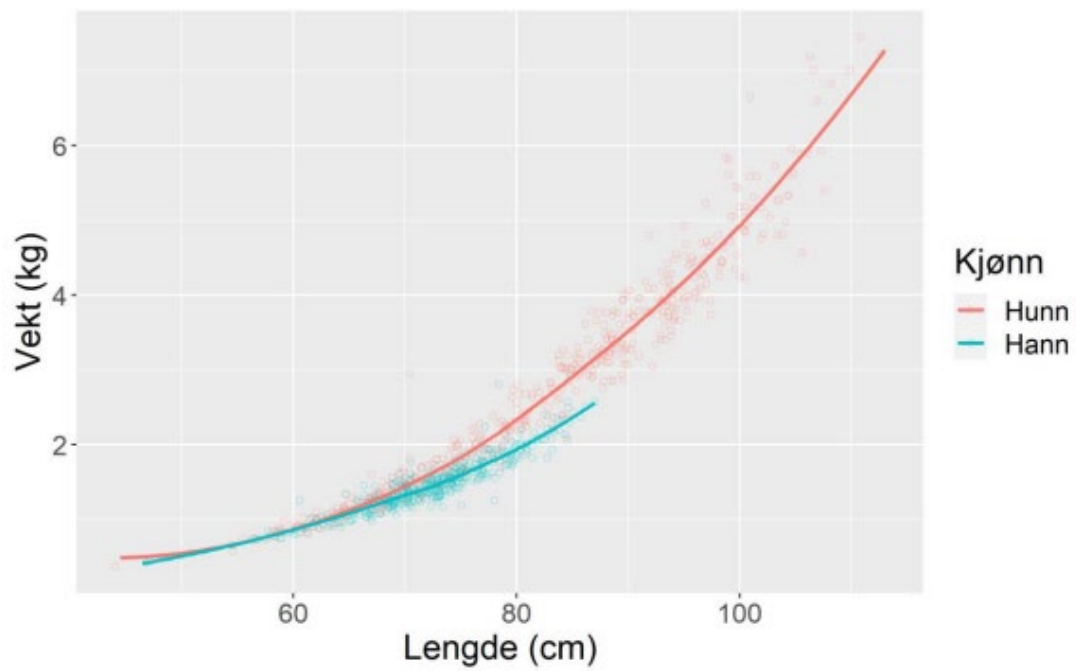
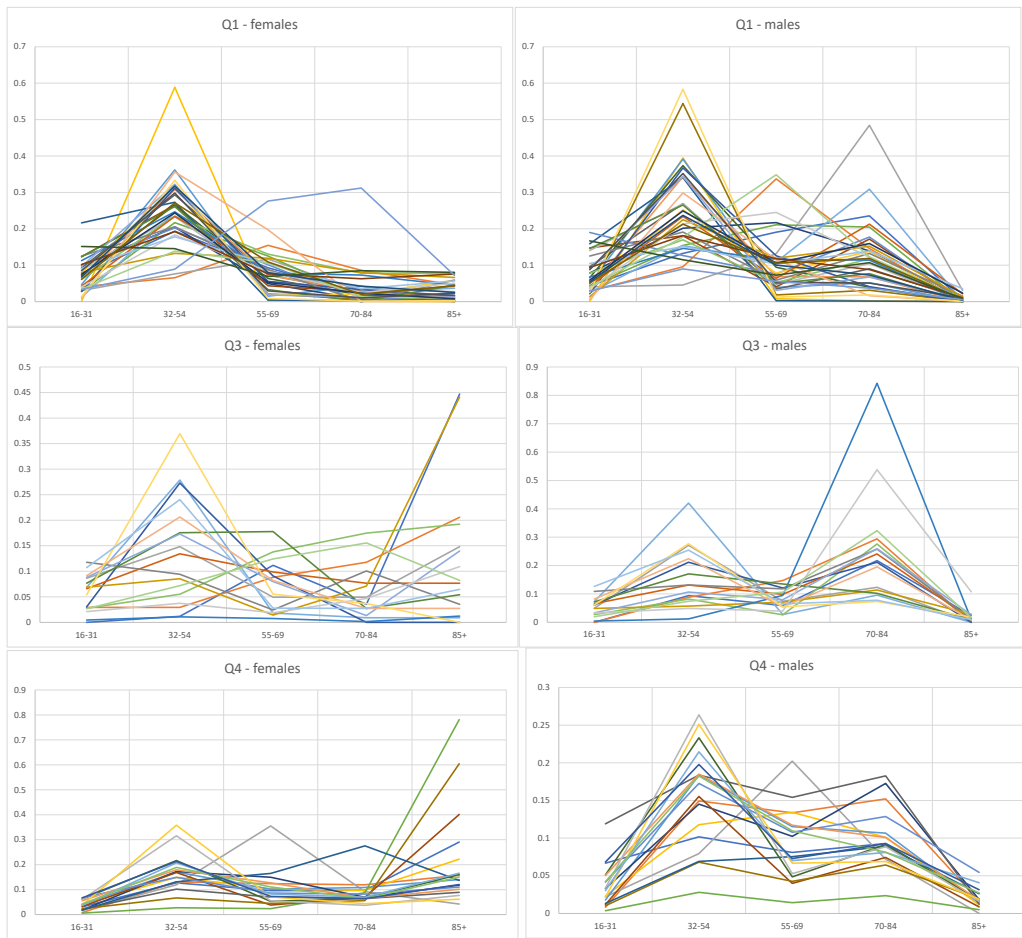


Figure 2.8. North East Atlantic Spurdog. The length-weight relationship of spurdogs caught in the 2021 Norwegian longline spurdog survey. Red line is females, blue line is males.



**Figure 2.11. Northeast Atlantic spurdog. Proportions by length-category for three combined survey indices (top row: Q1 1985-2021, middle row: Q2 1992-1994, 2008-2021, and bottom row: Q3 2003-2021) for females (left) and males (right).**

**Figure 2.14. Northeast Atlantic spurdog. Pigghåtokt**

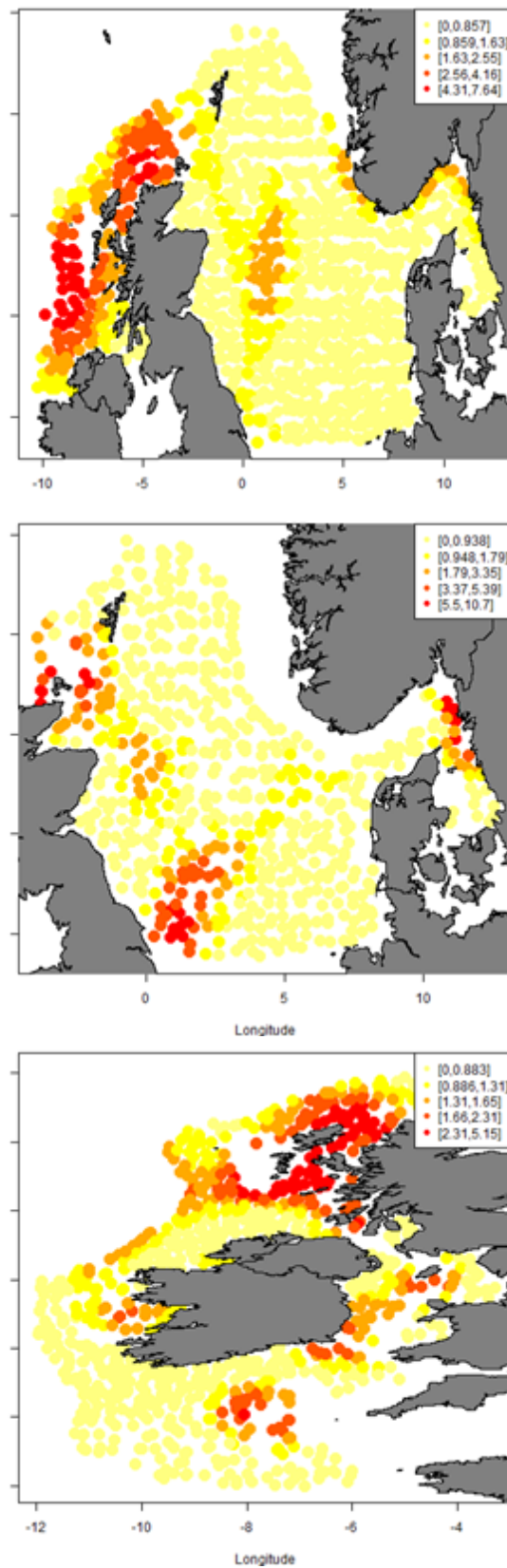
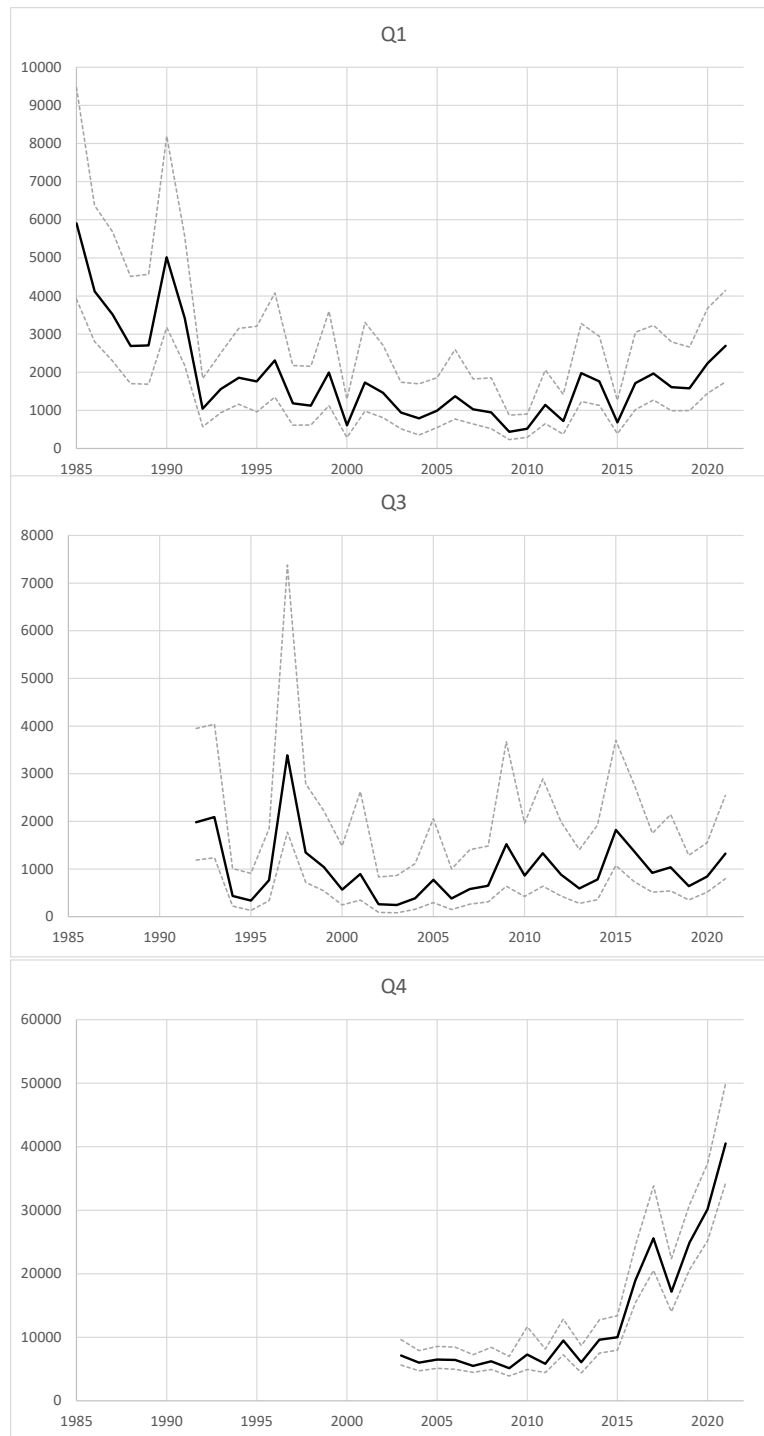


Figure 2.18. Northeast Atlantic spurdog. Biomass maps (top-Q1, middle-Q3, bottom-Q4), where the biomass is predicted within each grid cell at the haul nearest to the centroid of the cell, using a delta-lognormal modelling approach.



**Figure 2.19. Northeast Atlantic spurdog. Indices of biomass with 95% confidence bounds for the three combined survey indices (top-Q1, middle-Q3, bottom-Q4) estimated using a delta-lognormal modelling approach.**

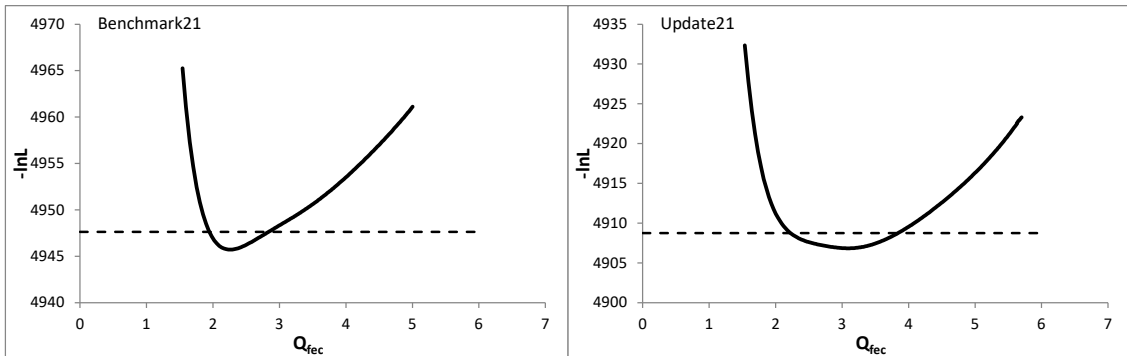


Figure 2.20. Northeast Atlantic spurdog. Comparison of the likelihood profile on  $Q_{fec}$  from the 2021 benchmark (left) and including corrections and updates for input data and infilling of missing discard data (right).

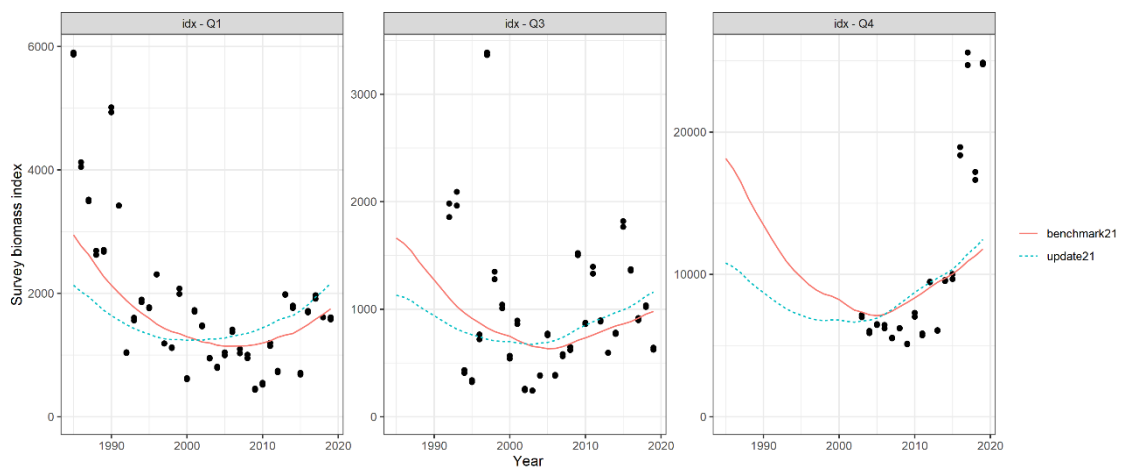
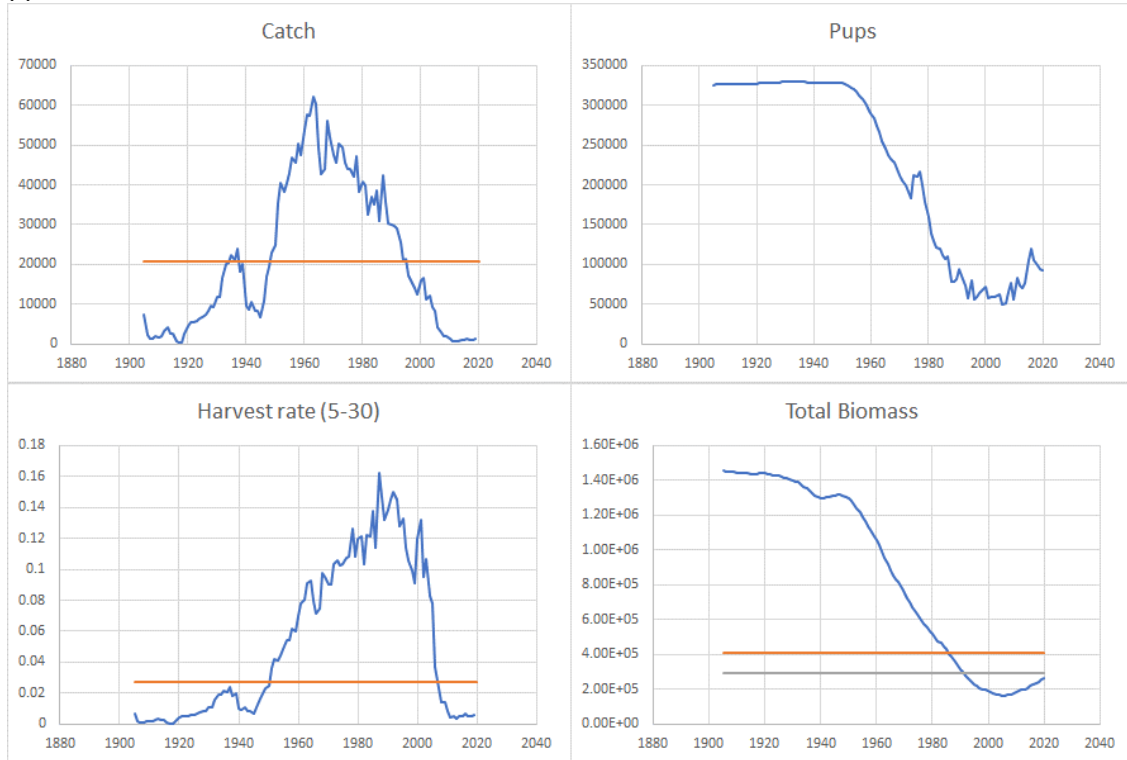
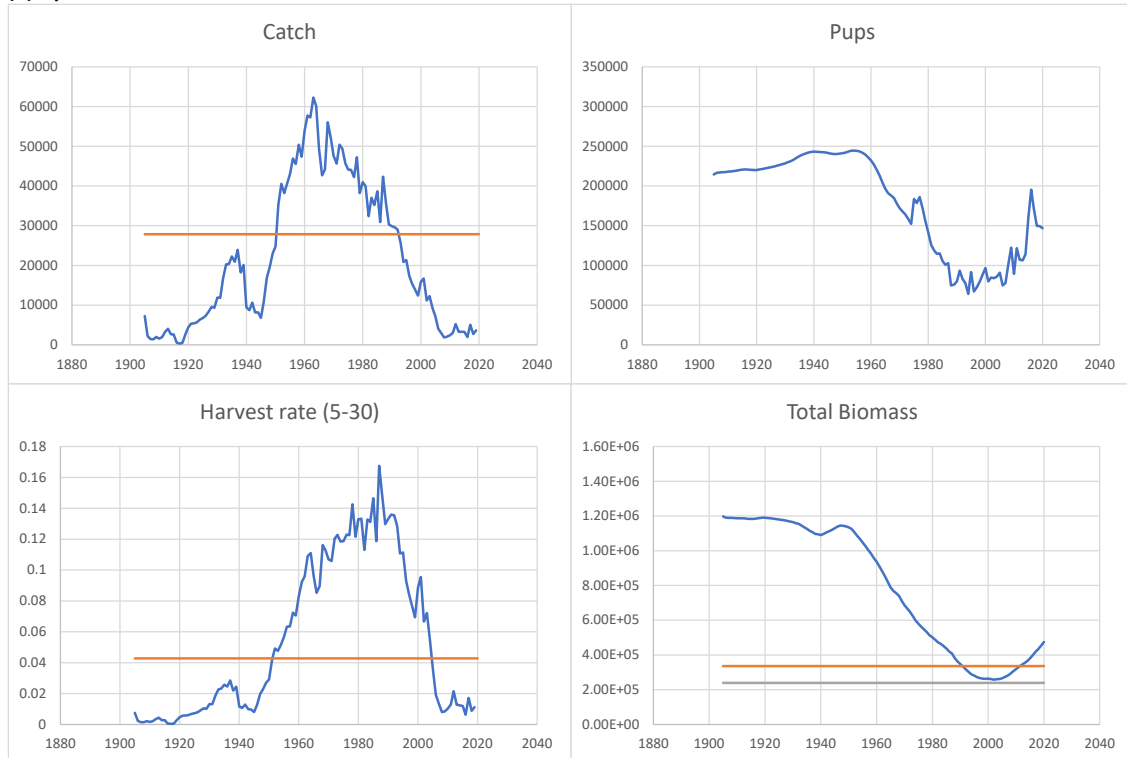


Figure 2.21. Northeast Atlantic spurdog. Comparison of the fits to the survey indices from the 2021 benchmark (red solid lines) and including corrections and updates for input data and infilling of missing discard data (blue hashed lines).

(a) Benchmark21

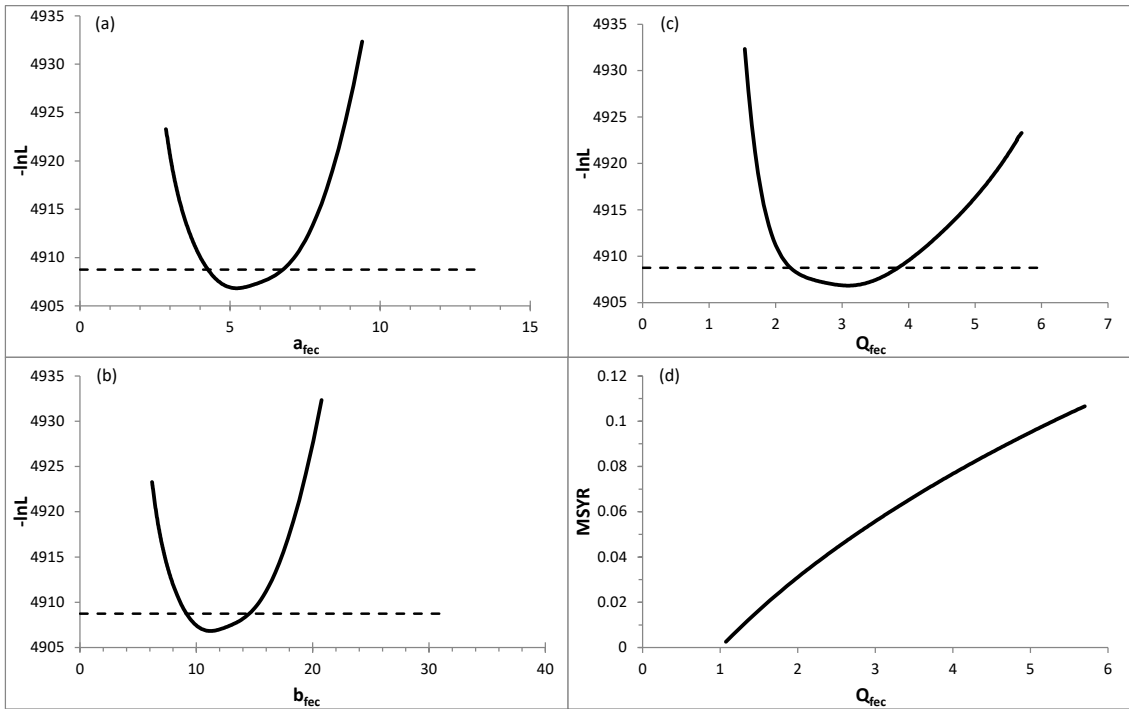


(b) Update21

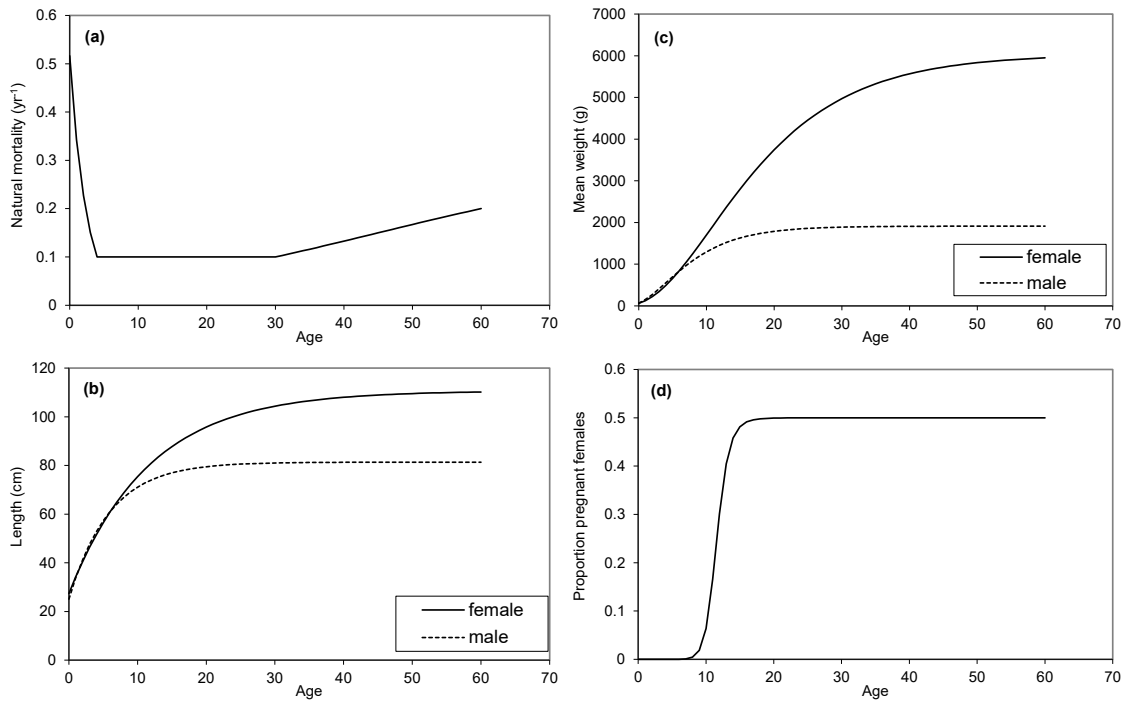


**Figure 2.22. Northeast Atlantic spurdog. Comparison of summary plots from (a) the 2021 benchmark and (b) including corrections and updates for input data and infilling of missing discard data. MSY quantities are given (horizontal orange lines) for the Catch and Harvest rate plots, while for Total Biomass, both MSY  $B_{trigger}$  (top horizontal orange line, and  $B_{lim}$  (bottom horizontal grey line) are shown.**

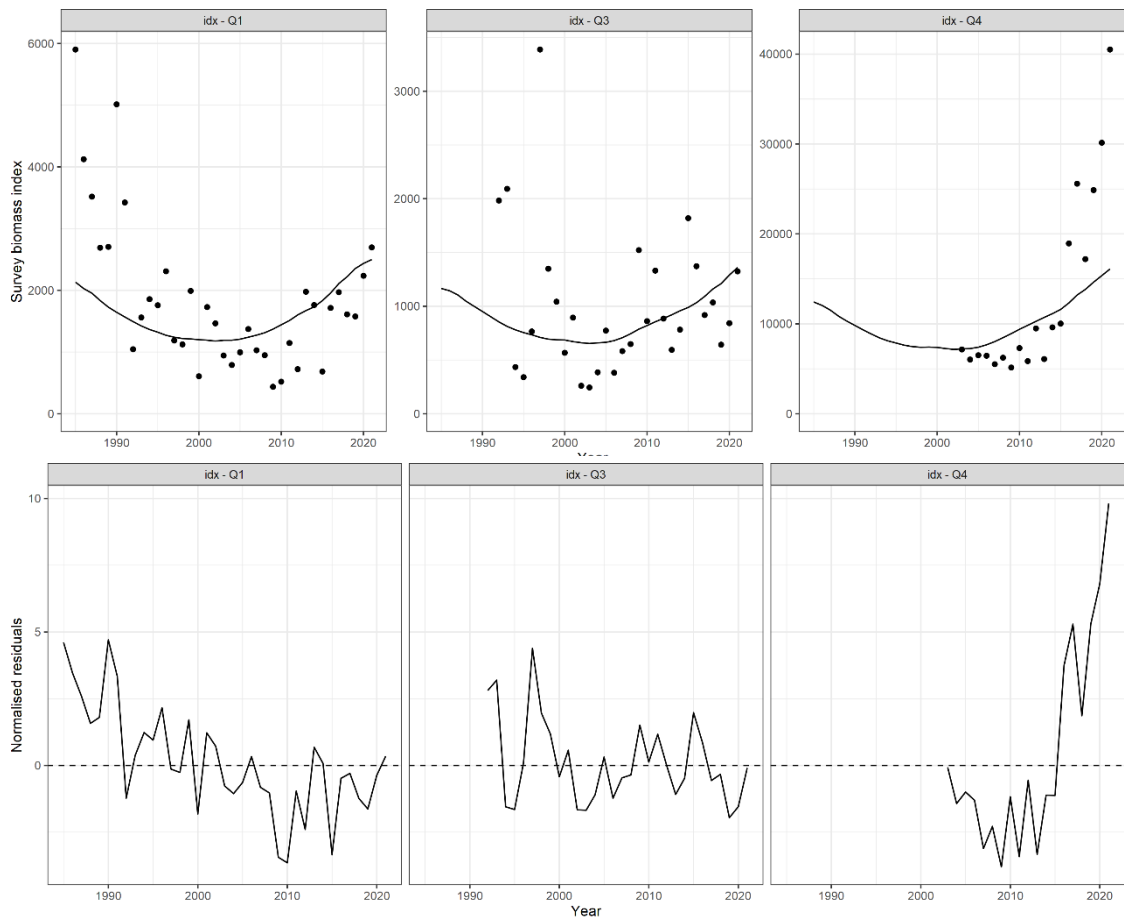




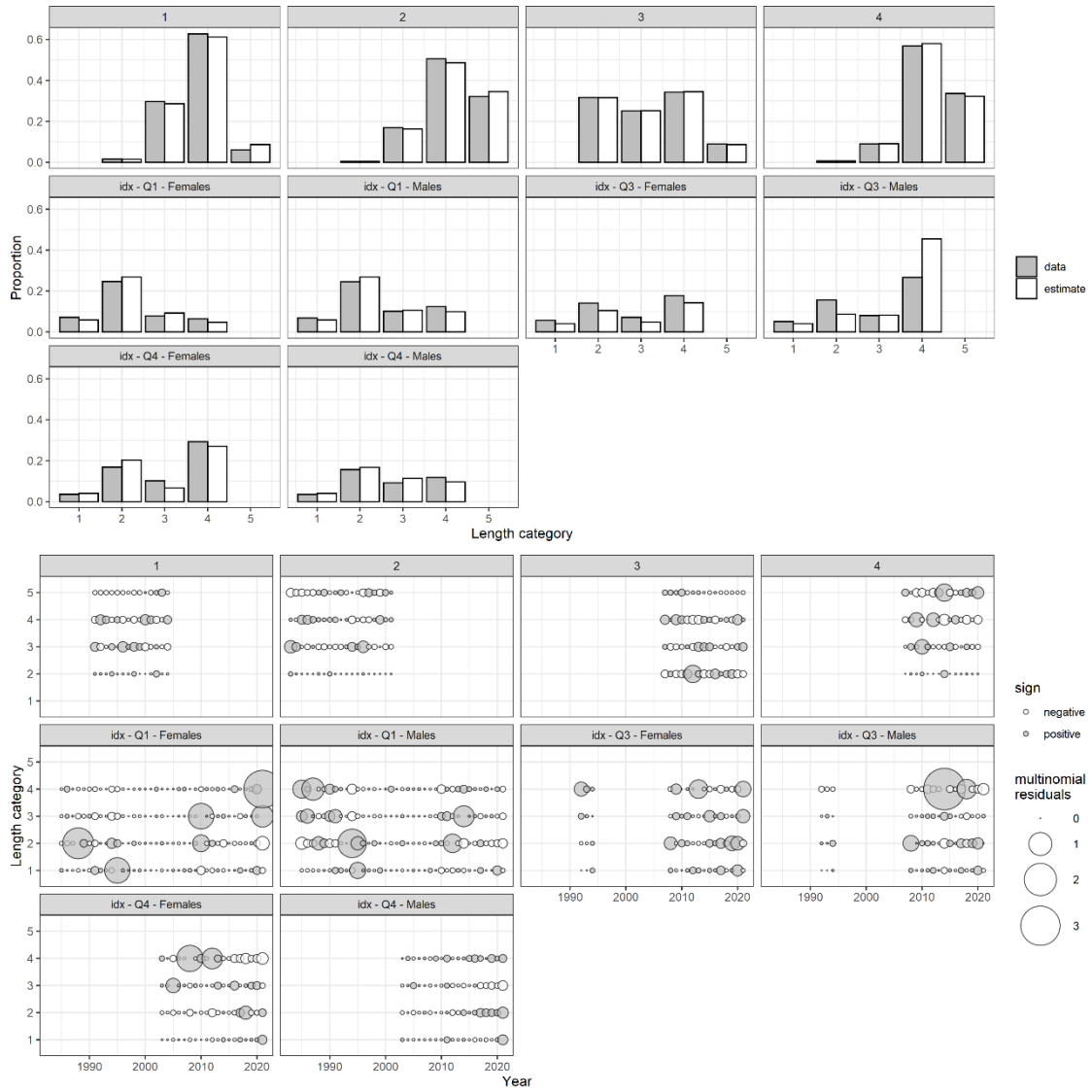
**Figure 2.23.** Northeast Atlantic spurdog. “Update21” assessment negative log-likelihood ( $-\ln L$ ) for a range of (a)  $a_{fec}$  and (b)  $b_{fec}$  values, with (c) corresponding  $Q_{fec}$ . Plot (d) shows MSYR ( $MSY/B_{MSY}$ ) vs.  $Q_{fec}$ . Using the likelihood ratio criterion, the hashed line in plots (a)–(c) indicate the minimum  $-\ln L$  value + 1.92, corresponding to 95% probability intervals for the corresponding parameters for values below the line. Plot (c) is identical to the plot on the right of Figure 2.20.



**Figure 2.24.** Northeast Atlantic spurdog. A visual representation of the life-history parameters described in Table 2.6. [Note, the value of natural mortality-at-age 0 is a parameter derived from the assessment.]

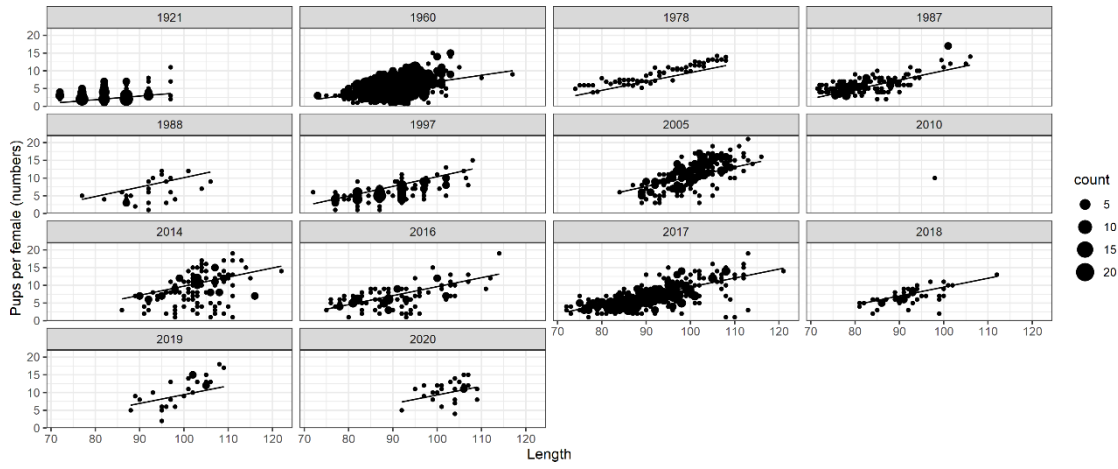


**Figure 2.25. Northeast Atlantic spurdog. Baseline assessment. Model fits to the three surveys indices (top panel), with normalised residuals ( $\epsilon_{sur,y}$  in Stock Annex equation 9b) (bottom).**

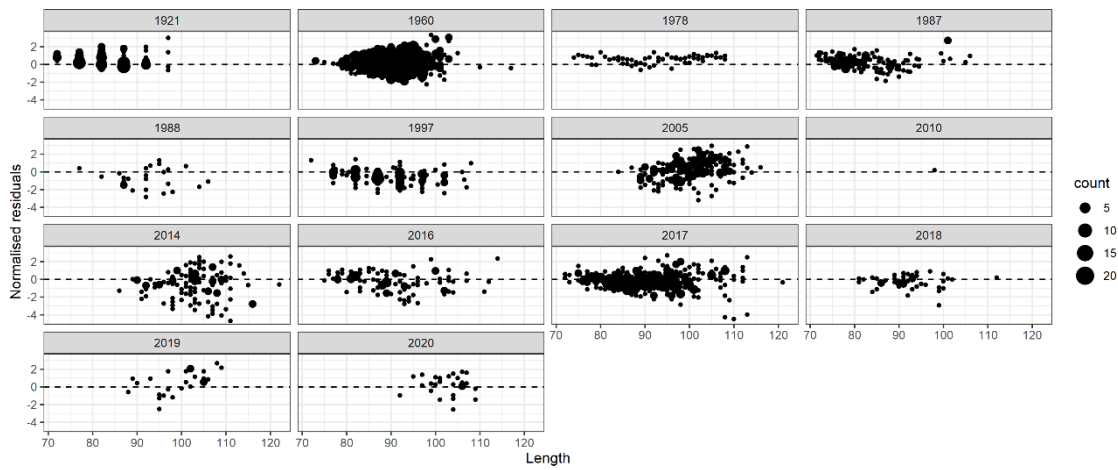


**Figure 2.26. Northeast Atlantic spurdog. Baseline assessment. Model fits (bar plots) and associated residuals (bubble plots) for the four commercial fleets (top row; 1="non-target", 2="target", 3="trawls & other", 4="nets & hooks") and three survey indices (second and third rows; by sex). The bar plots show proportions by length category averaged over the time period for which data are available, with the length category given along the horizontal axis. The bubble plots show multinomial residuals ( $\epsilon_{pcm,j,y,t}$  in Stock Annex equation 10b), with grey bubbles indicating positive residuals, bubble area being proportional to the size of the residual (see legend for reference), and length category indicated on the vertical axis. The length categories considered are, for the commercial data, 2: 16–54 cm; 3: 55–69 cm; 4: 70–84 cm; 5: 85+ cm, and for the surveys, 1: 16–31 cm; 2: 32–54 cm; 3: 55–69 cm; 4: 70+ cm.**

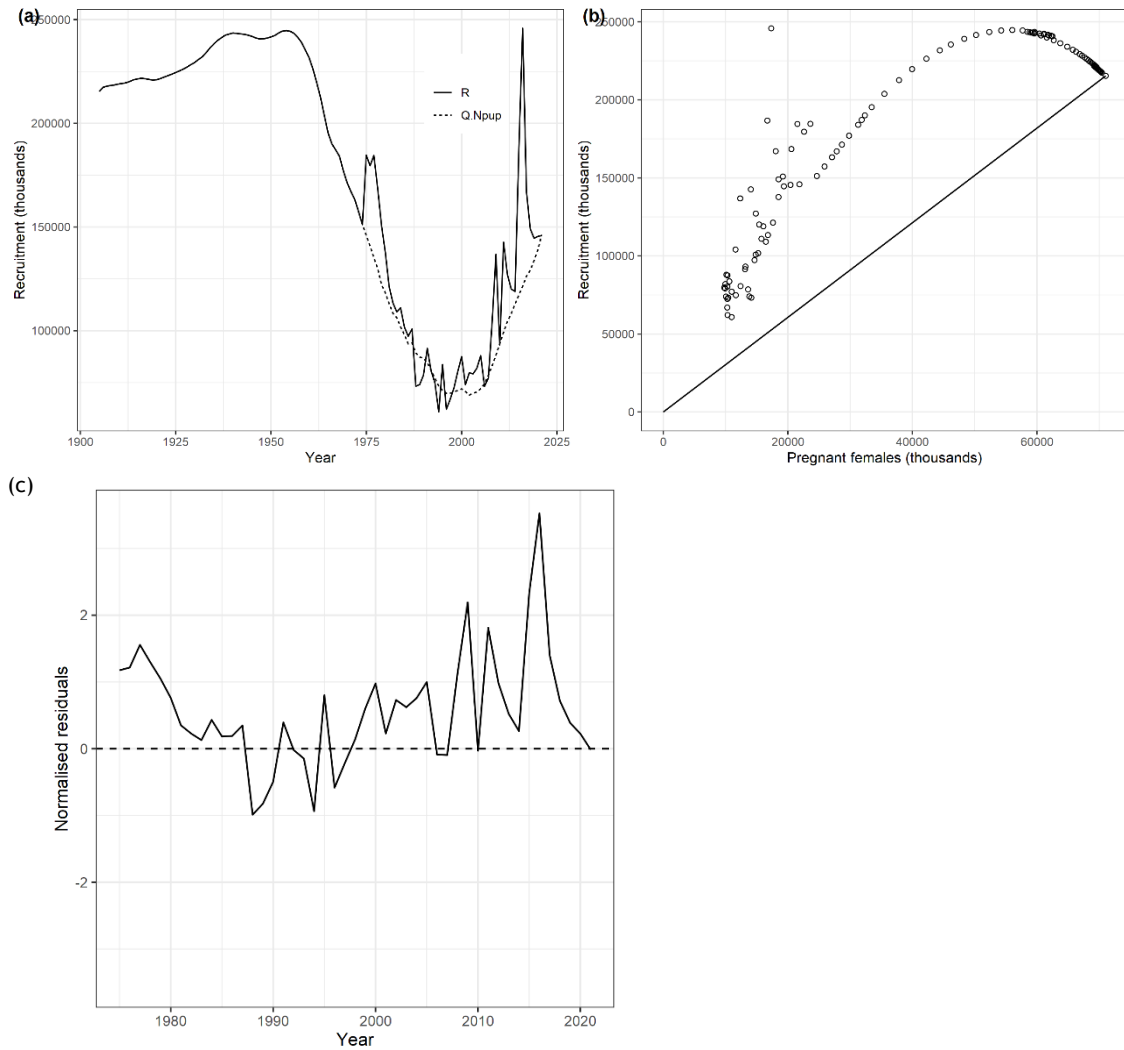
(a) Fits to fecundity data



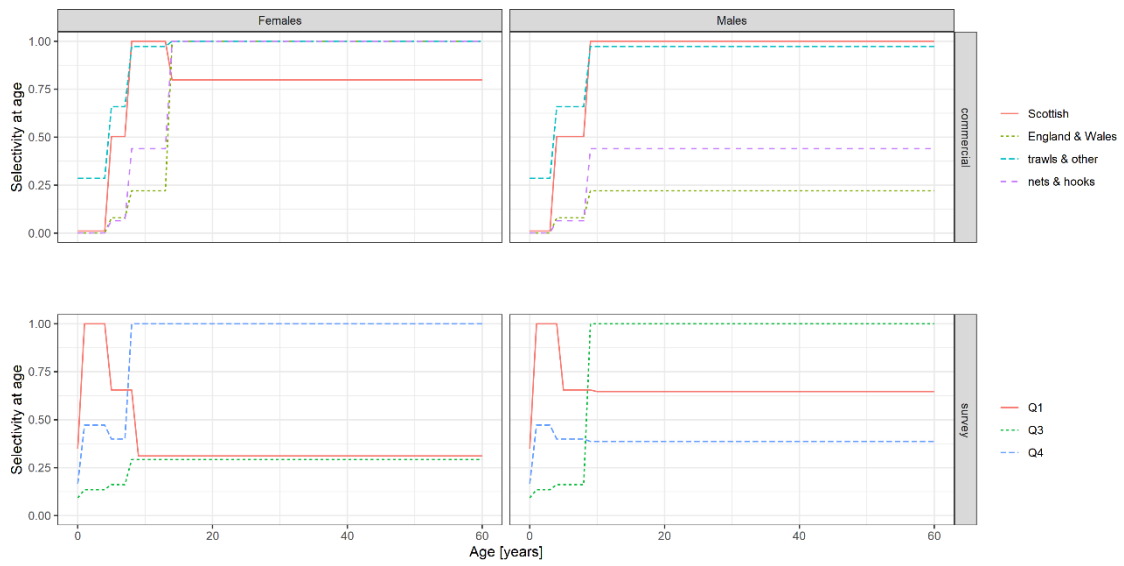
(b) Normalised residuals



**Figure 2.27. Northeast Atlantic spurdog. Baseline assessment. Fit to fecundity data from several periods (a), with associated normalised residuals ( $\epsilon_{fec,k,y}$  in Stock Annex equation 11b) (b). For (a), the black lines reflect the model estimates for the given points. For all plots, the diameter of each point is proportional to  $\sqrt{n}$ , where  $n$  is the number of samples with the same number of pups for a given length.**



**Figure 2.28. Northeast Atlantic spurdog. Baseline assessment. (a)** A comparison of the deterministic ( $N_{pup}$ ) and stochastic ( $R$ ) versions of recruitment (Stock Annex equations 2a–c) with (c) normalised residuals ( $\epsilon_{r,y}/\epsilon_r$ , where  $\epsilon_{r,y}$  are estimable parameters of the model); and (b) a plot of recruitment ( $R$ ) vs. number of pregnant females (in thousands; open circles), together with the replacement line (number of recruiting pups needed to replace the pregnant female population under no harvesting).



**Figure 2.29. Northeast Atlantic spurdog. Baseline assessment. Estimated selectivity-at-age curves for females (left plots) and males (right plots). The four commercial fleets considered (top row) have non-target (Scottish), target (England & Wales), “trawls & other”, and “nets & hooks” selectivity, which differ by sex because of the life-history parameters for males and females (Table 2.6). The survey selectivity-at-age curves for the three indices are given in the bottom row.**

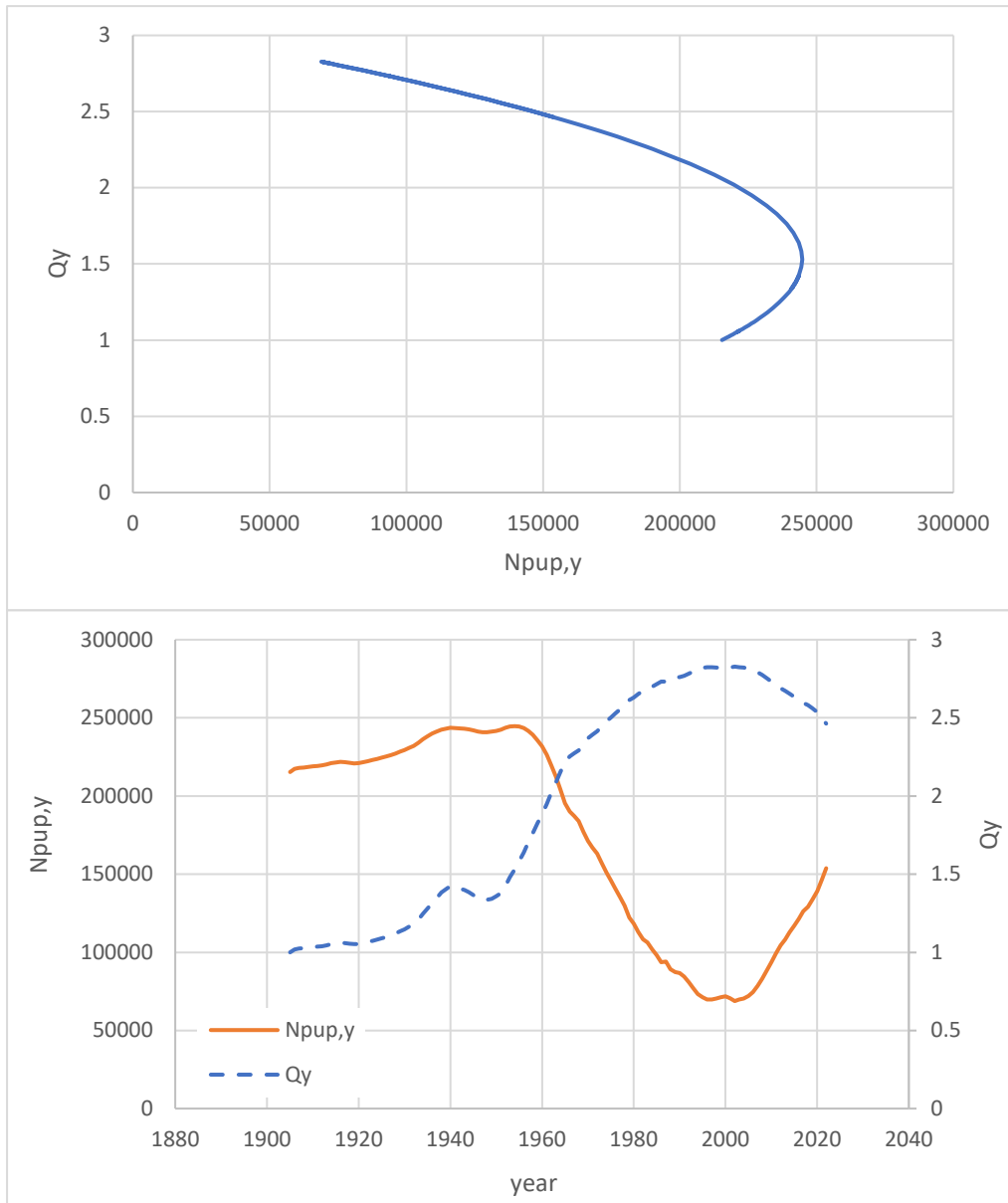
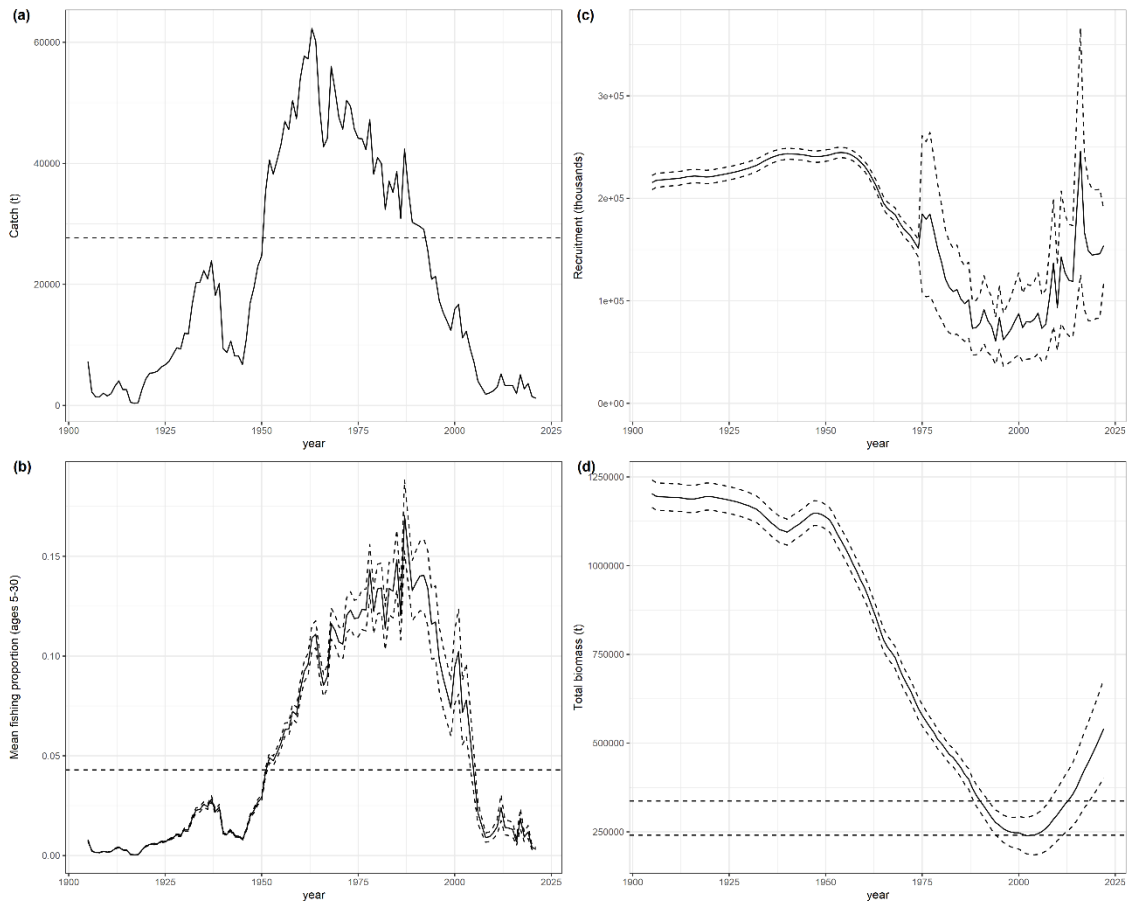


Figure 2.30. Northeast Atlantic spurdog. Baseline assessment. A plot of the density-dependent factor  $Q_y$  (Stock Annex equation 2b) against the number of pups  $N_{pup,y}$  (top), and both plotted against time (bottom; orange line for  $N_{pup,y}$ , and blue hashed line for  $Q_y$ ).



**Figure 2.31. Northeast Atlantic spurdog. Baseline assessment. Summary four-plot showing long-term trends in catch (tons; hashed horizontal line =  $MSY$ ), recruitment (thousands of pups), mean fishing proportion (harvest rate, average over ages 5–30; hashed horizontal line =  $HR_{MSY}$ ) and total biomass (tons; top hashed horizontal line =  $MSY B_{trigger}$ ; bottom hashed horizontal line =  $B_{lim}$ ). Hashed lines reflect estimates of precision ( $\pm 2$  standard deviations).**



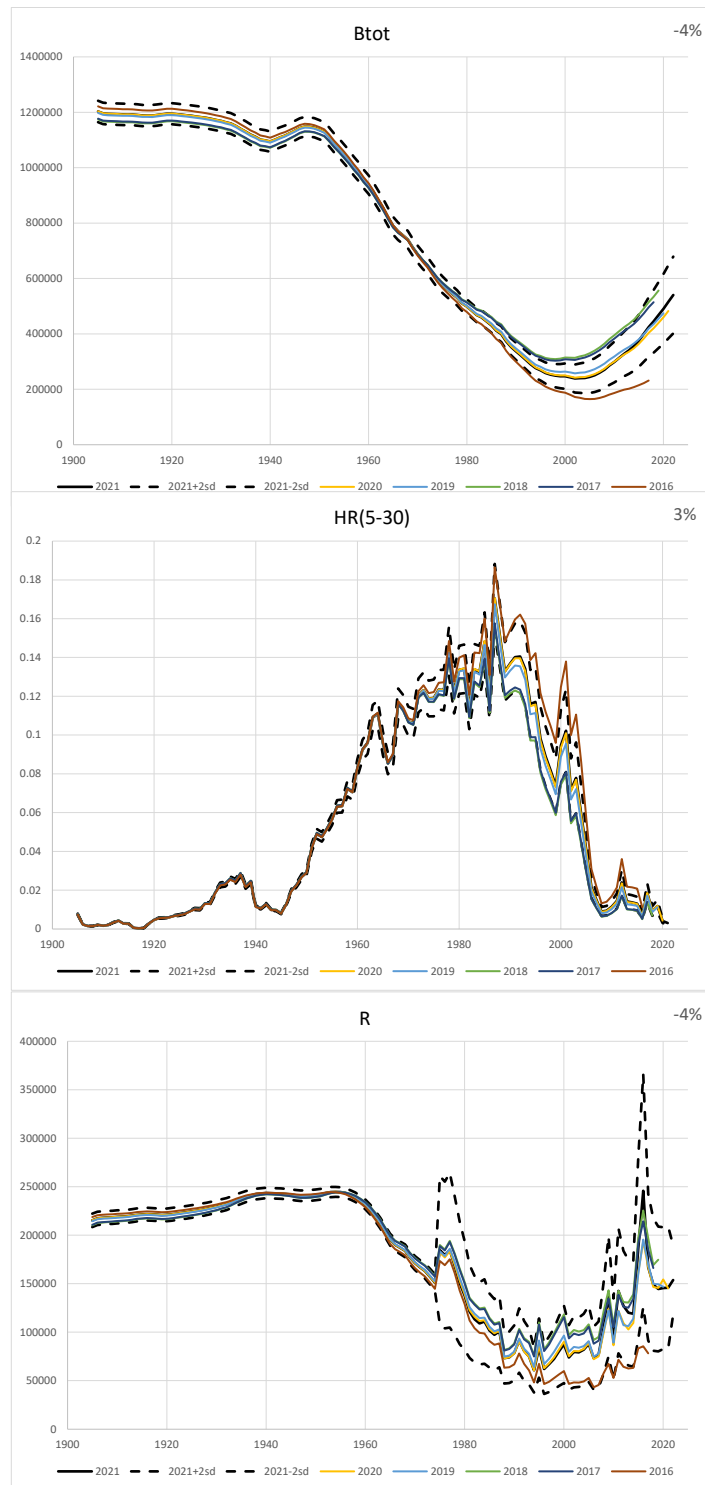
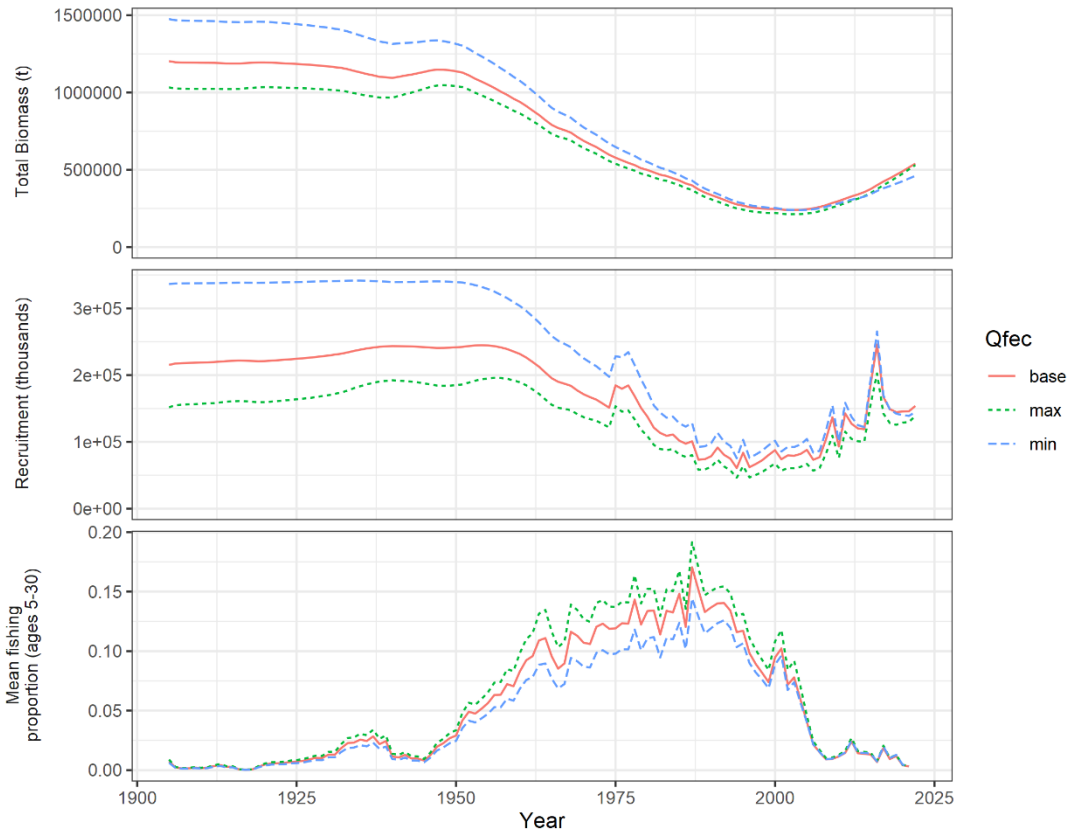


Figure 2.32. Northeast Atlantic spurdog. Baseline assessment. Six-year retrospective plots (the model was re-run, each time omitting a further year in the data). Mohn's rho is given in the top-right of each plot, and confidence bounds (hashed black curves;  $\pm 2$  sd) for the 2021 line (black curve).



**Figure 2.33. Northeast Atlantic spurdog. A sensitivity analysis of the parameter that determines the extent of density-dependence in pup production ( $Q_{fec}$ ). Three alternative values are considered, related to the optimum (in terms of lowest  $-\ln L$ ), smallest, and largest values for parameters  $a_{fec}$  and  $b_{fec}$  that are within the 95% probability intervals for the “update21” assessment (below the hashed lines in Figure 2.23). The estimated  $Q_{fec}$  associated with these are base = 3.060 (baseline assessment), max = 3.803, min = 2.275, respectively.**

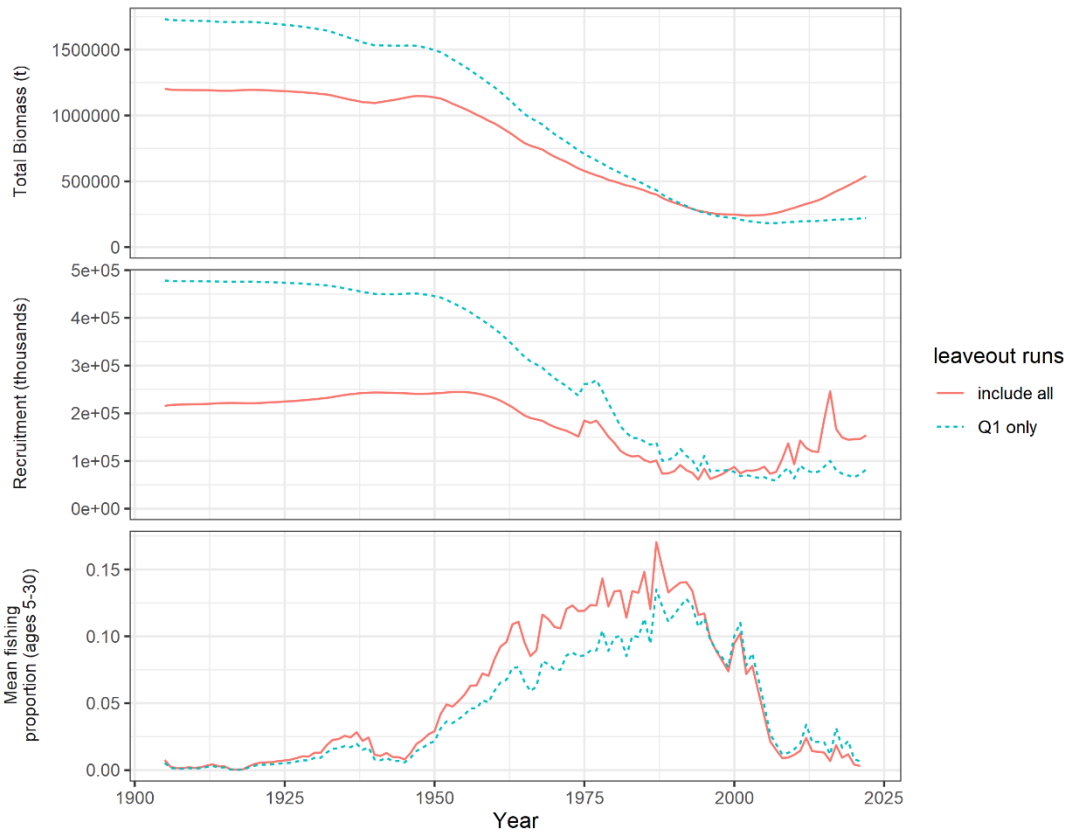


Figure 2.34. Northeast Atlantic spurdog. A sensitivity analysis omitting all surveys indices except the Q1 index (“Q1 only”) compared to the baseline assessment (“include all”).

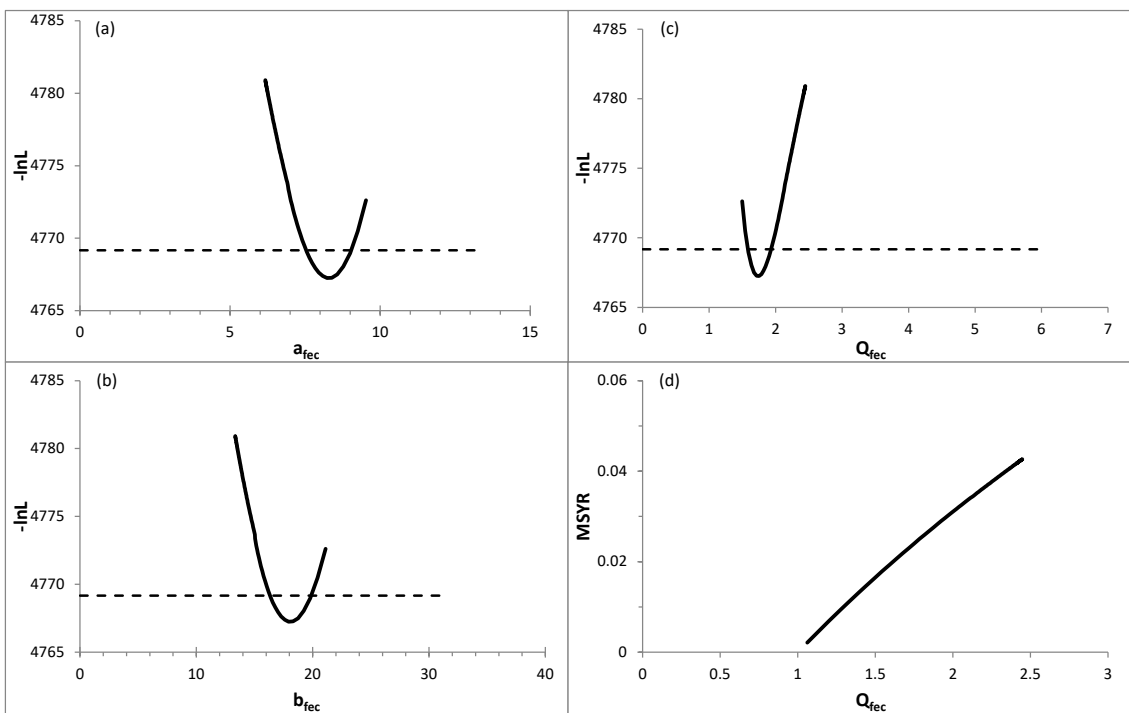
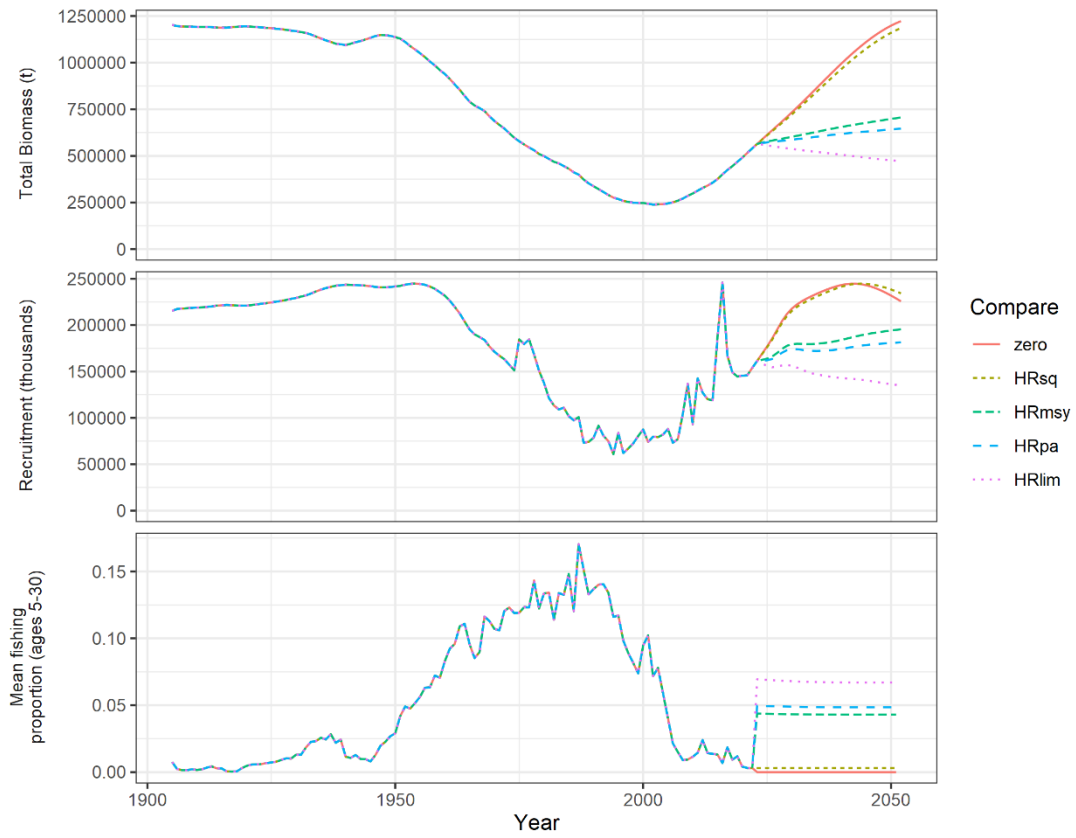


Figure 2.35. Northeast Atlantic spurdog. Q1 only assessment. See caption to Figure 2.23 for relevant details.



**Figure 2.36. Northeast Atlantic spurdog. Baseline assessment. 30-year projections for different levels of future catch, including zero catch for reference.**

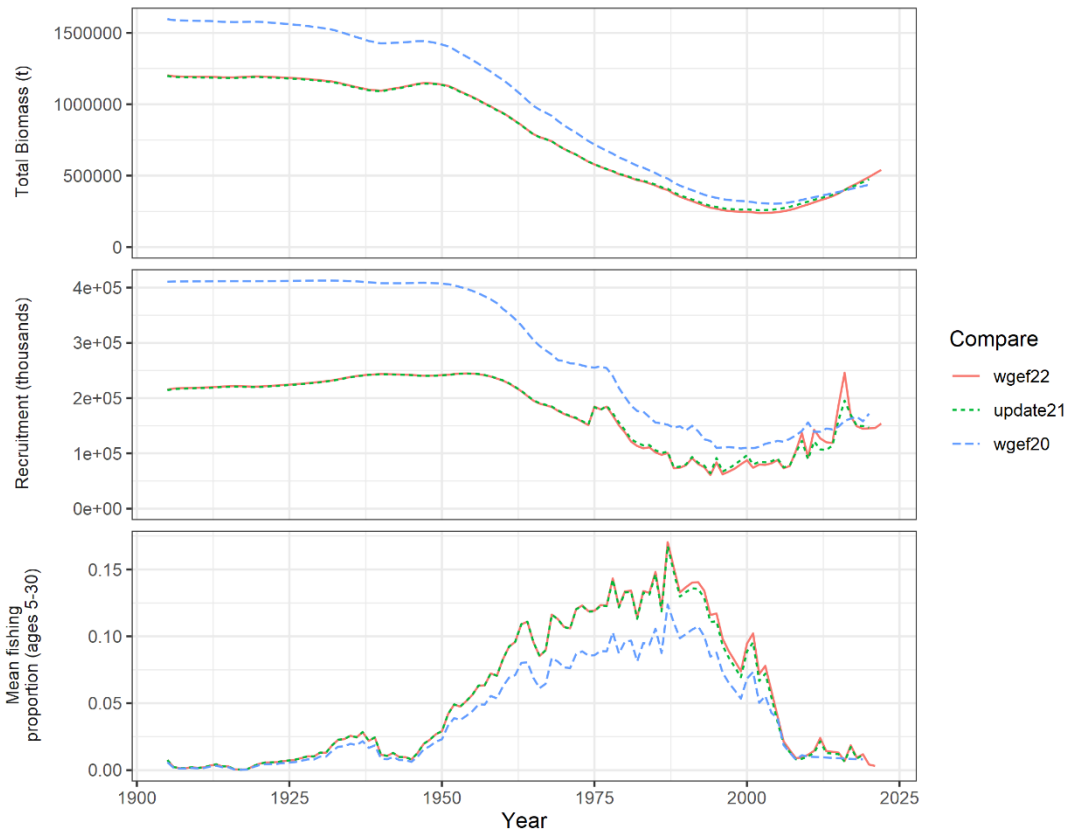


Figure 2.37. Northeast Atlantic spurdog. Compare baseline assessment (“wgef22”) with the assessment from WGEF (2020) (“wgef20”) and the “update21” assessment (i.e. the 2021 benchmark assessment but with corrections and updates to input data, and infilling of missing data).

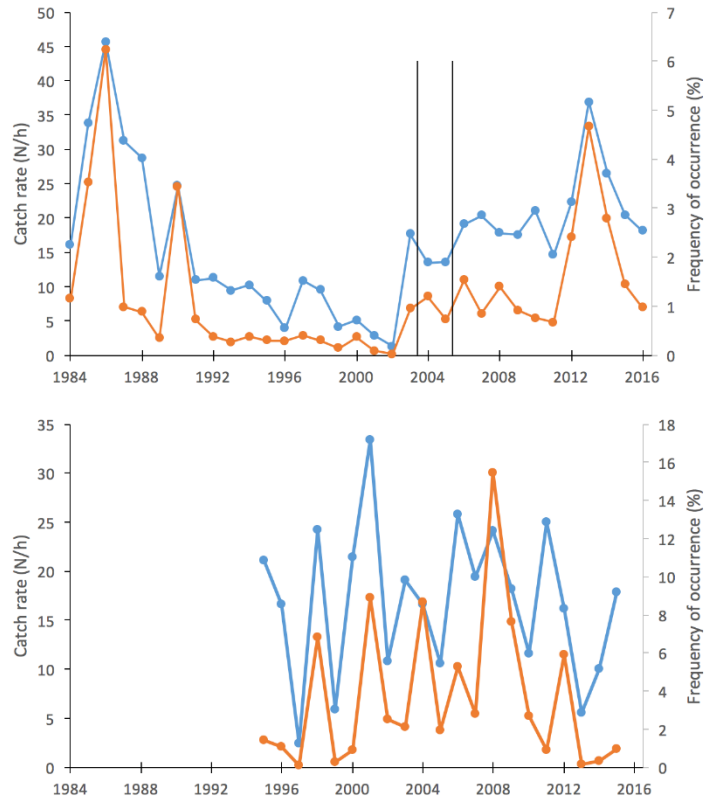


Figure 2.38. Northeast Atlantic spurdog. Survey indices of spurdog in terms of catch rates (orange lines) and frequency of occurrence (blue lines) from the Norwegian Shrimp Survey in South-Norway (top panel) and the Norwegian Coastal Survey in North-Norway (bottom panel). The two vertical lines indicate changes in seasonal coverage of the shrimp survey, being in fourth quarter from 1984, in second quarter from 2004, and in first quarter from 2006.

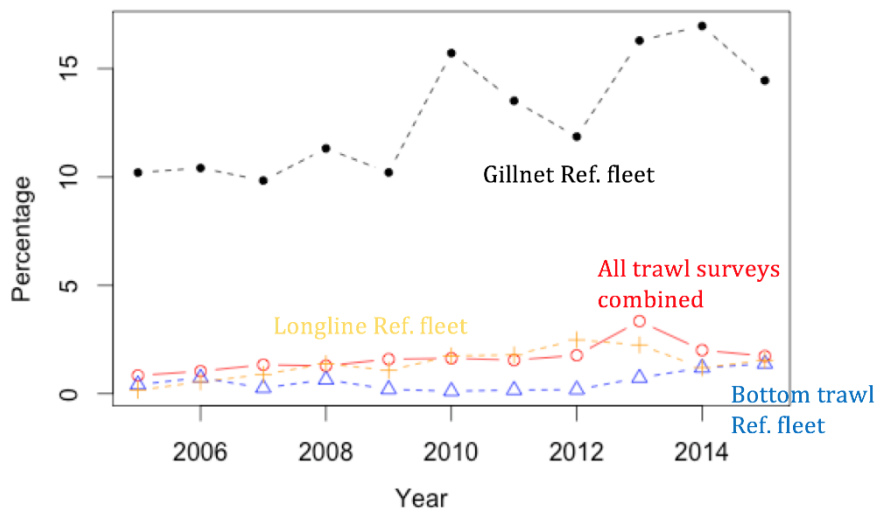


Figure 2.39. Northeast Atlantic spurdog. Percentage occurrence of spurdog in sampled Norwegian commercial catches from each year and from each major fishery groups.

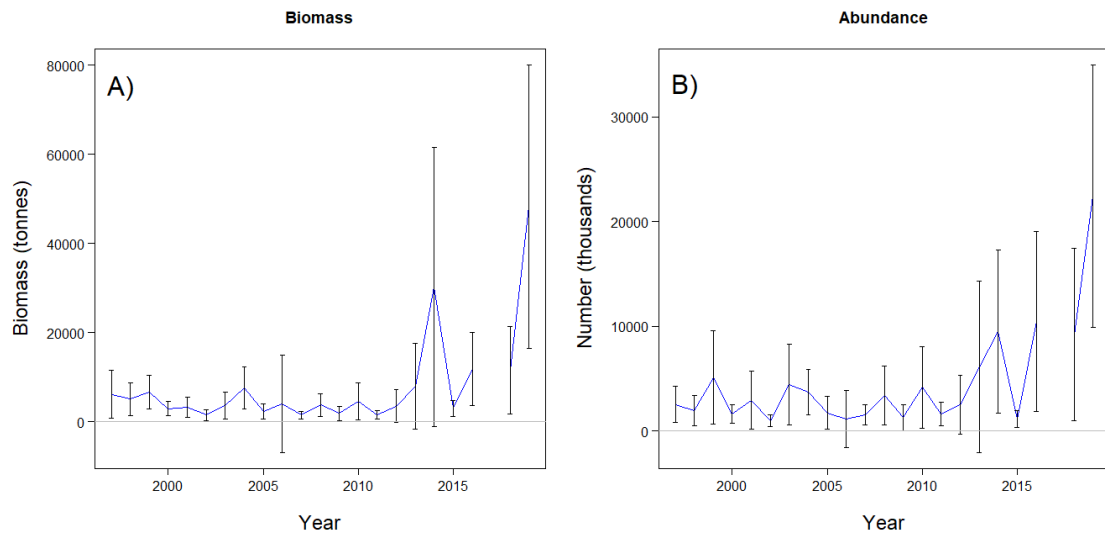


Figure 2.41. Swept area biomass and abundance index of spurdog in the EVHOE (EVHOE-WIBTS-Q4) survey.

## 3 Deep-water sharks; leafscale gulper shark and Portuguese dogfish in the Northeast Atlantic (subareas 4–14)

### 3.1 Stock distribution

A number of species of deep-water sharks have been exploited in the ICES area. This section deals with leafscale gulper shark *Centrophorus squamosus* and Portuguese dogfish *Centroscymnus coelolepis*, which have been the two species of greatest importance to commercial fisheries.

In the past in some of European fisheries, landings data for the two species were combined for most of the period since the beginning of the fishery, under a generic term “siki”.

#### 3.1.1 Leafscale gulper shark

The leafscale gulper shark has a wide distribution in the Northeast (NE) Atlantic, from Iceland and Atlantic slopes south to Senegal, Madeira and the Canary Islands. On the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, it is distributed from Iceland to the Azores (Hareide and Garnes, 2001). The species can be demersal on the continental slopes (at depths of 230–2400 m) or have a more pelagic behaviour, occurring in the upper 1250 m of oceanic areas with seafloor around 4000 m (Compagno and Niem, 1998).

Available information suggests that this species is highly migratory (Clarke *et al.*, 2001; 2002; Moura *et al.*, 2014; Rodríguez-Cabello *et al.*, 2016). In the NE Atlantic, the distribution pattern formerly assumed considered the existence of a large-scale migration, where females would give birth off the Madeira Archipelago, as there were reports of pregnant females (Severino *et al.*, 2009) in that region. Geo-referenced data show that pregnant females also occur off Iceland, indicating another potentially important reproductive area in the northern part of the NE Atlantic (Moura *et al.*, 2014). Juveniles are only caught rarely. Segregation by sex, size and maturity seems to occur, likely linked to factors such as depth and temperature. Post-natal and mature females tend to occur in relatively shallower sites. Pregnant females are distributed in warmer waters compared to the remaining maturity stages, particularly immature females, which are usually found at greater depths and lower temperatures (Moura *et al.*, 2014). Although based on a small sample size, tagging studies have observed movements from the Cantabrian Sea to the Porcupine Bank (Rodríguez-Cabello and Sánchez, 2014; Rodríguez-Cabello *et al.*, 2016) and north to the Faeroes Islands (Rodríguez-Cabello, personal comm.).

Results from a molecular study, using six nuclear loci, did not reject the null hypothesis of genetic homogeneity among NE Atlantic samples (Veríssimo *et al.*, 2012). The same study showed that females are less dispersive than males and possibly philopatric. In the absence of clearer information on stock identity, a single assessment unit of the Northeast Atlantic has been adopted.

#### 3.1.2 Portuguese dogfish

The Portuguese dogfish is distributed widely in the NE Atlantic. Stock structure and spatial dynamics are poorly understood. Specimens below 70 cm have been recorded rarely. The absence of small fishes in the NE Atlantic may be a consequence of their concentration in nurseries outside the sampling areas, movement to pelagic or deeper waters, gear selectivity or to different habitat and/or prey choices, with juveniles being more benthic (Moura *et al.*, 2014). Consistent



results among different studies show that females move to shallower waters for parturition (Girard and Du Buit, 1999; Clarke *et al.*, 2001; Moura and Figueiredo, 2012 WD; Moura *et al.*, 2014). Similar size ranges and different maturity stages exist in both the northern and southern European continental slopes. The occurrence of all adult reproductive stages within the same geographical area and, in many cases in similar proportions among different areas, suggests that this species is able to complete its life cycle within these areas (Moura *et al.*, 2014).

Population structure studies developed so far using microsatellites and mitochondrial DNA show no evidence of genetic population structure among collections in the NE Atlantic (Moura *et al.*, 2008 WD; Veríssimo *et al.*, 2011; Catarino *et al.*, 2015). In the absence of clearer information on stock identity, a single assessment unit of the Northeast Atlantic has been adopted.

## 3.2 The fishery

### 3.2.1 History of the fishery

Fisheries taking leafscale gulper shark or Portuguese dogfish are described in their respective stock annexes.

Since 2010, when EU TACs for deep-water sharks have been set at zero, reported landings for each of the two species have been very low or zero.

The EU fixed, for 2017-2020, a restrictive by-catch allowance, permitting limited landings of unavoidable by-catches of deep-sea sharks in directed artisanal deep-sea longline fisheries for black scabbardfish (Council regulation (EU) 2016/2285; Council regulation (EU) 2018/2025). Since 2021, both species are prohibited by several regulations and cannot be retained on board, transhipped, relocated or landed in a great extent of the NE Atlantic Discards are known to occur but were not quantified. See section 3.2.5 (Management applicable) for more details.

### 3.2.2 Species distribution and spatial overlap with fisheries

Geostatistical studies (Veiga *et al.*, 2013; Veiga *et al.*, 2015 WD) using deep-water longline black scabbardfish fishery data (vessel monitoring systems, logbooks and official daily landings) were conducted with the aim of evaluating the spatial distribution and spatial overlap between i) black scabbardfish and leafscale gulper shark and between ii) black scabbardfish and Portuguese dogfish taken by the longline fishery operating off mainland Portugal (Division 9.a). Results obtained indicated that in fishing grounds where black scabbardfish is more abundant and where fishing takes place, the relative occurrence of both deep-water shark species was reduced. These differences on the relative occurrence have implications for alternative management measures to be adopted in the deep-water longline black scabbardfish fishery, particularly in what concerns the minimization of deep-water shark bycatch. The existence of differences in the deep-water sharks' abundance between fishing grounds for black scabbardfish and deeper fishing grounds was further supported by results from a short-duration pilot survey on board commercial fishing vessels belonging to the Portuguese mainland black scabbard fishery in 2014 (Veiga, 2015 WD). Under this survey, ten fishing hauls were carried out by 5 vessels, each vessel performing one haul at the fishing grounds exploited by the black scabbardfish fleet (BSF fishing grounds) and other located at deeper areas adjacent to these fishing grounds, using the same gear, hook size and fishing practices. For all vessels, the proportions of each shark species (~quotient between the caught weight of the deep-water shark under analysis and the sum of the caught weight of black scabbardfish and of that deep-water shark) was significantly smaller in hauls performed at the BSF fishing grounds and those located deeper.

In addition to the conclusions drawn by these studies, an analysis of onboard data collected at commercial vessels belonging to the Portuguese deep-water longline fishery that takes place in ICES Subarea 9 suggested that *C. squamosus* and *D. calceus* have a larger spatial overlap with the fishery for black scabbardfish than *C. coelolepis* (Figueiredo and Moura, 2019 WD). Worth to mention that *C. squamosus* and *D. calceus* have a widespread distribution and undertake migrations associated to reproduction (despite those from the *D. calceus* being less understood).

As a reaction of the restrictive EU management measures adopted for deep-water sharks, fishing vessels also tend to avoid fishing grounds where deep-water sharks are more likely to be caught. No survival of sharks when returned to the sea is expected. See section 3.3.4. for more information on discard survival.

### 3.2.3 The fishery in 2021

No new information.

### 3.2.4 ICES advice applicable

Leafscale gulper shark: in 2019, ICES advised that “when the precautionary approach is applied there should be zero catches in each of the years 2020–2023.”.

Portuguese dogfish: in 2019, ICES advised that “when the precautionary approach is applied there should be zero catches in each of the years 2020–2023.”.

### 3.2.5 Management applicable

The EU TACs that have been adopted for deep-sea sharks in European Community waters and international waters for different ICES subareas are summarized below.

Year	ICES subareas		
	5–9	10	12 (includes also <i>Deania histricosa</i> <sup>(5)</sup> and <i>Deania profundorum</i> )
2005 and 2006	6763	14	243
2007	2472 <sup>(1)</sup>	20	99
2008	1646 <sup>(1)</sup>	20	49
2009	824 <sup>(1)</sup>	10 <sup>(1)</sup>	25 <sup>(1)</sup>
2010	0 <sup>(2)</sup>	0 <sup>(2)</sup>	0 <sup>(2)</sup>
2011	0 <sup>(3)</sup>	0 <sup>(3)</sup>	0 <sup>(3)</sup>
2012	0	0	0
2013	0	0	0
2014	0	0	0
2015	0	0	0
2016	0	0	0
2017	10 <sup>(4)</sup>	10 <sup>(4)</sup>	0
2018	10 <sup>(4)</sup>	10 <sup>(4)</sup>	0
2019	7 <sup>(4)</sup>	7 <sup>(4)</sup>	0

Year	ICES subareas		
	5–9	10	12 (includes also <i>Deania histricosa</i> <sup>(5)</sup> and <i>Deania profundorum</i> )
2020	7 <sup>(4)</sup>	7 <sup>(4)</sup>	0
2021 <sup>(6)</sup>	---	---	---
2022 <sup>(6)</sup>	---	---	---
2023 <sup>(6)</sup>	---	---	---

(1) Bycatch only. No directed fisheries for deep-sea sharks are permitted.

(2) Bycatch of up to 10% of 2009 quotas is permitted.

(3) Bycatch of up to 3% of 2009 quotas is permitted.

(4) Exclusively for bycatch in longline fishery targeting black scabbardfish. No directed fishery shall be permitted.

(5) Recent studies demonstrated that there is not enough scientific support to discriminate *Deania hystricosa* from its congener *Deania calceus*; they are likely the same species (Rodríguez-Cabello *et al.*, 2020; Stefanni *et al.*, 2021)

(6) Species included in the prohibited list of the TAC regulations

Since 2013, the deep-sea shark category includes the following species (Council regulation (EC) No 1182/2013): Deep-water catsharks *Apristurus* spp., frilled shark *Chlamydoselachus anguineus*, gulper sharks *Centrophorus* spp., Portuguese dogfish *Centroscymnus coelolepis*, longnose velvet dogfish *Centroscymnus crepidater*, black dogfish *Centroscyllium fabricii*; birdbeak dogfish *Deania calceus*; kitefin shark *Dalatias licha*; greater lantern shark *Etmopterus princeps*; velvet belly *Etmopterus spinax*; mouse catshark *Galeus murinus*; six-gilled shark *Hexanchus griseus*; sailfin roughshark *Oxynotus paradoxus*; knifetooth dogfish *Scymnodon ringens* and Greenland shark *Somniosus microcephalus*.

Since 2013, under NEAFC Recommendation, 7 it was required that Contracting Parties prohibit vessels flying their flag in the Regulatory Area from directed fishing for deep-sea sharks on the following list: *Centrophorus granulosus*, *Centrophorus squamosus*, *Centroscyllium fabricii*, *Centroscymnus coelolepis*, *Centroscymnus crepidater*, *Dalatias licha*, *Etmopterus princeps*, *Apristurus* spp, *Chlamydoselachus anguineus*, *Deania calceus*, *Galeus melastomus*, *Galeus murinus*, *Hexanchus griseus*, *Etmopterus spinax*, *Oxynotus paradoxus*, *Scymnodon ringens* and *Somniosus microcephalus*.

Since 2015, the leafscale gulper shark and the Portuguese dogfish, have been included on the EU prohibited species list for Union waters of Division 2.a and Subarea 4 and in all waters of Subareas 1 and 14 (Council Regulation (EC) No 2015/104, Art. 12:1(g)).

A bycatch TAC for deep-water sharks was allowed for each of the years from 2017 to 2020, on a trial basis, in the directed artisanal deep-sea longline fisheries for black scabbardfish (Council regulation (EU) 2016/2285; Council regulation (EU) 2018/2025). The Council regulation (EU) 2016/2285 affects specifically the Portuguese deep-water longline fishery targeting black scabbardfish in ICES Division 9.a and Subarea 10. According to this Member States should develop regional management measures for the black scabbardfish fishery and establish specific data-collection measures for deep-sea sharks to ensure their close monitoring. Specifically, 10 and 7 tonnes were allowed for deep-sea sharks in Union and international waters of ICES subareas 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9, in Union and international waters of ICES Subarea 10 and in Union waters of CECAF 34.1.1, 34.1.2 and 34. 2 in 2017–2018 and 2019–2020, respectively. This allowance was in accordance with ICES indications according to which in the artisanal deep-sea longline fisheries for black scabbardfish, the restrictive catch limits lead to misreporting of unavoidable by-catches of deep-sea sharks, which are currently discarded dead.

Since 2021 there is a prohibition to fish, to retain on board, to tranship, to relocate or to land some deep-water sharks species (including leafscale gulper shark and Portuguese dogfish) in United

Kingdom and Union waters of ICES subarea 4; United Kingdom waters of division 2a; international waters of ICES subareas 1 and 14; United Kingdom, Union and international waters of ICES subareas 6 to 9; United Kingdom and international waters of 5; Union and international waters of ICES subarea 10; Union waters of CECAF areas 34.1.1, 34.1.2 and 34.2; and international waters of ICES subarea 12 (Council Regulation (EU) 2023/194).

EU regulations on some deep-water fisheries also contributed to the reduction of the deep-water sharks fishing mortality. In 2005, the use of trawls and gillnets in waters deeper than 200 m in the Azores, Madeira and Canary Island areas was banned (Council Regulation (EC) No 1568/2005). In 2007, the use of gillnets by Community vessels at depths greater than 600 m in ICES divisions 6.a-b, 7.b-c, 7.j-k and Subarea 12 was banned while a maximum bycatch of deep-water shark of 5% in hake and monkfish gillnet catches was allowed (Council Regulation (EC) No 41/2007). Since 2009, the “rasco (gillnet)” fishing gear was banned at waters deeper than the 600 m isobath (EC Regulation 43/2009). A gillnet ban in waters deeper than 200 m is also in operation in the NEAFC regulatory Area (all international waters of the ICES Area). NEAFC also ordered the removal of all such nets from NEAFC waters by 1 February 2006.

Since 2016, and in order to mitigate the potential damaging impacts of bottom trawling, fishing with bottom trawls was ban at depths deeper than 800 metres (EU Regulation 2016/2336).

### 3.3 Catch data

#### 3.3.1 Landings

Landings of leafscale gulper shark and Portuguese dogfish have historically been included by many countries in mixed landings categories (e.g. sharks ‘nei’ and dogfish ‘nei’). Figure 3.1 shows the Working Group estimates of combined landings of the two species by country and by ICES area.

During WKSHARK2, landing data provided by country was revised in relation to data quality (including taxonomic categories). Protocols to better document the decisions to be made when estimating WG landings were developed (ICES, 2016). For the years before 2005, it was not possible to determine identity to species level for some countries and hence the landings presented here are of “siki” sharks. “Siki” landings are a mixed category comprising mainly *C. squamosus* and *C. coelolepis* but also including unknown quantities of other species (Table 3.1). Landings estimates from 2005 onwards were revised following WKSHARK2, and are presented by species (Figure 3.2; Tables 3.2 and 3.3).

Landings have declined from around 10 000 t in 2001–2004 to one tonne in 2012. The recent decrease in landings is mostly related to the imposition of the EU TAC, which has been set at zero catch since 2010. From 2017 to 2020, landings were reported in division 9a due to the deep-water sharks by-catch allowance in the black scabbard longline fisheries. In 2021 and 2022, and due to the regulations in place since 2021, there were no landings of Portuguese dogfish. In the case of leafscale gulper shark, Portugal reported landings of 59 kg and 7 kg, respectively.

#### 3.3.2 Discards

Given the restrictive EU TACs for deep-water sharks, it was admitted that the discarding in deep-water fisheries had increased. However, with the several EU regulations in place, particularly the ban of gillnet, entangle and trammel net fisheries at depths >600 m and trawl deep-water fisheries at depths >800 m, the potential bycatch and subsequent discarding of Portuguese

dogfish and leafscale gulper shark is now thought to be relatively low. Since 2010, that discard information is limited to some years and countries (Tables 3.4 and 3.5).

**Portugal.** The IPMA on-board sampling programme of Portuguese commercial vessels that operate deep-water longlines to target black scabbardfish (métier LLD\_DWS\_0\_0\_0), started in mid-2005. Sampling effort was fixed at three trips per quarter and sampled trips and vessels were selected in a quasi-random sampling (Fernandes *et al.*, 2011 WD). However, it is considered that spatial coverage by the sampling is insufficient to allow discards to be raised to the whole fleet (Prista *et al.*, 2014 WD).

To evaluate the level of shark bycatch and discards, and to increase knowledge of the fishery, a pilot study on the Portuguese trammel net fishery targeting anglerfish in Division 9.a (200–600 m deep) took place, under the PNAB/DCF from 2012–2014 (Moura *et al.*, 2015 WD). Results showed that the fishery targeting anglerfish at depths of 200–600 m had a low frequency of occurrence of Portuguese dogfish. No specimens of leafscale gulper shark were ever sampled. Despite these results, higher frequencies are likely to be observed at depths >600 m.

**Spain.** The Spanish Discards Sampling Programme for Otter and Pair Bottom Trawl (OTB and PTB) fleets, covering ICES subareas 6–7 and divisions 8.c and 9.a started in 1988; however, it did not have annual coverage until 2003. The sampling strategy and the estimation methodology used follows the “Workshop on Discard Sampling Methodology and Raising Procedures” guidelines (ICES, 2003) and more details of this applied to this area were explained in Santos *et al.* (2010 WD).

Estimated discards of leafscale gulper shark in 2021 were 5.5 tonnes.

Discards estimates of *C. squamosus* from the Spanish Discards Sampling Programme for Otter and Pair Bottom Trawl (OTB and PTB) fleets, covering ICES Subareas 6, 7, 8c and North 9a in the period 2003–2013 are presented in Table 3.6. It should be noted that the CVs from these estimates are very high (>50%) (Santos *et al.*, 2010 WD), which can be related with the sampling not being stratified to account for the depth effect (*C. squamosus* generally distributes at high depths). The results presented in Table 3.6 can therefore not be considered reliable estimates of the quantities discarded. They are included in this report as indicative that some discarding of the species occurred in the period considered.

**France.** French bycatch of Portuguese dogfish and leafscale gulper shark occurs mainly, if not only, in the deep-water fishery to the West of Scotland. Estimates for the period 2005–2014 are available in Table 3.7. It was previously shown that estimated discards may vary strongly with the auxiliary variable used for raising observed discards to the French fleet. Available auxiliary variables are fishing time, number of trips, number of fishing operations, number of fishing days and total landings of all species caught. Raising to the landings of the same species is not suitable as these sharks are not landed. Raising to available variables returned different discard estimates, which range from 13–200 tonnes of Portuguese dogfish and from 40–700 tonnes of leafscale gulper shark. Estimated discards for recent years (2020–2022) were not scrutinized by WGEF.

**Ireland.** Discard data from Ireland is available from 2009 to 2017 for the Portuguese dogfish from the trawl fleet operating in ICES divisions 27.6.a and 27.7.bgj. Discards are considered negligible as values estimated are <1 tonne in most of the years.

### 3.3.3 Quality of the catch data

Historically, very few countries have provided landings data disaggregated by species. Portugal has supplied species-specific data for many years. Since 2003 onwards, other countries have increased species-specific reporting of landings but some of these data may contain misidentifications.

It is believed that immediately prior to the introduction of quotas for deep-water species, in 2001, some vessels may have reported deep-water sharks as other species (and vice versa) in an effort to build up track record for other deep-water species (or deep-water sharks). It was also likely that, before the introduction of quotas for deep-water sharks, some gillnetters may have reported monkfish as sharks.

Misreporting is likely to have increased as a reaction to the EU restrictive measures adopted for deep-water sharks. As an example, the data from the DCF landing sampling programme at Sesimbra landing port in 2009 and 2010 revealed the existence of misidentification problems (Lagarto *et al.*, 2012 WD). In 2014, sampling data derived from 13 trips on deep-water longliners (a small proportion of the total number of trips) indicate that nearly 50% of the sampled specimens landed as *Galeorhinus galeus* corresponded to leafscale gulper shark and Portuguese dogfish. Misidentification issues persisted until 2016.

### 3.3.4 Discard survival

No information is available. Scientific studies have recently tagged leafscale gulper sharks caught by longline at depths of 900–1100 m, indicating that they are capable of surviving after capture and release (Rodríguez-Cabello and Sánchez, 2014; Rodríguez-Cabello and Sánchez, 2017). In this studies, at-vessel mortality (for *C. squamosus* and *C. coelolepis* (proportion of fish that are dead when the fish are brought on board) was low: 1.2%, and 4.5%, respectively. However, if including also specimens scored in poor condition, at vessel mortality increased to 18.9% and 38.6%, respectively.

It is important to remark that in these studies, the soaking times were restricted to 2–3 hours and the fishing gear was hauled in at a much slower speed (0.4–0.5 m s<sup>-1</sup>) than under normal fishing practices.

## 3.4 Commercial catch composition

### 3.4.1 Species composition

No new information.

Past efforts made by WGEF to assign mixed landings by species are described in the Stock Annex. Briefly, the benchmarked procedure agreed by WKDEEP 2010 was further explored by a dedicated workshop on splitting of deep-water shark historical catch data in 2011 (ICES, 2011a). Results from this meeting indicated that the ratio between leafscale gulper shark and Portuguese dogfish varied considerably both temporally and spatially. Data from 2005 onwards was revised in WKSHARK2.

### 3.4.2 Length composition

No new information is available.

### 3.4.3 Quality of catch and biological data

Despite past efforts to improve the quality of the data, particularly on species composition, considerable uncertainties persist on historical data (ICES, 2011a; ICES, 2016).

Since the reduction of EU TACs to zero, significant quantities of the two deep-water shark species under consideration are likely to be discarded by deep-water fisheries. Despite some sampling effort on discards has been undertaken, the sampling effort is clearly insufficient to estimate the quantities caught by species and size composition.

### **3.5 Commercial catch-effort data**

Information on past commercial catch-effort data is presented in the stock annex. No new information is available.

### **3.6 Fishery-independent surveys**

Since 1996, Marine Scotland Science has been conducting a monitoring deep-water survey in Subarea 6 at depths ranging from 300–2040 m [G6642]. This survey can be considered to be standardised in terms of depth coverage since 1998. More information on this survey is presented below.

In September, from 2006 to 2008, and in December 2009, Ireland carried out annual deep-water surveys in subareas 6 and 7. Fishing hauls were performed off north-western Ireland and west of Scotland, and the Porcupine Bank area to the west of Ireland at depth strata: 500 m, 1000 m, 1500 m and 1800 m. The Irish deep-water survey and other surveys were part of a planned coordinated survey in the ICES area, through the Planning Group on Northeast Atlantic Continental Slope Surveys (WGNEACS).

A new Irish trawl survey (IAMS) began trawling deep-water stations in 2018, but data have not yet been analysed.

From 2015 to 2022, AZTI conducted a deep-water longline survey (PALPROF) along the Basque Coast, Bay of Biscay (ICES Division 8.c), onboard a commercial longliner [L4398]. More information on this survey is presented below.

The WGNEACS (ICES, 2011b) was dedicated mainly to the design of a longline survey in Bay of Biscay and Iberian waters. One of its main objectives would be to clarify the distribution of all the deep-water sharks and to provide data to monitor their stock status, in the absence of commercial fisheries data.

### **3.7 Life-history information**

Information on life history is presented in the corresponding stock annexes. No new information is available.

### **3.8 Exploratory assessments**

#### **3.8.1 Scottish deep-water survey data (ICES Subarea 6)**

Survey indicators from the Scottish deep-water survey have been investigated since 2012 (; Campbell, 2018WD; ICES, 2019). The survey takes place every 2 years and the most recent information refers to 2021. In 2023, species mean weight and numbers per tow (for the hauls at 500 – 1800m and 700 – 1900m, respectively) were submitted to WGEF (Figures 3.3 and 3.4). Portuguese dogfish shows an increasing trend in both indicators since 2012, with relatively high values in 2019 and 2021. Although not so evident as for the Portuguese dogfish, the leafscale gulper shark also shows relatively higher values in the last three years with survey information, being the

mean value in 2021 remarkably higher than the preceding ones (but with relatively high error values associated).

### 3.8.2 PALPROF survey (ICES Division 8c)

New information from the PALPROF survey in the Bay of Biscay was presented, updating the data presented previously (see Diez *et al.*, 2023WD and Diez *et al.* 2021 for details). The PALPROF survey has been conducted annually since 2015 in a commercial longliner with the main objective of estimating and assessing the inter-annual variation of the abundance and biomass indices of the deep-water sharks and other ichthyofauna. The surveyed area is located 10.5 km North of the Cape Matxitxako (ICES 27.8.c east) close to a narrow canyon of about 28 km length, where the bottom depth progressively increases from 500 to 2500 m. Based on canyon valley depth profile, and for a depth range from 650 m to 2400 m, 400 m depth interval strata were considered. Six fishing hauls were performed each year, at the same position and time, in order to get homogeneous and comparable data.

To minimize the mortality of deep-water sharks, the number of hooks of a former commercial deep-water-sharks longline was reduced to 300 (Figure 3.5). Depth, temperature and salinity are continuously monitored through CTD sensors (every 30 s).

Data on status of the hook were recorded during the hauling and the recovering of the long line. The categories considered were: i) **E** - Hook with bait; ii) **C** - Hook with bait partially eaten; iii) **R** - Broken-Tangled hook; iv) **V** - Empty hook (no catch, no bait); v) **P** - Hook with catch and vi) **N.O.** - Hook status not Observed/recorded during recovering of the line.

On board, all fish specimens caught were sorted and species identified to the lowest taxonomic level possible. Also, each specimen was measured (cm), sexed and the condition (dead or alive) recorded. Individual body weight was estimated based on species length/weight relationships. The effective fishing effort performed in each stratum (EFFORT<sub>st</sub>) corresponded to the number of hooks able to fish during the haul, i.e. P + E + C divided by the total of hooks and multiplied by the soaking time (minutes):

$$\text{EFFORT}_{st} = ((P + E + C) / \text{total hooks}) \times \text{soak time (minutes)}$$

For each *stratum* the CPUE of species *i* was calculated as the ratio of catch of *i*<sup>th</sup> species (kg) and EFFORT<sub>st</sub>.

In the estimates presented to WGEF in 20213, the catch per unit of effort (CPUE) was adapted to the units usually used in the assessments based in survey trends. Therefore, the CPUE was raised to 60 min and the biomass and abundance indices were calculated in kg/h and n/h, respectively.

During the eight years of the survey, 13 different species of sharks and 2 chimaeras were caught. Sharks and chimaeras were less frequently caught in the floating sections of the fishing gear than at the bottom sections. The highest CPUE values were recorded for *C. coelolepis*. CPUE values for this species showed no major trends until 2020, but decreased in 2022 (Figure 3.6). The CPUE values for *C. squamosus* peaked in 2018 being around the long term mean of the time series since then. Abundance of *C. coelolepis* is highest in the 1451–1850 strata whereas *C. squamosus* presented similar percentage of abundance in the 1051–1450 m and in the 1451–1850 strata.

### 3.8.3 On-board Portuguese data (ICES Division 9a)

IPMA analysed the onboard data collected under Data Collection Framework (PNAB/DCF) for the deep-water sharks *Centroscymnus coelolepis*, *Centrophorus squamosus* and *Deania calceus*



(Figueiredo and Moura, 2019WD). The analysis covered a period from 2009 to 2018 during which data on deep-water sharks was collected by onboard observers of the deep-water longline fishery targeting the black scabbardfish (LLD-DWS *métier*) in Division 9.a. Details and results have been provided in previous reports (ICES, 2019).

The initial objective of this analysis was to estimate the level of by-catch of the main deep-water sharks by year and by area (see section 3.2.2) in addition to evaluate any potential trend during this time period, to compare with catch levels prior to 2007 (when the TAC started to restrict landings). However, the sampling effort achieved is considered insufficient to provide reliable information on the abundance or biomass trend of deep-water shark species. The spatial locations of the fishing hauls are heterogeneously dispersed along time (Figure 3.7) and the vessels sampled also changed. It should be noted that given the vessel site fidelity, there is a confounding effect between the fishing vessel and the fishing grounds and with the distribution patterns of each species, difficult to disentangle. The results obtained from the onboard analysis are presents below, by species.

**Portuguese dogfish.** The relative occurrence of *C. coelolepis* at the sampled fishing hauls, by year, varied between 33 and 100%. The number of specimens caught varied, not only among years, but also among vessels. The highest number of specimens caught by fishing haul were consistently recorded in some places (Figure 3.8). The geographic information of the catches of *C. coelolepis* supports previous studies where it was concluded that the black scabbardfish fishery operate at locations of lower abundance of *C. coelolepis* (Veiga *et al.*, 2015 WD).

**Leafscale gulper shark.** *Centrophorus squamosus* was quite frequently caught but its relative occurrence by fishing haul and by year varied between 17 and 100%. Also, the number of specimens caught per fishing haul varied not only among years but also among vessels. The data available were considered insufficient to estimate the level of by-catch and did not put in evidence any temporal trend. This fact might be associated with the spatial changes of the sampled fishing hauls along time (Figure 3.9).

## 3.9 Stock assessment

No new assessments were undertaken in 2022.

## 3.10 Quality of the assessments

Several regulations on catch opportunities and fisheries operations are in place in the NE Atlantic since 2005 to protect deep-water sharks' populations (or with effect on their protection), being recognized that fishing effort to these species has been reduced in a great extent (see Section 3.3.5). However, data to evaluate the impact of those management measures and current stock status of these species are deficient. Despite not being conducted yearly, the Scottish deep-water survey provides a meaningful time-series of species-specific data, but this started after the fishery being established, and only covers part of the stock range for both the leafscale gulper shark and the Portuguese dogfish. The PALPROF survey in the Bay of Biscay provides new fishery-independent data since 2015, but also covers a small area. Fishery-independent data from other areas of the stock range are limited or lacking.

Fishery dependent data are lacking. The data derived from discards sampling is not adequate to estimate the quantities caught or needs further investigation.

Therefore, a major scientific investment is required to gain a full understanding of the spatial and temporal population dynamics of deep-water sharks to enable estimates of sustainable exploitation levels.

Several strategies to be adopted to monitor species abundance and evaluate fishing impact on their populations by the different deep-water fisheries have been discussed in previous meetings and included the: i) increase of close monitoring of deep water shark populations; ii) development of specific studies to assess the distribution patterns of species and estimate the spatial overlap with fisheries; iii) evaluate the effect on the bycatch of deep water sharks of modifications in deep water fishing operations (Figueiredo and Moura, 2016 WD).

Many countries formerly reported landings of Portuguese dogfish and leafscale gulper shark combined with other deep-water sharks in categories such as “siki sharks”. Unless suitable data can be found to enable splitting of the catch data, historical catch levels by species will remain uncertain.

### 3.10.1 Historical assessments

In 2010, an exploratory assessment method was proposed for the Portuguese dogfish stock (cyo.27.nea) (ICES, 2010). The demographic model proposed is a state-space model that divides the population system dynamics into two processes running in parallel: an unobserved process that describes the female shark's population abundance in number, and an observational model, annual catches, that allows establishing the connection between the unknown states (ICES, 2010). However, the application of the model requires catch data discriminated by species from the different areas within the stock NE Atlantic. Such data is deficient, as historical data is not split by species and current catch estimates are also not quantified.

## 3.11 Reference points

There are not reference points for these stocks.

## 3.12 Conservation considerations

The Red List of European marine fish considered both leafscale gulper shark and Portuguese dogfish to be Endangered (Nieto *et al.*, 2015).

Recent IUCN assessments for a group of deep-water sharks classified the Portuguese dogfish as globally Near Threatened with signs of increase in the population inhabiting the NE Atlantic (Finucci *et al.*, 2020a). The Leafscale gulper shark was classified as globally Endangered, with signs of reduction of the population in the NE Atlantic (Finucci *et al.* 2020b).

Both species are included in the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic (OSPAR) List of Threatened and/or Declining Species & Habitats (OSPAR, 2021).

## 3.13 Management considerations

Some species of deep-water shark are considered to have very low population productivity.

Whilst the zero TAC for deep-water sharks has prevented targeted fisheries for deep-water sharks, these species can still be a bycatch in some deep-water fisheries. The level of bycatch in these fisheries is uncertain but is now assumed to be relatively low given the EU regulations adopted for deep-water fisheries (see Section 3.3.5).

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### 3.15 Tables and Figures

**Table 3.1. Deep-water sharks - Leafscale gulper shark and Portuguese dogfish in the Northeast Atlantic (subareas 4–14). Working Group estimate of combined landings of Portuguese dogfish and leafscale gulper shark (t) by ICES area from 1998 to 2004. Landings by species not available in these years, UA, unknown area.**

	4.a	5.a	5.b	6	7	8	9	10	12	14	UA	Total
1988	0	0	0	0	0	0	560	0	0	0		560
1989	12	0	0	8	0	0	507	0	0	0		527
1990	8	0	140	6	0	6	475	0	0	0		635
1991	10	0	75	1013	265	70	1075	0	1	0		2509
1992	140	1	123	2013	1171	62	1114	0	2	0		4626
1993	63	1	97	2781	1232	25	946	0	7	0		5152
1994	98	0	198	2872	2087	36	1155	0	9	0		6455
1995	78	0	272	2824	1800	45	1354	0	139	0		6512
1996	298	0	391	3639	1168	336	1189	0	147	0		7168
1997	227	0	328	4135	1637	503	1311	0	32	9		8182
1998	81	5	552	4133	1038	605	1220	0	56	15		7705
1999	55	0	469	3471	895	531	972	0	91	0		6484
2000	1	1	410	3455	892	361	1049	0	890	0		7059
2001	3	0	475	4459	2685	634	1130	0	719	0		10105
2002	10	0	215	3086	1487	669	1198	0	1416	12		8093
2003	16	0	300	3855	3926	746	1180	0	849	4		10876
2004	5	0	229	2754	3477	674	1125	0	767	0		9031

**Table 3.2. Deep-water sharks - Leafscale gulper shark and Portuguese dogfish in the Northeast Atlantic (subareas 4–14). Working Group estimate of landings of Portuguese dogfish (t) by ICES area. FAO34, FAO area 34, UA, unknown area. 0 = landings <0.5 t.**

	27.2	27.4	27.5	27.6	27.7	27.8	27.9	27.10	27.12	27-UA	TOTAL	FAO34
2005	0	2	149	414	392	92	541	0	8	60	1657	256
2006	0	1	138	244	214	106	537		0		1240	25
2007	0	2	133	186	14	29	143				507	0
2008		0	121	145	7	361	86				394	0
2009		0	27	47	3	4	33				114	
2010		0	31	24	2	0	1				58	0
2011			1		1		1				2	
2012			4				0				4	
2013			2				0				2	0
2014			5								5	0
2015		0				0	0				1	
2016					0	0					0	
2017							3*				3	
2018						0	2*				2	
2019							11*				11	
2020						0	9*				9	
2021												
2022												

\* Landings from the deep-sea longline fisheries for black scabbardfish (Council regulation (EU) 2016/2285; Council regulation (EU) 2018/2025).

**Table 3.3. Deep-water sharks - Leafscale gulper shark and Portuguese dogfish in the Northeast Atlantic (subareas 4–14). Working Group estimate of landings of leafscale gulper shark (t) by ICES area. FAO34, FAO area 34; UA, unknown area. 0 = landings <0.5 t.**

	27.2	27.4	27.5	27.6	27.7	27.8	27.9	27.10	27.12	27-UA	TOTAL	FAO34
2005	0	0	32	189	249	154	457	0	1	64	1147	565
2006		0	47	158	95	50	508		0		858	50
2007	0	0	44	28	26	2	231				331	0
2008		0	41	43	15	3	87				190	7
2009		0	50	83	4	1	26				165	13
2010		0	58	59	12	0	4				134	5
2011					3		1				3	3
2012					1		1				2	5
2013							0				0	4
2014			32		0		0				33	3
2015		1	9			0	0				10	
2016							0				0	
2017							7*				7	9*
2018							2*				2	9*
2019							17*				17	11*
2020		0					4*				4	8*
2021							0				0	
2022							0				0	

\* Landings from the deep-sea longline fisheries for black scabbardfish (Council regulation (EU) 2016/2285; Council regulation (EU) 2018/2025).

**Table 3.4. Deep-water sharks - Leafscale gulper shark and Portuguese dogfish in the Northeast Atlantic (subareas 4–14). Discards of Portuguese Dogfish available in the period 2010-2022.**

Year	Ireland - all other bottom trawls		France - all other bottom trawls			France - set nets	
	27.6.a	27.7.b.g.j	27.7.h	27.6.a	27.5.b	27.8.b	
2010	0.13						
2011	0.44						
2012	0.12						
2013	0.04						
2014		1.51					
2015	0.03						
2016	0.41						
2017	0.12						
2018			4.18	165.60	1.79	0.06	4.18



**Table 3.5. Deep-water sharks - Leafscale gulper shark and Portuguese dogfish in the Northeast Atlantic (subareas 4–14). Discards of leafscale gulper shark available in the period 2010-2022.**

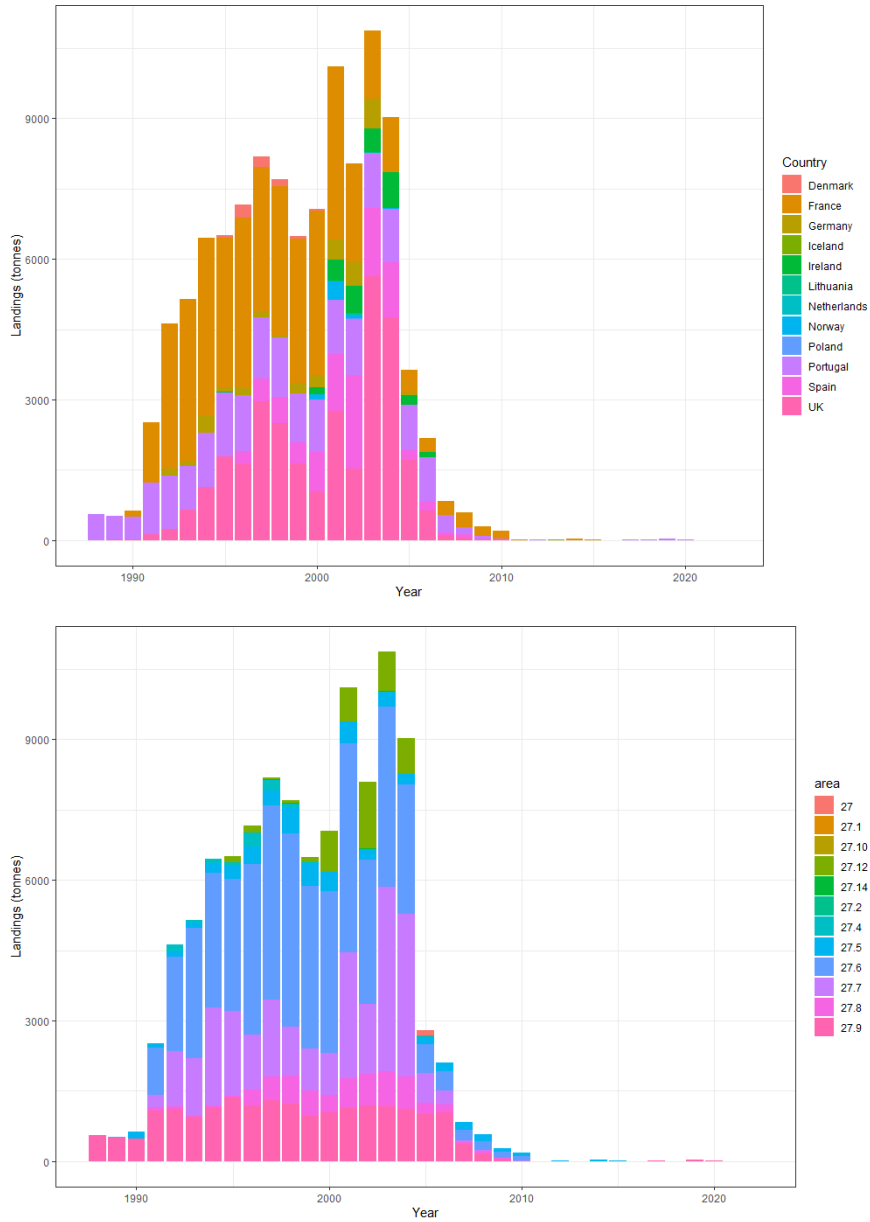
Year	Spain - all other bottom trawls		Spain - set nets	
	27.8c	27.9a	27.8c	27.9a
2018	12.49	6.39		
2019	0.26	0.13		
2021			4.93	0.59

**Table 3.6. Deep-water sharks - Leafscale gulper shark and Portuguese dogfish in the Northeast Atlantic (subareas 4–14). Spanish discard data for Leafscale gulper shark. Numbers of sampled trips and total trips are not available for the years 2010 onward.**

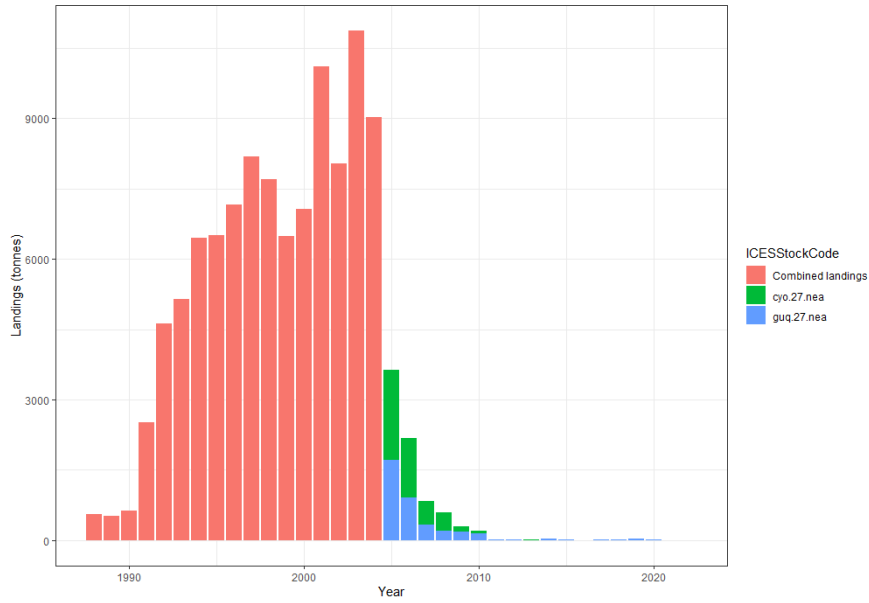
Year	Celtic Sea (subareas 6–7)			Iberian Waters (divisions 8.c–9.a)		
	Sampled trips	Total trips	Raised discards (t)	Sampled trips	Total trips	Raised discards (t)
2003	9	1172	0	51	18 036	0
2004	11	1222	0	53	20 819	0
2005	10	1194	0	97	11 693	4.5
2006	13	1152	3.2	75	18 352	4.1
2007	12	1233	0	95	17 750	0
2008	11	1206	67.3	103	15 114	0
2009	15	1304	61.1	116	14 486	85.9
2010			0			29.2
2011			0			0.9
2012			173.4			0.7
2013			0			0

**Table 3.7. Deep-water sharks - Leafscale gulper shark and Portuguese dogfish in the Northeast Atlantic (subareas 4–14). Total number of fishing trips, number of hauls and number of hauls with catch of Portuguese dogfish and leafscale gulper shark in French on-board observations (2005–2014).**

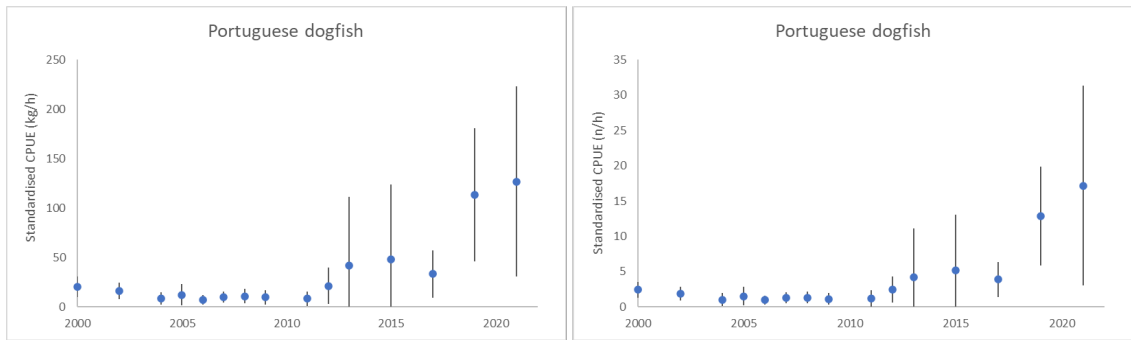
Year	Country	Total number of:		Portuguese dogfish (positive hauls)		Leafscale gulper shark (positive hauls)	
		Trips	Hauls	Number	Proportion	Number	Proportion
2005	France	18	212	26	0.12	9	0.04
2006	France	9	106	18	0.17	1	0.01
2007	France	6	15	1	0.07	35	0.14
2008	France	18	245	12	0.05	143	0.24
2009	France	42	605	89	0.15	120	0.24
2010	France	48	504	93	0.18	71	0.16
2011	France	29	443	67	0.15	93	0.21
2012	France	32	449	35	0.08	79	0.18
2013	France	36	447	27	0.06	72	0.20
2014	France	31	365	34	0.09	9	0.04



**Figure 3.1. Deep-water sharks - Leafscale gulper shark and Portuguese dogfish in the Northeast Atlantic (subareas 4–14). Working Group estimates of combined landings of the two species, by country (top) and by ICES Subarea (bottom).**



**Figure 3.2. Deep-water sharks - Leafscale gulper shark and Portuguese dogfish in the Northeast Atlantic (subareas 4–14). Working Group estimates of landings (combined landings from 1988 to 2004; by species from 2005 to 2022).**



**Figure 3.3. Deep-water sharks - Leafscale gulper shark and Portuguese dogfish in the Northeast Atlantic (subareas 4–14). Mean weight and number of Portuguese dogfish per tow in Scottish deep-water surveys 2000 to 2021.**

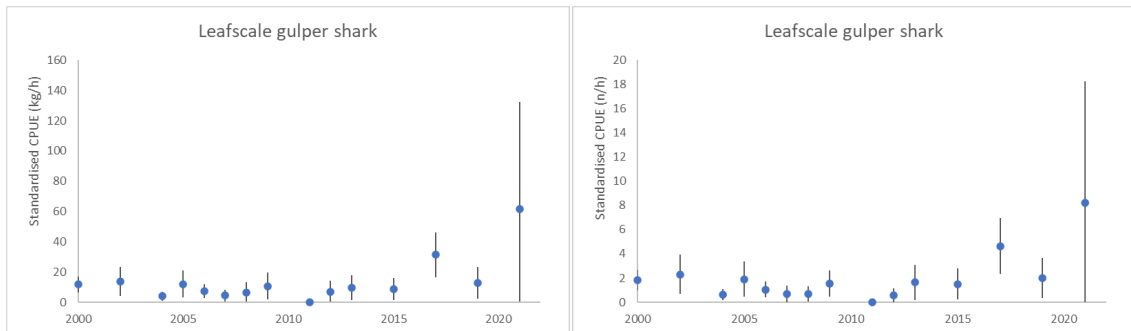


Figure 3.4. Deep-water sharks - Leafscale gulper shark and Portuguese dogfish in the Northeast Atlantic (subareas 4–14). Mean weight and number of leafscale gulper shark per tow in Scottish deep-water surveys 2000 to 2021.

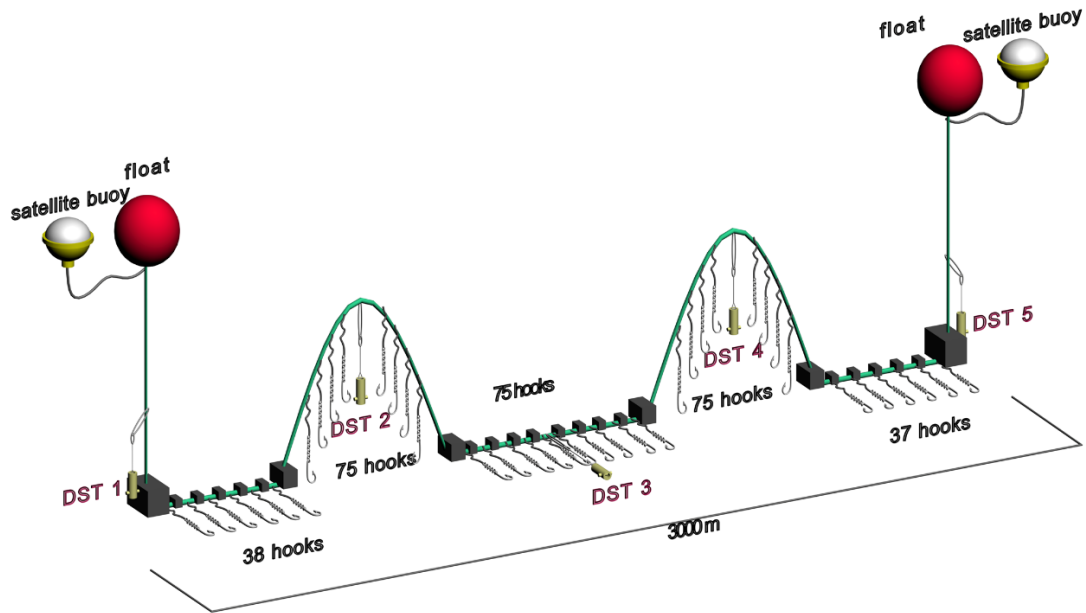


Figure 3.5. Deep-water sharks - Scheme of the final design of long-line fishing gear used in the PALPROF survey (from WD01 - Diez *et al.*, 2020).

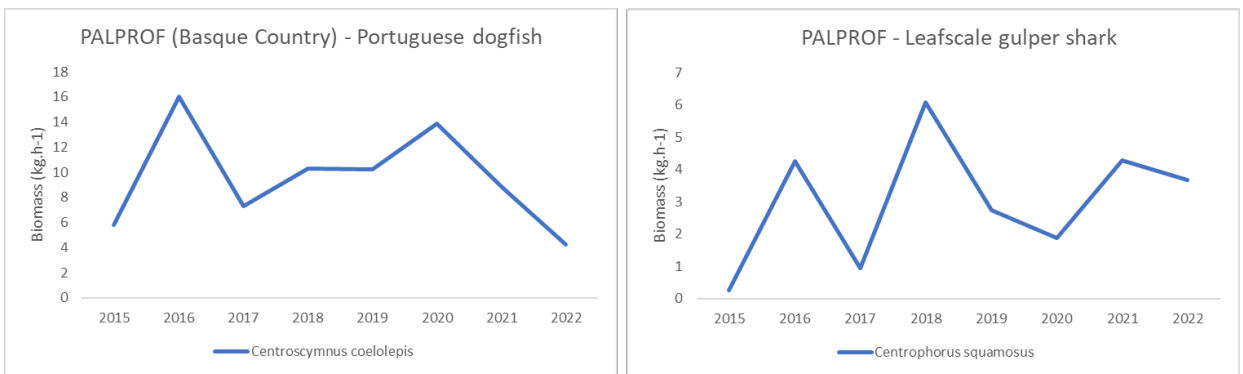


Figure 3.6 Deep-water sharks - Leafscale gulper shark and Portuguese dogfish in the Northeast Atlantic (subareas 4–14)–CPUE (kg hook<sup>-1</sup> min<sup>-1</sup>) estimates for *C. coelolepis* and *C. squamosus* in the PALPROF survey (2015–2022).

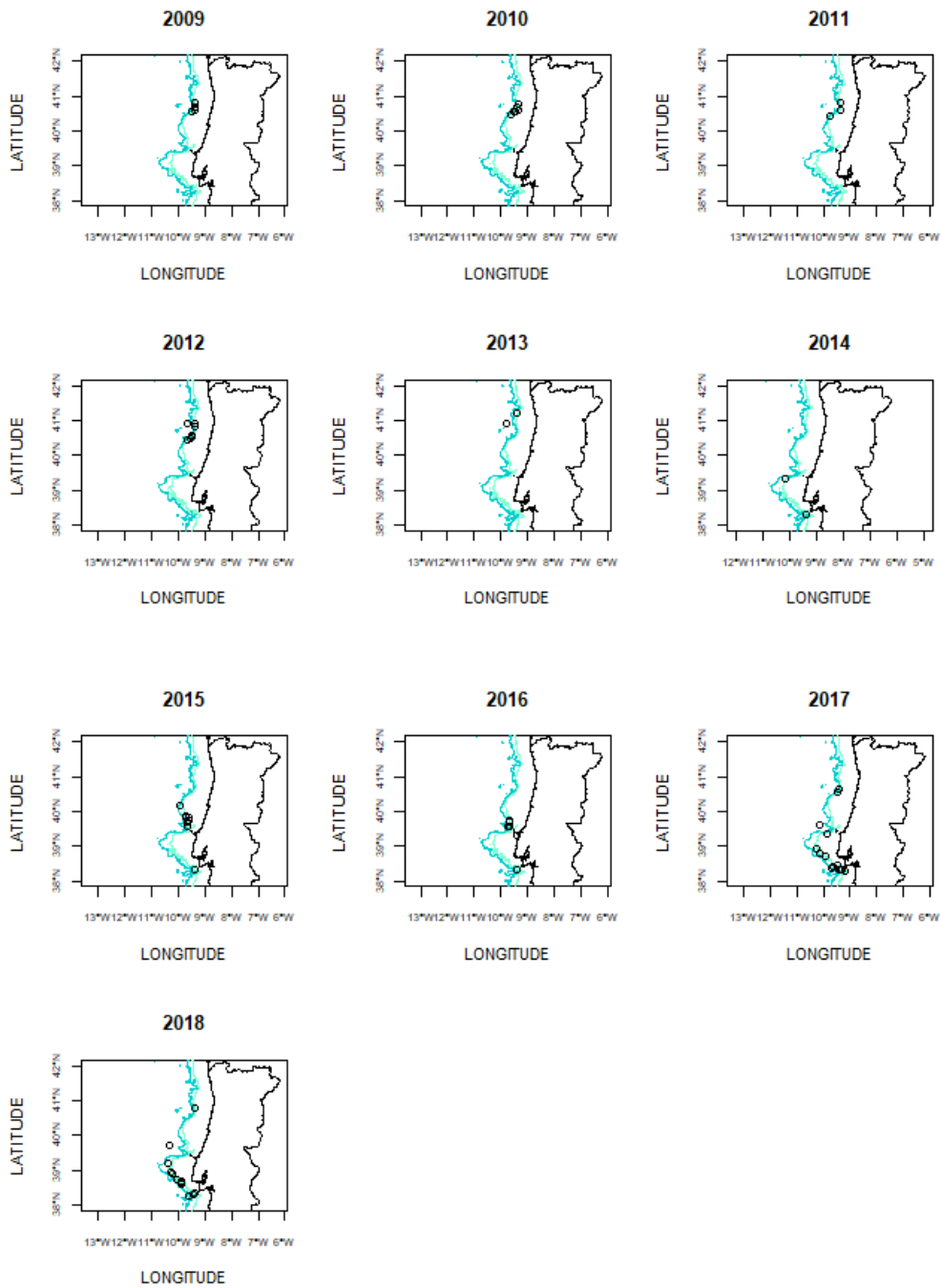


Figure 3.7. Deep-water sharks – Geographic locations of the LLS-DWS métier fishing hauls annually sampled by IPMA from 2009 to 2018.

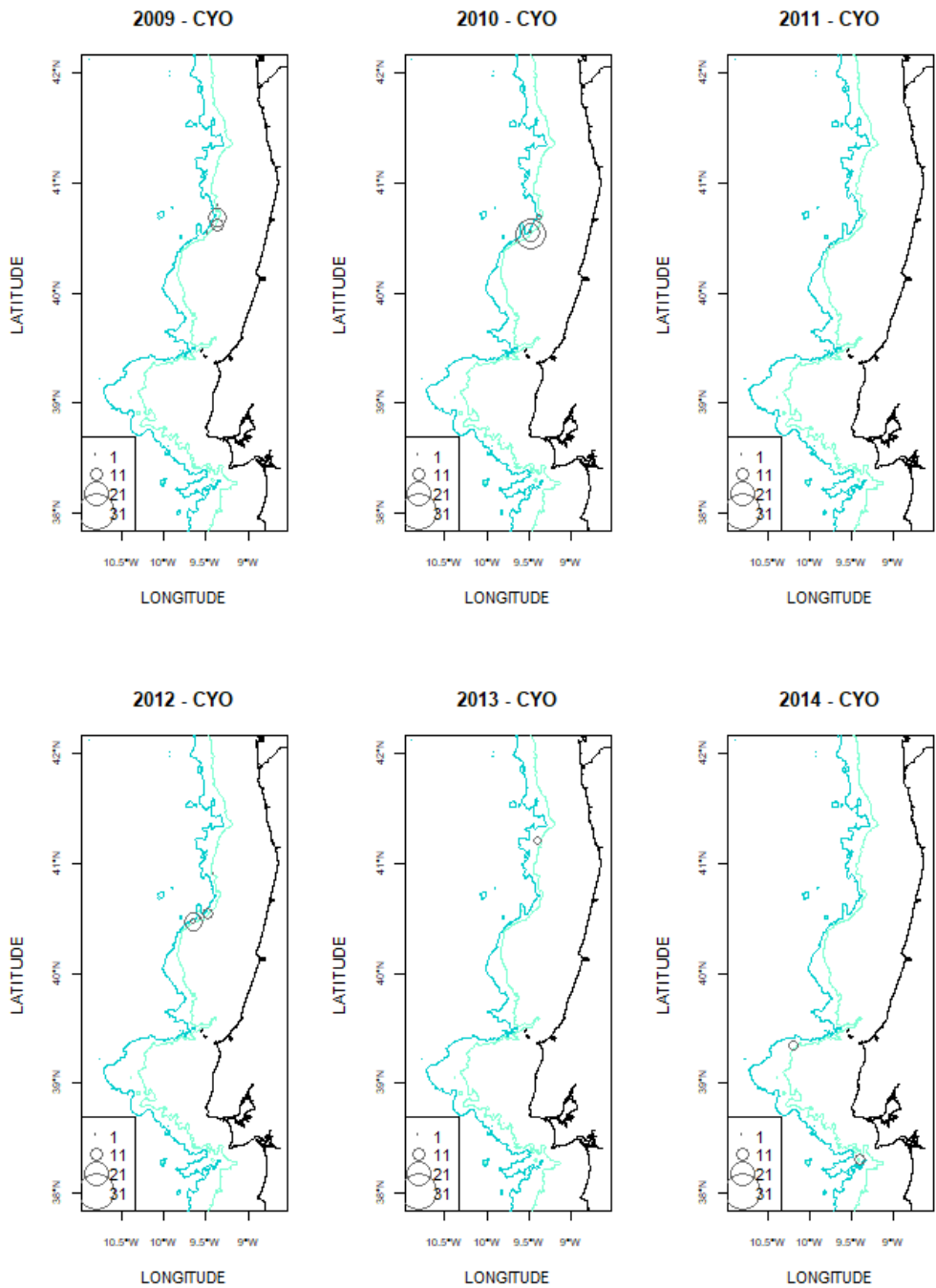


Figure 3.8. Deep-water sharks – Geographic location and number of specimens of *C. coelolepis* caught per fishing haul for the period 2009 to 2018.

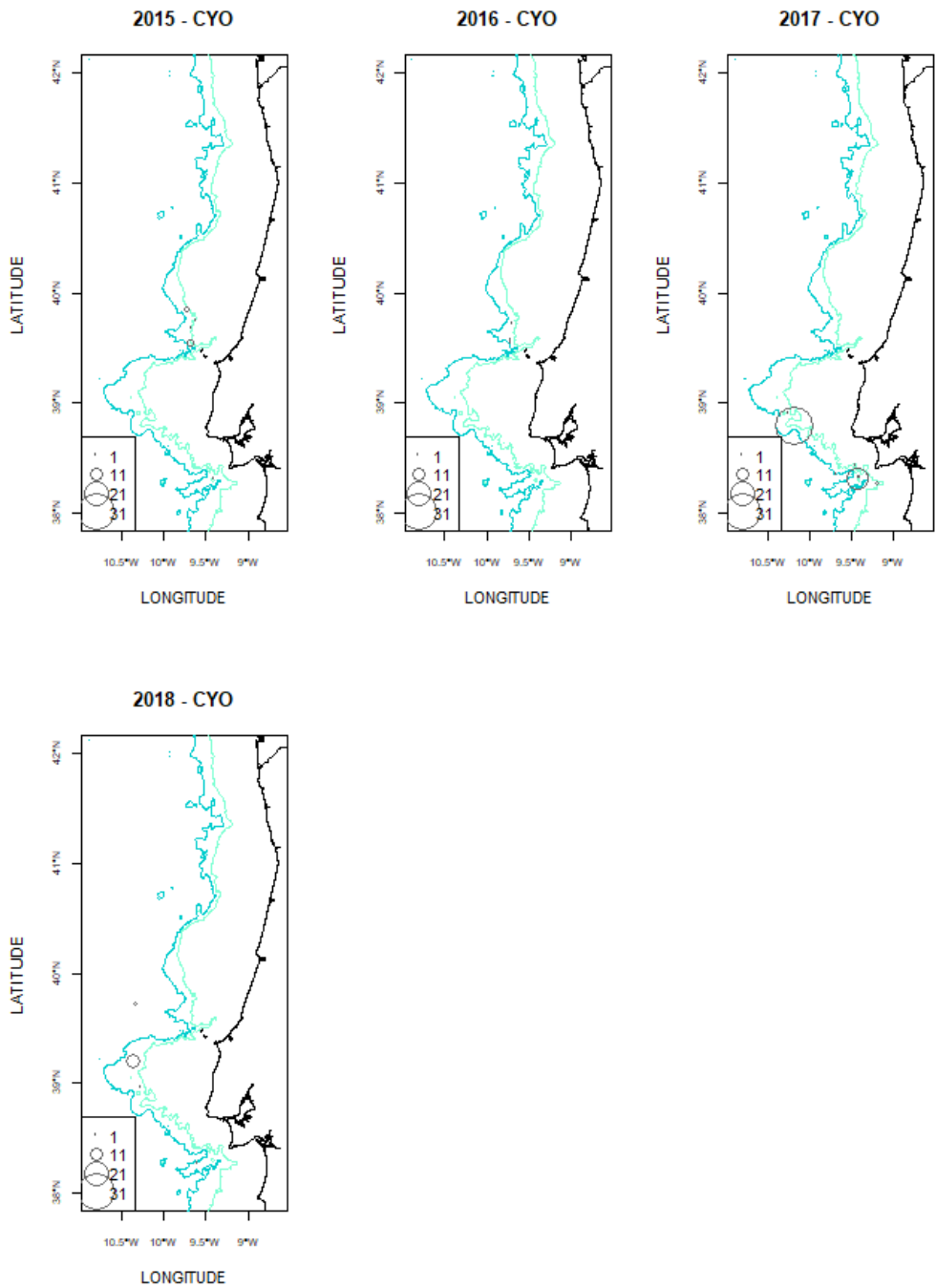


Figure 3.8 continued Deep-water sharks – Geographic location and number of specimens of *C. coelestis* caught per fishing haul for the period 2009 to 2018.

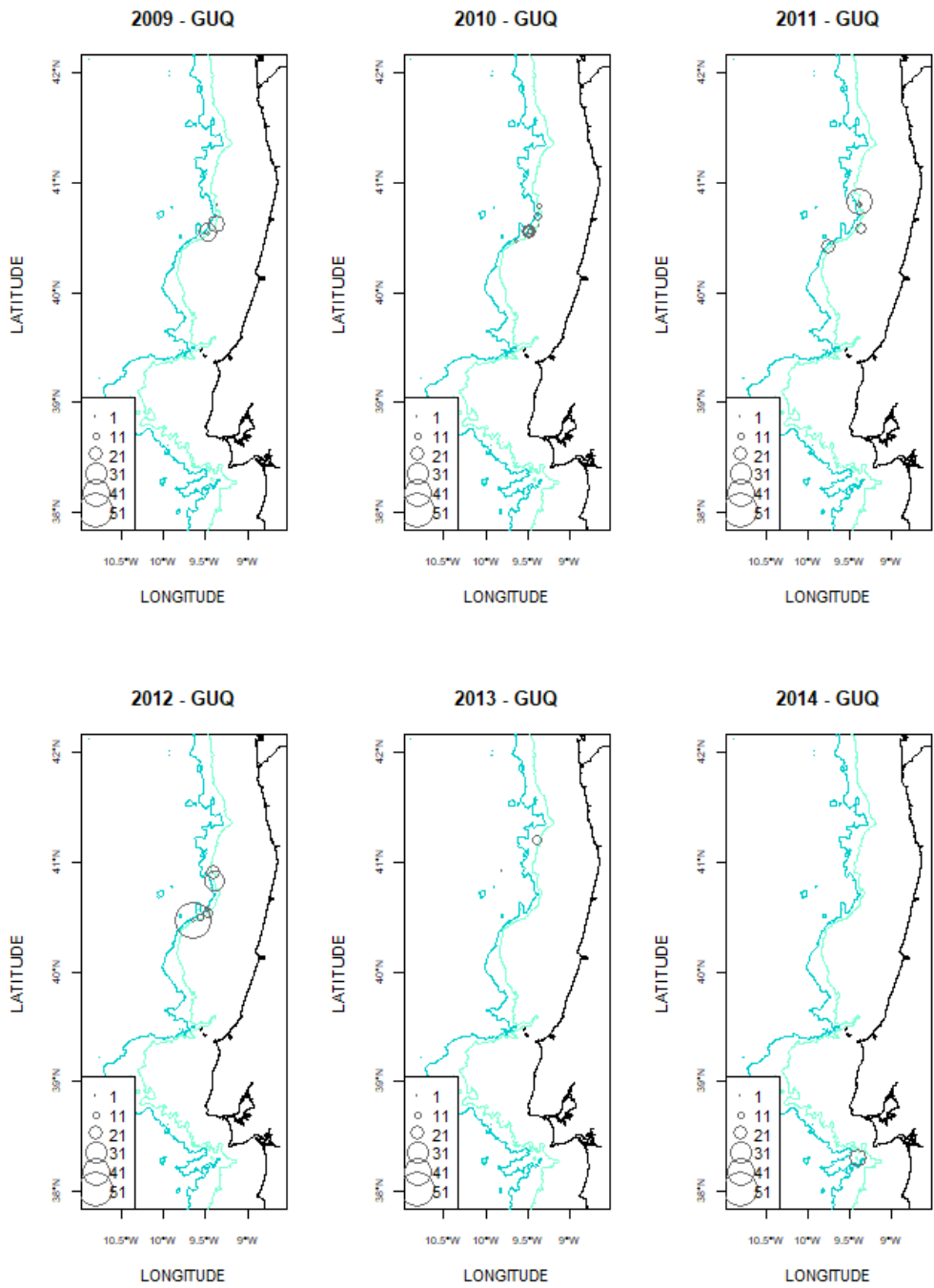


Figure 3.9. Deep-water sharks – Geographic location and number of specimens of *C. squamosus* caught per fishing haul for the period 2009 to 2018.



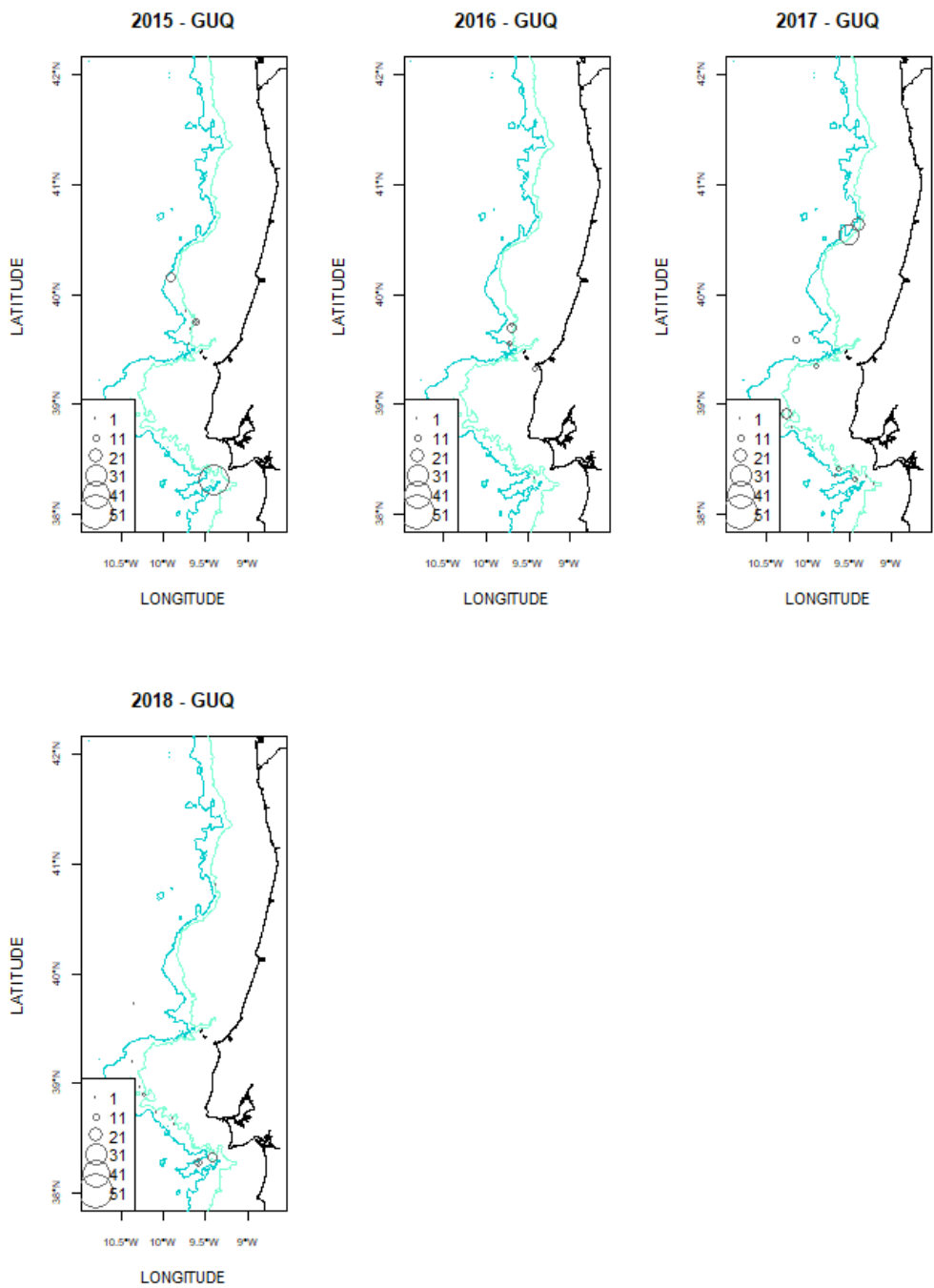


Figure 3.9. *continued* Deep-water sharks – Geographic location and number of specimens of *C. squamosus* caught per fishing haul for the period 2009 to 2018.

## 4 Kitefin shark in the Northeast Atlantic (entire ICES Area)

### 4.1 Stock distribution

Kitefin shark *Dalatias licha* is distributed widely in the deeper waters of the northeast Atlantic, from Norway to northwest Africa and the Gulf of Guinea, including the Mediterranean Sea and NW Atlantic.

The stock identity of kitefin shark in the NE Atlantic is unknown. However, the species seems to be more abundant in the southern area of the Mid-Atlantic Ridge (Subarea 10). Elsewhere in the NE Atlantic, kitefin shark is recorded infrequently. The species is caught as bycatch in mixed deep-water fisheries in subareas 5–7, although at much lesser abundance than the main deep-water sharks (see Section 3), and the species composition of the landings is not accurately known.

For assessment purposes, the Azorean stock (Subarea 10) is considered as a management unit. The Azores archipelago is composed of nine islands with almost no geological continental shelf, and an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) with 461 identified seamounts. The Azores ecoregion (Subarea 10) lies within a much larger open ocean ecosystem, and straddles the Mid-Atlantic Ridge (ICES, 2020a).

### 4.2 The fishery

#### 4.2.1 History of the fishery

A detailed description of historical fisheries can be found in Heessen (2003) and ICES (2003). The Azorean target fishery stopped at the end of the 1990s. Elsewhere in the North Atlantic, it is a frequent bycatch in various deep-water fisheries.

Fishing in the Azores ecoregion occurs mostly around the island slopes and the numerous surrounding offshore seamounts (ICES, 2020b). Historically, Azorean landings of kitefin shark began in the early 1970s and increased rapidly to over 947 tonnes in 1981, fluctuating considerably thereafter, at least in part due to market fluctuations. Landings peaked at 937 tonnes in 1984 and 896 tonnes in 1991. In the 1990s, these landings have declined, possibly as a result of economic problems related to markets. From the early 1990s there has been some landings from other areas, which have declined from 2005 following the implementation and reduction over time of the TAC for deep-sea sharks.

#### 4.2.2 The fishery in 2022

Currently there are no target fisheries for kitefin shark. Landings in the northeast Atlantic have been at low levels since 2005, with most of the catches reported from subareas 7, 8 and 10 (Table 4.1 and Figure 4.1). Small amounts are reported for other subareas but in some cases landings may correspond to coding errors.

#### 4.2.3 ICES advice applicable

ICES advised in 2019 that “*when the precautionary approach is applied, there should be zero catches in each of the years 2020–2023*”.

This is similar to the 2006 advice where ICES advised: “This stock is managed as part of the deep-sea shark fisheries. No targeted fisheries should be permitted unless there are reliable estimates of current exploitation rates and sufficient data to assess productivity. It is recommended that exploitation of this species should only be allowed when indicators and reference points for future harvest have been identified and a management strategy, including appropriate monitoring requirements has been decided upon and is implemented”.

#### 4.2.4 Management applicable

The EU TACs that have been adopted for deep-sea sharks in European Community waters and international waters in different ICES subareas are summarized in the table below. The deep-sea shark category includes the kitefin shark *Dalatias licha* (Council regulation (EC) No 2285/2016).

Year	Subareas 5–9	Subarea 10	Subarea 12 (includes also <i>Deania histricosa</i> and <i>Deania profundorum</i> )
2005 and 2006	6763	14	243
2007	2472 <sup>(1)</sup>	20	99
2008	1646 <sup>(1)</sup>	20	49
2009	824 <sup>(1)</sup>	10 <sup>(1)</sup>	25 <sup>(1)</sup>
2010	0 <sup>(2)</sup>	0 <sup>(2)</sup>	0 <sup>(2)</sup>
2011	0 <sup>(3)</sup>	0 <sup>(3)</sup>	0 <sup>(3)</sup>
2012	0	0	0
2013	0	0	0
2014	0	0	0
2015	0	0	0
2016	0	0	0
2017	10 <sup>(4)</sup>	10 <sup>(4)</sup>	0
2018	10 <sup>(4)</sup>	10 <sup>(4)</sup>	0
2019	7 <sup>(4)</sup>	7 <sup>(4)</sup>	0
2020	7 <sup>(4)</sup>	7 <sup>(4)</sup>	0
2021 <sup>(5)</sup>	---	---	---
2022 <sup>(5)</sup>	---	---	---

(1) Bycatches only. No directed fisheries for deep-sea sharks are permitted.

(2) Bycatches of up to 10% of 2009 quotas are permitted.

(3) Bycatches of up to 3% of 2009 quotas are permitted.

(4) Bycatch only for bottom longline fisheries targeting black scabbardfish.

(5) Species included in the Prohibited list of the TAC regulations

Council Regulation (EC) No 1568/2005 banned the use of trawls and gillnets in waters deeper than 200 m in the Azores, Madeira and Canary Island areas.

Council Regulation (EC) No 41/2007 banned the use of gillnets by Community vessels at depths greater than 600 m in divisions 6.a-b, 7.b-c, 7.j-k and Subarea 12. A maximum bycatch of deep-water shark of 5% is allowed in hake and monkfish gillnet catches and 10% on the bottom longline fisheries targeting black scabbardfish.

A gillnet ban in waters deeper than 200 m is also in operation in the NEAFC regulatory Area (all international waters of the ICES Area). NEAFC also ordered the removal of all such nets from these waters by 1 February 2006.

In 2009, the Azorean Regional Government introduced new technical measures for the demersal/deep-water fisheries (Portaria n.º 43/2009 de 27 de Maio de 2009) including area restrictions by vessel size and gear, and gear restrictions (hook size and maximum number of hooks on the longline gear). These measures have been adapted thereafter. In Azorean waters, there is a network of closed areas (summarized in Section 20). The Condor seamount has been closed to demersal/deep-water fisheries since 2010.

Since 2015 the kitefin shark is included on the EU prohibited species list for Union waters of Division 2.a and Subarea 4 and in all waters of Subareas 1 and 14 (Council Regulation (EC) No 2015/104, Art. 12:1(g)). In 2016 the EU established specific conditions for fishing for deep-sea stocks in the Northeast Atlantic (EU Regulation 2016/2336).

A by-catch TAC for deep-water sharks was allowed for each of the years from 2017 to 2020, on a trial basis, in the directed artisanal deep-sea longline fisheries for black scabbardfish (Council regulation (EU) 2016/2285; Council regulation (EU) 2018/2025). The Council regulation (EU) 2016/2285 affects specifically the Portuguese deep-water longline fishery targeting black scabbardfish in ICES Division 9.a and Subarea 10. According to this, Member States should develop regional management measures for the black scabbardfish fishery and establish specific data-collection measures for deep-sea sharks to ensure their close monitoring. Specifically, 10 tonnes were allowed for deep-sea sharks in Union and international waters of ICES subareas 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9, in Union and international waters of ICES Subarea 10 and in Union waters of CECAF 34.1.1, 34.1.2 and 34.2. This allowance was in accordance with ICES indications according to which in the artisanal deep-sea longline fisheries for black scabbardfish, the restrictive catch limits lead to misreporting of unavoidable by-catches of deep-sea sharks, which are currently discarded dead.

Since 2021 there is a prohibition to fish, to retain on board, to tranship, to relocate or to land some deep-water sharks species (including the kitefin shark) in United Kingdom and Union waters of ICES subarea 4; United Kingdom waters of division 2a; international waters of ICES subareas 1 and 14; United Kingdom, Union and international waters of ICES subareas 6 to 9; United Kingdom and international waters of 5; Union and international waters of ICES subarea 10; Union waters of CECAF areas 34.1.1, 34.1.2 and 34.2; and international waters of ICES subarea 12 (Council Regulation (EU) 2023/194).

## 4.3 Catch data

### 4.3.1 Landings

The annual landings reported from each country are given in Table 4.1 and in Figure 4.1.

### 4.3.2 Discards

No new data were presented this year.

Discard rates of 15–85% of the kitefin shark caught per set were reported from the sampled Azorean longliners during 2004–2010 (ICES, 2012). Since 2011, discards may have increased due to management restrictions (decreasing TACs followed by prohibition), or been landed as unspecified elasmobranchs.

Sporadic and low levels of kitefin shark discards were reported from the Spanish trawl fleets operating in divisions 8.c and 9.a in 2010–2012.

### 4.3.3 Quality of catch data

Historic landings of deep-water sharks taken in the Azores were commonly gutted, finned, beheaded and also skinned. Only the trunks and, in some cases, the livers were landed. Misidentification problems were likely to occur with other deep-water shark species in ICES Division 10.a.

The reported Azorean landings data come exclusively from the commercial first sale of fresh fish at auctions and so landings data (Table 4.1) may be underestimated.

## 4.4 Commercial catch composition

No new information.

## 4.5 Commercial catch–effort data

No new information.

## 4.6 Fishery-independent surveys

Existing research surveys rarely catch kitefin shark, as the surveys are not designed for the species, and thus will not provide relevant information for the assessment.

Relative abundances of kitefin shark (ind.  $h^{-1}$ ) from the Scottish deep-water trawl survey (depth range 500–1000 m) were submitted in 2016 to the group (Table 4.2). These data confirm that only low numbers are caught (<10 specimens are caught each survey). For the entire survey period, a total of 34 specimens (8 males of 60–110 cm, and 26 females of 40–140 cm) have been caught.

Relative biomass estimates of kitefin shark (kg haul $^{-1}$ ) from the Spanish Groundfish Survey on the Porcupine Bank were provided to WGEF (WD Ruiz-Pico *et al.*, 2023). In 2022, the biomass and abundance index of *D. licha* decreased (Figure 4.2). The mean biomass of 2021–2022 was high compared with the 2016–2020 values (Figure 4.3). A total of 8 hauls showed presence of this species, between 375 and 675 m deep, where individuals with sizes from 40 to 86 cm TL were found, mainly in the deepest strata in the south and west of the study area (Figure 4.4–4.5).

Relative biomass estimates of kitefin shark (kg haul $^{-1}$ ) from the bottom trawl survey on the Northern Spanish Shelf were submitted in 2023 to the group (Figure 4.6–4.8; WD Fernández-Zapico *et al.*, 2023). Two individuals sized between 51 and 75 cm were captured in two hauls at 591 and 693 m depth, in the FE sector (Figure 4.7–4.8).

The Azorean longline survey (ARQDACO(P)-Q1) has on average of 495 fishing stations per survey, covering a depth range 50–1200 m. During the period 1995–2018, a total of 102 kitefin sharks were caught, averaging about five individuals per year (Santos *et al.*, 2020). Over the entire time period, specimens were caught at depths of 150–850 m and their total length ranged from 43–150 cm (Santos *et al.*, 2020).

The new PALPROF survey in ICES Division 8.c did not provide survey indicator for kitefin shark as the species was only caught in one out of eight years of this survey (Diez *et al.*, 2023 WD).

## 4.7 Life-history information

There is no new information available.

## 4.8 Exploratory assessment models

Exploratory kitefin shark stock assessments were conducted during the 1980s, using an equilibrium Fox production model (Silva, 1987). The stock was considered intensively exploited with the average observed total catches (809 t) near the estimated maximum sustainable yield (MSY = 933 t). An optimum fishing effort of 281 days fishing bottom nets and 359 trips fishing with handlines was proposed, corresponding approximately to the observed effort.

During the DELASS project (Heessen, 2003), a Bayesian stock assessment approach using the Pella-Tomlinson biomass dynamic model was applied to two fisheries, handline and bottom gill-net (ICES, 2003; 2005). Based on the probability of the Biomass 2001 be less than  $B_{MSY}$ , the stock was considered depleted.

## 4.9 Stock assessment

No new assessment was undertaken in 2023.

In the last assessment (2019), the ICES framework for category 6 was applied (ICES, 2012). For stocks without information on abundance or exploitation, ICES considers that a precautionary reduction of catches should be implemented unless there is ancillary information clearly indicating that the current level of exploitation is appropriate for the stock.

Landings have declined after the early 1990s, which is considered to be partly due to market conditions. In line with the zero TAC, landings have been negligible since 2010 and there are no new data to assess the status of the stock. In its most recent advice for 2020–2023, ICES advises that there should be no fisheries for this stock unless there is evidence that the fisheries will be sustainable.

## 4.10 Quality of assessments

No new assessment was undertaken.

## 4.11 Reference points

No reference points have been proposed for this stock.

## 4.12 Conservation considerations

Kitefin shark is listed as 'Vulnerable' on the IUCN Red List (Finucci *et al.*, 2018)

## 4.13 Management considerations

Preliminary assessment results suggested that the stock might have been depleted to about 50% of virgin biomass. However, further analysis is required to better understand the actual status of the stock. Fisheries for kitefin shark have been affected by fluctuations in the price of shark liver

oil. An analysis of liver oil prices may provide some information on historical exploitation levels of this species.

There are no adequate fishery-independent surveys to monitor the stock. WGEF recommends that the development of a fishery should not be permitted unless data on the level of sustainable catches become available. If an artisanal sentinel fishery is established, it should be accompanied by a data collection programme.

## 4.14 References

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## 4.15 Tables and Figures

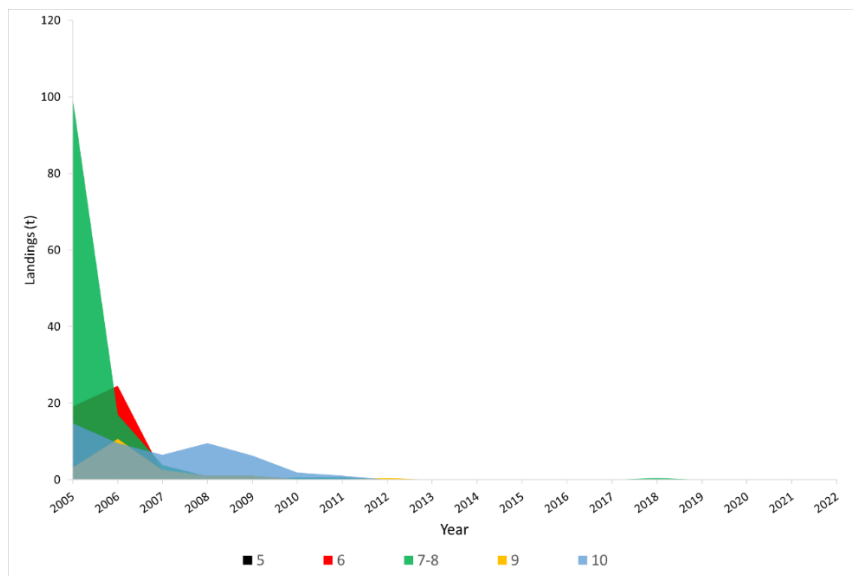
Table 4.1. Kitefin shark in the Northeast Atlantic. Working Group estimates of landings (t) of kitefin shark *Dalatias licha*.

Country	Area	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Total			
Germany	7j	5.9																			5.9		
	7k	15.1																				15.1	
France	27						1.2															1.2	
	5b		1.3																				1.3
	7b						0.1																0.1
	7e											0.0			0.3								0.3
	7g						0.0																0.0
	8a		0.5			0.0					0.0		0.0		0.0								0.5
	8b	1.1	1.4	1.0	0.8	0.2	0.4	0.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0		0.1	0.0	0.1	0.0						5.7
	8c		0.1	0.0				0.1															
UK	6a	19.1	24.5	1.8																			45.5
	7b	0.4		0.3																			0.7
	7c	11.3	0.3																				11.7
	7j	26.4	3.7	1.3																			31.4
	7k	32.3		1.0																			33.3
	8c		0.7																				0.7
	8d		0.1	0.2																			0.3
	8e		1.5																				1.5
Ireland	9b		4.2																				4.2
Ireland	7b	0.0	0.4																				0.4
	7c	4.6	5.3																				9.9
	7j	0.4	0.7																				1.2
	7k	2.2	2.3																				4.5
Portugal	10	0.4																					0.4
	9a	3.2	6.5	2.5	1.1	1.1	0.1	0.2	0.4	0.0	0.0		0.1	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.0						15.3
Portugal	10a	14.3	9.6	6.5	9.6	6.3	1.9	1.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0						49.3
	<b>Total</b>		136.9	63.1	14.7	11.5	7.5	3.7	1.9	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.0	0.5	0.0	0.0					240.7



**Table 4.2. Kitefin shark in the Northeast Atlantic. Relative abundance of kitefin shark (number per hour trawling) from Scottish deep-water survey (depth range 500–1000 m: Only one fish has been caught outside this core depth range) in ICES Subarea 6.**

Year	N° hauls	N° positive hauls	N° fish	Mean Nph
1998	17	2	2	0.05
2000	13	0	0	0.00
2002	16	2	4	0.13
2004	14	2	2	0.07
2005	13	1	4	0.15
2006	20	3	8	0.20
2007	15	2	7	0.23
2008	20	3	5	0.13
2009	27	1	1	0.06
2011	15	1	1	0.07
2012	18	0	0	0.00
2013	11	1	1	0.09



**Figure 4.1. Kitefin shark in the Northeast Atlantic. Total landings of kitefin shark by ICES division.**

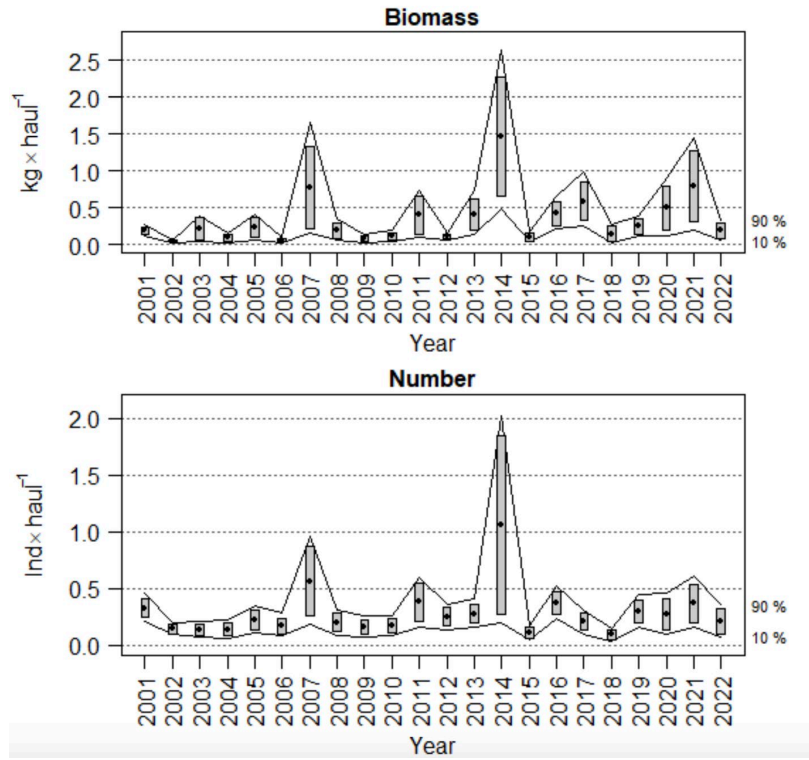


Figure 4.2. Kitefin shark in the Northeast Atlantic. Relative abundance of kitefin shark, in weight (kg/haul) and number from the Spanish groundfish survey on the Porcupine bank. Boxes mark parametric standard error of the stratified biomass index. Lines mark bootstrap confidence intervals ( $\alpha = 0.80$ , bootstrap iterations = 1000). Source: Ruiz-Pico *et al.* (2023).

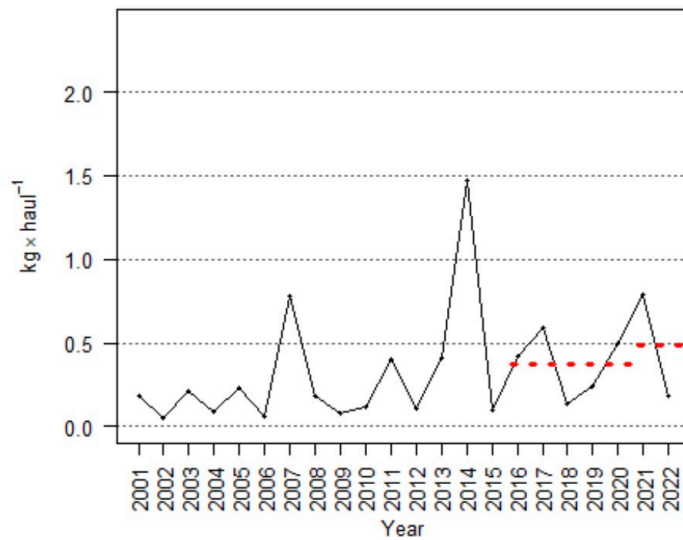


Figure 4.3. Evolution in kitefin shark biomass index in Porcupine surveys (2001–2022). Dotted red lines compare mean stratified biomass in the last two years (2021–2022) with the five previous years (2016–2020). Source: Ruiz-Pico *et al.* (2023).

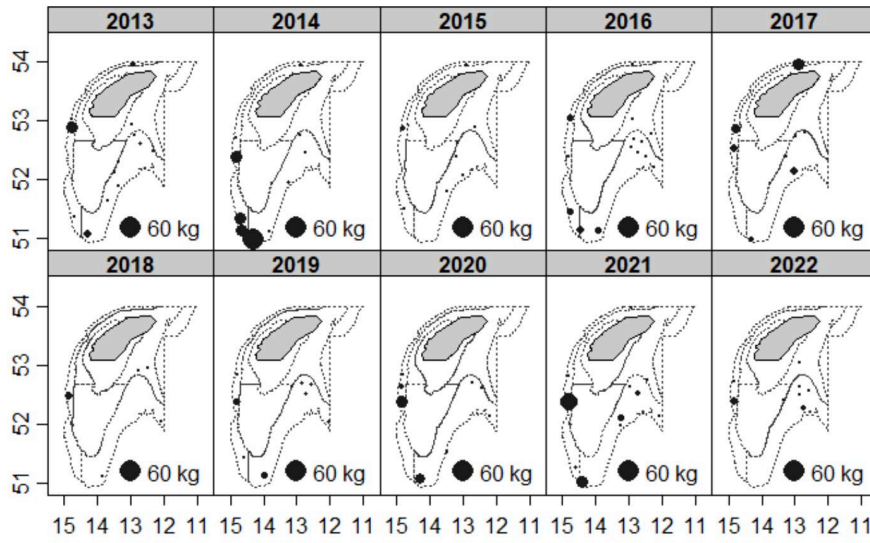


Figure 4.4. Kitefin shark in the Northeast Atlantic. Annual (2012–2022) spatial distribution of kitefin shark (kg/30 min haul) on the Porcupine bank survey. Source: Ruiz-Pico *et al.* (2023).

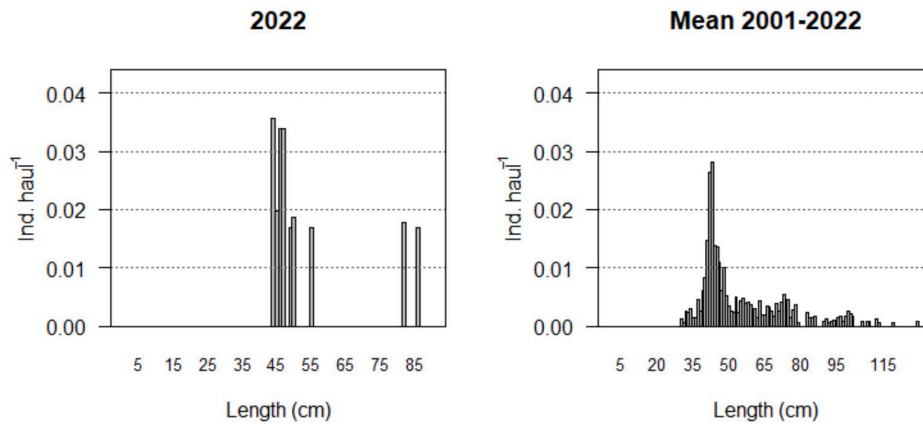


Figure 4.5. Kitefin shark in the Northeast Atlantic. Annual length composition of kitefin shark from the Spanish groundfish survey on the Porcupine Bank. Source: Ruiz-Pico *et al.* (2023).

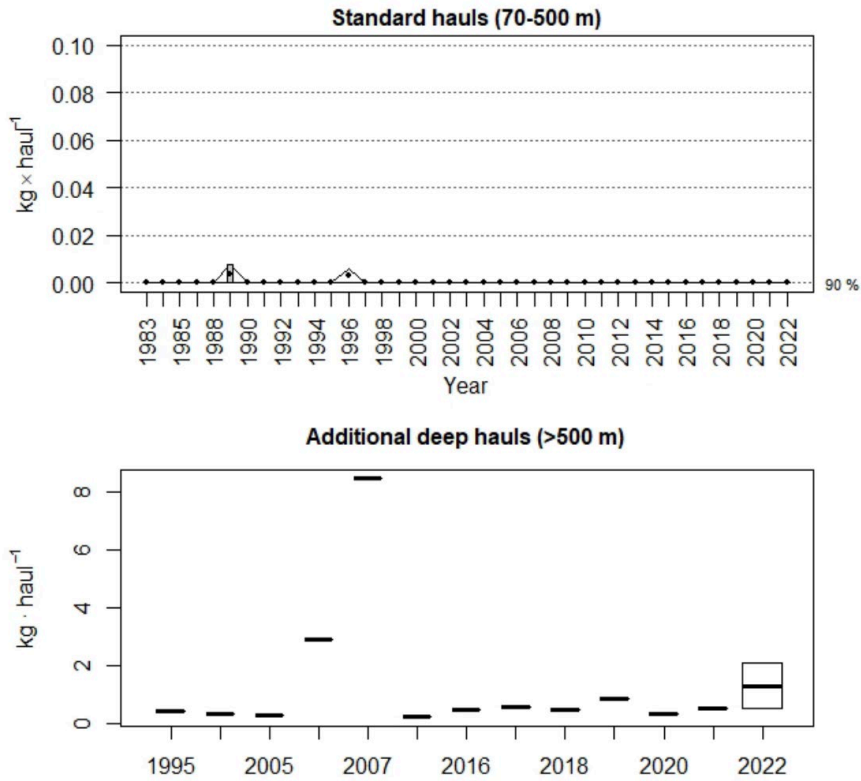


Figure 4.6. Kitefin shark in the Northern Spanish shelf. Relative abundance of kitefin shark in weight (kg/haul) from the Spanish bottom trawl survey in standard hauls (plot at the top) and in additional deep hauls (plot at the bottom). Boxes mark parametric standard error of the stratified biomass index. Lines mark bootstrap confidence intervals ( $\alpha = 0.80$ , bootstrap iterations = 1000). Bottom figure boxplots of biomass considering only hauls with catches of *D. licha* in hauls out of the standard stratification (> 500 m) and not standardized to the area. Horizontal lines mark the median (and unique) value of the catch of the species in the year. Source: Fernández-Zapico *et al.* (2023).

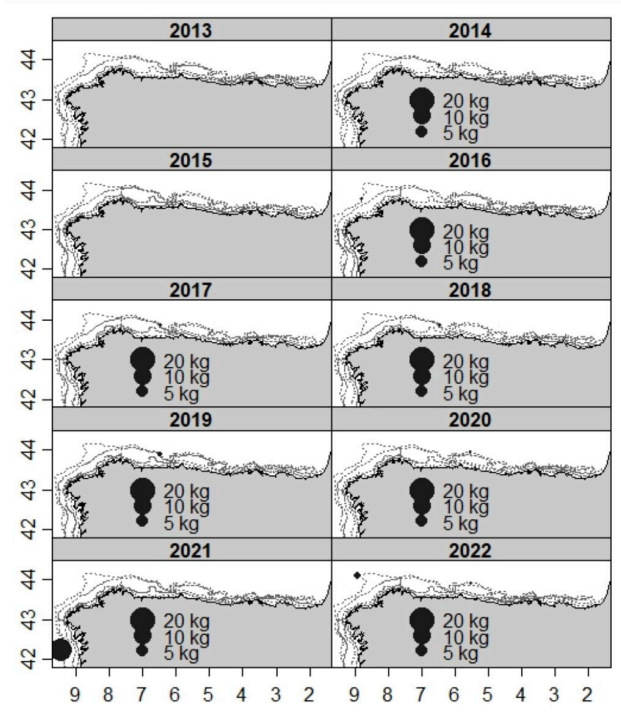


Figure 4.7. Kitefin shark in the Northern Spanish shelf. Annual (2012–2022) spatial distribution of kitefin shark (kg/30 min haul) from the Spanish bottom trawl survey. Source: Fernández-Zapico et al. (2023).

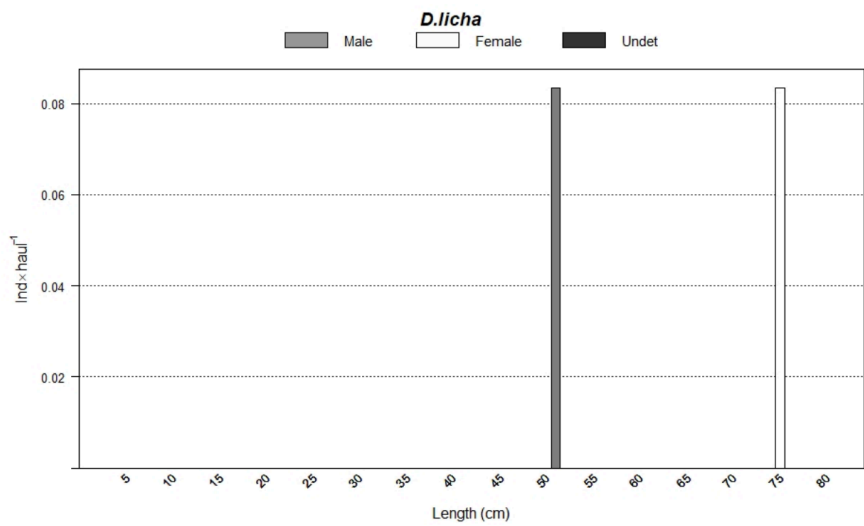


Figure 4.8. Kitefin shark in the Northern Spanish shelf. Annual length composition of kitefin shark from the Spanish bottom trawl survey in additional deep hauls (> 500 m) in 2022 Source: Fernández-Zapico et al. (2023).

## 5 Other deep-water sharks and skates from the North-east Atlantic (ICES subareas 4–14)

### 5.1 Stock distributions

This section includes information about deep-water elasmobranch species other than Portuguese dogfish and leafscale gulper shark (see Section 3), kitefin shark (see Section 4) and Greenland shark (see Section 24). Limited information exists on the majority of the deep-water elasmobranchs considered here, and the stock units for these species are unknown.

The species and generic landing categories for which data are presented are: gulper sharks *Centrophorus* spp., birdbeak dogfish *Deania calceus*, longnose velvet dogfish *Centroscymnus crepidater*, black dogfish *Centroscyllium fabricii*, lanternsharks *nei* *Etmopterus* spp. Historical catches of knifetooth dogfish *Scymnodon ringens*, arrowhead dogfish *Deania profundorum*, bluntnose sixgill shark *Hexanchus griseus*, mouse catshark *Galeus murinus*, velvet belly lanternshark *Etmopterus spinax* and 'aiguillat noir' (which may include *C. fabricii*, *C. crepidater* and *Etmopterus* spp.) are also presented in the stock annex. Other deep-water sharks in the ICES area include: deep-water catsharks *Apristurus* spp., frilled shark *Chlamydoselachus anguineus*, great lanternshark *Etmopterus princeps* and sailfin roughshark (sharpback shark) *Oxynotus paradoxus*.

Fifteen species of skate (Rajidae) are known from deep water in the NE Atlantic: Arctic skate *Amblyraja hyperborea*, Jensen's skate *Amblyraja jenseni*, Krefft's skate *Malacoraja krefftii*, roughskin skate *Malacoraja spinacidervis*, deep-water skate *Rajella bathyphila*, pallid skate *Bathyraja pallida*, Richardson's skate *Bathyraja richardsoni*, Bigelow's skate *Rajella bigelowi*, round skate *Rajella fyllae*, Mid-Atlantic skate *Rajella kukujevi*, spinytail skate *Bathyraja spinicauda*, sailray *Rajella lintea*, Norwegian skate *Dipturus nidarosiensis*, blue pygmy skate *Neoraja caerulea* and Iberian pygmy skate *Neoraja iberica*.

Species such as common skate complex, shagreen skate *Leucoraja fullonica*, starry ray *Amblyraja radiata* and longnose skate *Dipturus oxyrinchus* also distributed in shallower waters down to 500 m and are not considered in this section. The electric ray *Torpedo nobiliana* may also occur in deep waters.

Eight species of rabbitfish (Chondichthyes; Holocephali), including members of the genera *Chimaera*, *Hariotta* and *Rhinochimaera* are a bycatch of some deep-water fisheries and are sometimes marketed. The current zero-TACs for deep-water sharks, whose livers were used to extract squalene, may have led to the increased retention of rabbitfish, particularly common chimaera *Chimaera monstrosa* in Norway to produce "ratfish oil". Catches of Chimaeridae are included in the report of the ICES Working Group on the Biology and Assessment of Deep-sea Fisheries Resources (WGDEEP).

### 5.2 The fishery

#### 5.2.1 History of the fishery

Most species of other deep-water shark and skate species are taken as by-catch in mixed trawl, longline and gillnet fisheries together with Portuguese dogfish, leafscale gulper shark and deep-water teleosts.

## 5.2.2 The fishery in 2022

Deep-water elasmobranch species are usually taken as bycatch in mixed fisheries. Regulations in place (see below) for deep-water sharks' and difficulties in monitoring limit the information available for this group of species.

## 5.2.3 ICES advice applicable

No species-specific advice is given for the shark and skate species considered here.

## 5.2.4 Management applicable

The EU TACs that have been adopted for deep-sea sharks in European Community waters, UK waters and international waters at different ICES subareas are summarized below.

Year	ICES subareas		
	5–9	10	12 (includes also <i>Deania histricosa</i> and <i>Deania profundorum</i> ) <sup>(5)</sup>
2005 and 2006	6763	14	243
2007	2472 <sup>(1)</sup>	20	99
2008	1646 <sup>(1)</sup>	20	49
2009	824 <sup>(1)</sup>	10 <sup>(1)</sup>	25 <sup>(1)</sup>
2010	0 <sup>(2)</sup>	0 <sup>(2)</sup>	0 <sup>(2)</sup>
2011	0 <sup>(3)</sup>	0 <sup>(3)</sup>	0 <sup>(3)</sup>
2012	0	0	0
2013	0	0	0
2014	0	0	0
2015	0	0	0
2016	0	0	0
2017	10 <sup>(4)</sup>	10 <sup>(4)</sup>	0
2018	10 <sup>(4)</sup>	10 <sup>(4)</sup>	0
2019	7 <sup>(4)</sup>	7 <sup>(4)</sup>	0
2020	7 <sup>(4)</sup>	7 <sup>(4)</sup>	0
2021 <sup>(6)</sup>	---	---	---
2022 <sup>(6)</sup>	---	---	---
2023 <sup>(6)</sup>			

(1) Bycatch only. No directed fisheries for deep-sea sharks are permitted.

(2) Bycatch of up to 10% of 2009 quotas is permitted.

(3) Bycatch of up to 3% of 2009 quotas is permitted.

(4) Exclusively for bycatch in longline fishery targeting black scabbardfish. No directed fishery shall be permitted.

(5) Recent studies demonstrated that there is not enough scientific support to discriminate *Deania hystricosa* from its congener *Deania calceus*; they are likely the same species (Rodríguez-Cabello *et al.*, 2020; Stefanni *et al.*, 2021)

(6) Some species included in the prohibited list of the TAC regulations

Since 2013, the deep-sea shark category includes the following species (Council regulation (EC) No 1182/2013): Deep-water catsharks *Apristurus* spp., frilled shark *Chlamydoselachus anguineus*, gulper sharks *Centrophorus* spp., Portuguese dogfish *Centroscymnus coelolepis*, longnose velvet dogfish *Centroscymnus crepidater*, black dogfish *Centroscyllium fabricii*; birdbeak dogfish *Deania calcea*; kitefin shark *Dalatias licha*; greater lantern shark *Etmopterus princeps*; velvet belly *Etmopterus spinax*; mouse catshark *Galeus murinus*; six-gilled shark *Hexanchus griseus*; sailfin roughshark *Oxynotus paradoxus*; knifetooth dogfish *Scymnodon ringens* and Greenland shark *Somniosus microcephalus*.

Since 2013, under NEAFC Recommendation 7, it was required that Contracting Parties prohibit vessels flying their flag in the Regulatory Area from directed fishing for deep-sea sharks on the following list: *Centrophorus granulosus*, *Centrophorus squamosus*, *Centroscyllium fabricii*, *Centroscymnus coelolepis*, *Centroscymnus crepidater*, *Dalatias licha*, *Etmopterus princeps*, *Apristurus* spp., *Chlamydoselachus anguineus*, *Deania calcea*, *Galeus melastomus*, *Galeus murinus*, *Hexanchus griseus*, *Etmopterus spinax*, *Oxynotus paradoxus*, *Scymnodon ringens* and *Somniosus microcephalus*.

Since 2015, the birdbeak dogfish (*D. calcea*) and the great lanternshark (*E. princeps*) have been included on the EU prohibited species list for Union waters of Division 2.a and Subarea 4 and in all waters of Subareas 1 and 14 (Council Regulation (EC) No 2015/104).

A by-catch TAC for deep-water sharks was allowed for each of the years from 2017 to 2020, on a trial basis, in the directed artisanal deep-sea longline fisheries for black scabbardfish (Council regulation (EU) 2016/2285; Council regulation (EU) 2018/2025). According to this limited landing of unavoidable by-catches of deep-sea sharks were allowed and Member States should develop regional management measures for the black scabbardfish fishery and establish specific data-collection measures for deep-sea sharks to ensure their close monitoring. Specifically, 10 and 7 tonnes were allowed for deep-sea sharks in Union and international waters of ICES subareas 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9, in Union and international waters of ICES Subarea 10 and in Union waters of CECAF 34.1.1, 34.1.2 and 34.2 in 2017–2018 and 2019–2020, respectively. This allowance was in accordance with ICES indications according to which in the artisanal deep-sea longline fisheries for black scabbardfish, the restrictive catch limits lead to misreporting of unavoidable by-catches of deep-sea sharks, which are currently discarded dead. These small TACs were no continued in 2021 and 2022.

Since 2021 there is a prohibition to fish, to retain on board, to tranship, to relocate or to land some deep-water sharks species (including some considered in this chapter) in United Kingdom and Union waters of ICES subarea 4; United Kingdom waters of division 2a; international waters of ICES subareas 1 and 14; United Kingdom, Union and international waters of ICES subareas 6 to 9; United Kingdom and international waters of 5; Union and international waters of ICES subarea 10; Union waters of CECAF areas 34.1.1, 34.1.2 and 34.2; and international waters of ICES subarea 12 (Council Regulation (EU) 2023/194).

EU regulations on some deep-water fisheries likely contributed to the reduction of the deep-water sharks fishing mortality. In 2005, the use of trawls and gillnets in waters deeper than 200 m in the Azores, Madeira and Canary Island areas was banned (Council Regulation (EC) No 1568/2005). In 2007, the use of gillnets by Community vessels at depths greater than 600 m in ICES divisions 6.a-b, 7.b-c, 7.j-k and Subarea 12 was banned while a maximum bycatch of deep-water shark of 5% in hake and monkfish gillnet catches was allowed (Council Regulation (EC) No 41/2007). A gillnet ban in waters deeper than 200 m is also in operation in the NEAFC regulatory Area (all international waters of the ICES Area). NEAFC also ordered the removal of all such nets from NEAFC waters by 1 February 2006.

Since 2009, the “rasco (gillnet)” fishing gear was banned at depths lower than the 600 m isobath (EC Regulation 43/2009). The regulation affected 4–6 boats in the Basque Country that used this technique. The “rasco” fleet targets anglerfish *Lophius* spp., which represents around 90% of



catch weight. This métier is highly seasonal, with the highest activity occurring during winter months. Catches during these months tend to occur in deeper waters, where the nets are sunk to depths down to 1000 m.

Since 2016, , fishing with bottom trawls was permitted only < 800 metres (EU Regulation 2016/2336) in order to mitigate the potential damaging impacts of bottom trawling at these depths.

## 5.3 Catch data

### 5.3.1 Landings

Landings estimates from 2005 onwards were revised following WKSHARK2 (updated in WGEF 2018). Information, by species, is presented below. Past information is presented in the stock annex. Due to the management measures in force for deep-water sharks, their landings in 2022 continued to be low (tables 5.1–5.7).

#### **Gulper sharks *Centrophorus* spp. (excluding *C. squamosus*)**

WGEF landings estimates of gulper sharks are presented in tables 5.1 and 5.7.

In 2022, Portugal reported landings of *Centrophorus* spp. but those were < 4 kg.

#### **Birdbeak dogfish *Deania calceus***

WGEF landings estimates of birdbeak dogfish are presented in tables 5.2 and 5.7.

Five European countries reported landings of birdbeak dogfish: Norway, Ireland, UK, Spain and Portugal. In 2022, landings of 386 kg were reported by Norway.

#### **Longnose velvet dogfish *Centroscymnus crepidater***

WGEF landings estimates of longnose velvet dogfish are presented in tables 5.3 and 5.7.

No landings were reported in 2022 for this species.

#### **Black dogfish *Centroscyllium fabricii***

Reported landings of black dogfish are presented in tables 5.4 and 5.7.

In 2022, Iceland reported landings of this species of 271 kg.

#### **Lanternsharks *Etmopterus* spp.**

Reported landings of velvet belly lanternshark *Etmopterus spinax* are presented in Table 5.5 until 2004. Revised landing data provided to WGEF from 2005 onwards indicates that landings assigned to *E. spinax* should be considered as *Etmopterus* spp. Those figures are provided in tables 5.6 and 5.7. Six countries have reported landings of *Etmopterus* spp.: Denmark, Norway, UK, France, Spain and Portugal. Until 2001, highest landings were from Denmark. In 2022, Norway reported *E. spinax* landings of 136 tonnes.

Portuguese landings mainly referred to *Etmopterus spinax* and *Etmopterus pusillus*, however, only a very small proportion of the catches of these species is retained.

Catches of this species by Russian deep-water longline fisheries in the Faroese Fishing Zone and other North-eastern Atlantic areas were reported in working documents to WGEF (Vinnichenko

and Fomin, 2009 WD; Vinnichenko *et al.*, 2010 WD). Landings data from this fishery were not subsequently available to the working group.

### Other species

There are landings information for other deep-water shark species, presented in Table 5.7. Other reported landings are sporadic and very low and thus were not presented.

### 5.3.2 Discards

No new information is available. Given the restrictive EU TACs for deep-water sharks (set to zero in 2010), it was admitted that the discarding in deep-water fisheries had increased. However, with the several EU regulations in place, particularly the ban of gillnet, entangle and trammel net fisheries at depths >600 m and trawl deep-water fisheries at depths >800 m, the potential bycatch and subsequent discarding of deep-water sharks is now thought to be relatively low. Since 2010, that discard information is limited to some years and countries.

Historical discards from Portugal (Azores and mainland) and Spain are available in the stock annex.

**Ireland:** Discard data from Ireland are available from 2009 to 2020 from the trawl fleet operating in ICES divisions 27.6.a and 27.7.b (Table 5.8). Discards are considered negligible as values estimated are <1 tonne in most of the years.

**Denmark:** Discard data from *E. spinax* is available from 2009 to 2017 (Table 5.8). This species is mostly discarded by the trawl fleet from areas 27.3.a, 27.4.a and 27.4.b. Discards varied among years but has remained around 5–6 tonnes in 2016 and 2017.

**Sweden:** Discard data from *E. spinax* is available for 2019 (12.72 tonnes) and 2022 (2.37 tonnes; Table 5.8).

### 5.3.3 Quality of the catch data

Data provided to WGEF since 2017 followed WKSHARK2 guidelines. Despite the decisions taken regarding the assignment of landings to species or higher *taxa* some problems persist. For example, some quantities of deep-water species are maintained grouped in generic categories such as “sharks indetermined”, “unidentified deepwater sharks” or “Squaliformes”.

As a result of restrictive quotas for deep-water sharks, landings of these species may have been misreported.

### 5.3.4 Discard survival

No data available to the Working Group.

## 5.4 Commercial catch composition

No new information is available.

## 5.5 Commercial catch and effort data

No new information is available.

## 5.6 Fishery-independent surveys

### 5.6.1 ICES Subarea 6

The Scottish deep-water trawl survey has operated from 1996 to 2021 at depths of 300–2000 m along the continental slope between approximately 55°N and 59°N (see Neat et al. (2010) for details). Since 2013 that the survey takes place every 2 years. Neat et al. (2015) analysed catches of deep-water elasmobranch species from Scottish deep-water trawl survey. This information is available in the stock annex.

### 5.6.2 ICES Subarea 7

The Spanish survey on the Porcupine Bank (SpPGFS-WIBTS-Q4) in ICES divisions 7.c and 7.k covers an area from longitude 12°W to 15°W and from latitude 51°N to 54°N following the standard IBTS methodology for the western and southern areas (ICES, 2010). A random stratified sampling design is used (Velasco and Serrano, 2003) with two geographical sectors (North and South) and three depth strata (<300 m, 300–450 m and 450–800 m). Haul allocation is proportional to the strata area following a buffered random sampling procedure (as proposed by Kingsley et al., 2004) to avoid the selection of adjacent 5×5 nm rectangles. More details on the survey design and methodology are presented in ICES (2017). Results for 2022 are presented in Ruiz-Pico et al. (WD 2023). The most abundant deep-water shark species in biomass in these surveys were *D. calceus* (birdbeak dogfish), *S. ringens* (knifetooth dogfish), *E. spinax* (velvet belly lantern shark), *D. licha* (kitefin shark), and *H. griseus* (bluntnose six-gill shark). Length distributions for these species are presented in the working document presented to WGEF (see Ruiz-Pico et al., WD 2023).

### 5.6.3 ICES divisions 8.c and 9.a

From 2015 to 2021, AZTI conducted a deep-water longline survey (PALPROF) along the Basque Coast (600–2400 m deep) onboard a commercial longliner, with the objective of estimating and assessing the inter-annual variation of the abundance and biomass indices of the deep-water sharks and other ichthyofauna (WD - Diez et al., 2023; Diez et al. 2021). More information is presented in Section 3.9.2. from Section 3 (3. Deep-water sharks; Leafscale gulper shark and Portuguese dogfish in the Northeast Atlantic (subareas 4–14)).

The Spanish survey in the Cantabrian Sea and Galician waters (SpGFS-WIBTS-Q4) has covered this area annually since 1983 (except 1987), obtaining abundance indices and length distributions for the main commercial species and elasmobranchs. A new vessel (R/V Miguel Oliver) is in use since 2013, but in 2021, due to the vessel breakdown the survey was also partially conducted in R/V Vizconde de Eza, using the same gear. More details on the survey design, methodology and results can be found in ICES (2017). Elasmobranchs represented 7% of the total fish caught in the survey in 2022 (WD - Fernández-Zapico et al., 2023). Length distributions for the most abundant species are presented in the working document presented to WGEF (see WD - Fernández-Zapico et al., 2023).

### 5.6.4 ICES Subarea 10

Data from the Azorean bottom longline survey (ARQDAÇO-L6563) in Division 10.a2 were given in Pinho and Silva (2017, WD) and Santos et al. (2020). *Deania* spp. were the most representative (abundant) species in the survey. *Centroscymnus crepidater* was common, but much less abundant. Other species occurred in very low numbers (averaging 1–4 individuals per year). Depth range

sand length composition data are available. It should be noted that the gear configuration used is not adequate for sampling all the species (Pinho and Silva, 2017 WD).

## 5.7 Life-history information

See stock annex for further details.

## 5.8 Exploratory assessments analyses of relative abundance indices

The exploratory assessments below are all based on analyses of relative abundance or biomass indices in fishery-independent surveys.

Information previously submitted to WGEF for the black dogfish *C. fabricii*, the longnose velvet dogfish *C. crepidater*, the greater lantern shark *E. princeps*, the small-eye catshark *A. microps*, the pale catshark *A. aphyodes* and other deep-water skates and rays are presented in the stock annex.

### 5.8.1 Summary of occurrences and trends by species

#### Birdbeak dogfish *Deania calceus* and Arrowhead dogfish *Deania profundorum*

In the Spanish Porcupine survey (SpPGFS-WIBTS-Q4) survey series, these two species were traditionally registered together, but have been better separated since 2012. The biomass and abundance index of *Deania calceus* decreased in 2022 but remained among the average values of the time series (Figure 5.1). The biomass and abundance of *D. profundorum* in this survey is low (WD - Ruiz-Pico *et al.*, 2023).

In the SpGFS-WIBTS-Q4, both species are more frequent in additional deeper hauls (>500 m) and scarce or absent on the standard hauls (70–500 m) (Figure 5.2). After two years without records, *Deania calceus* has been caught since 2019 although at low biomass values (only one individual was caught in 2022). The biomass caught of *D. profundorum* decreased in relation to the previous year (WD - Fernández-Zapico *et al.*, 2023).

*Deania calceus* has been caught by the PALPROF survey in ICES Division 8.c (2015–2021). The species is frequent (the second most abundant species in most of the years) and the CPUE values are variable but a decrease in biomass was recorded in 2022 (Figure 5.3) (Diez *et al.*, 2023).

#### Knifetooth dogfish *Scymnodon ringens*

In SpPGFS-WIBTS-Q4, the biomass and abundance of *S. ringens* decreased in 2022, after attaining the maximum of the time series in 2021 (Figure 5.4) (WD - Ruiz-Pico *et al.*, 2023). An increase of small specimens ranging from 30 to 41 cm was observed in 2022. Biomass values of this species in the SpGFS-WIBTS-Q4 survey in the Cantabrian Sea and Galician waters are low. This species is mostly caught in the additional deeper hauls (Figure 5.5) (WD02 - Fernández-Zapico *et al.*, 2023).

#### Velvet belly lanternshark *Etmopterus spinax*

In the SpPGFS-WIBTS-Q4, the biomass of *E. spinax* was similar to the value observed in the previous year. The values have been fluctuating throughout the time series without any trend (Figure 5.6; WD - Ruiz-Pico *et al.*, 2023).

In the SpGFS-WIBTS-Q4 survey in the Cantabrian Sea and Galician waters the biomass of *E. spinax* in standard hauls was similar to 2021 (Figure 5.7). The highest fraction of the biomass of

this elasmobranch is usually found in hauls deeper than 500 m. In these additional deep hauls, the mean biomass of this species is also similar to 2021 (WD - Fernández-Zapico *et al.*, 2023).

### **Bluntnose six-gill shark *Hexanchus griseus***

This is not a frequent shark in the SpPGFS-WIBTS-Q4 (eight specimens in 2022) and results should be considered with caution. Abundance and biomass of *H. griseus* in this survey increased in 2022 but is still among the lowest values of the time series. (Figure 5.8) (WD - Ruiz-Pico *et al.*, 2023).

*Hexanchus griseus* is not frequent in the SpGFS-WIBTS-Q4 and results should be considered with caution. Even though, in 2022, the biomass of *H. griseus* in standard hauls increased attaining the highest value of the time series (Figure 5.9). Very few individuals are caught in the deep hauls (WD - Fernández-Zapico *et al.*, 2023).

### **Other deep-water elasmobranchs**

In the 2022 SpPGFS-WIBTS-Q4, there are records of *Oxynotus paradoxus*, *Centroscymnus crepidater*, *Apristurus laurussinii*, *Apristurus manis* and *Centroscyllium fabricii*. *Dipturus nidarosiensis* were caught in nine hauls (WD03 - Ruiz-Pico *et al.*, 2023).

*Centroscymnus crepidater* and *Etmopterus princeps* were caught in the PALPROF survey in ICES Subdivision 8.c and CPUE data is available for the period 2015–2021 (Figure 5.3) (WD04 - Diez *et al.*, 2023).

## **5.9 Stock assessment**

No formal assessments are undertaken for these stocks.

### **5.10 Quality of assessments**

No assessments undertaken.

### **5.11 Reference points**

No reference points have been proposed for any of the species.

### **5.12 Conservation considerations**

The European Red List of marine fishes considers *C. granulosus* to be Critically Endangered, *Echinorhinus brucus*, *D. calceus* and *D. nidarosiensis* as Endangered; and *Centrophorus uyato* and *Oxynotus centrina* as Vulnerable (Nieto *et al.*, 2015).

Recent IUCN assessments for a group of deep-water sharks classified *C. crepidater*, *D. profundorum*, *D. calceus* and *H. griseus* as globally Near Threatened, *S. ringens* as globally Vulnerable, *C. granulosus*, *C. uyato* and *E. brucus* as globally Endangered. All these species were considered to have their populations stable or increasing in the NE Atlantic (Finucci *et al.* 2020a-h).

The gulper shark is included in the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic (OSPAR) List of Threatened and/or Declining Species & Habitats (OSPAR, 2008).

## 5.13 Management considerations

No management advice is given in 2022.

## 5.14 References

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## 5.15 Tables and Figures

**Table 5.1. Other deep-water sharks and skates from the Northeast Atlantic. Working Group estimates of landings of gulper sharks (*Centrophorus granulosus* and *Centrophorus* spp.) in tonnes. Portuguese landings (<sup>1</sup>) are assigned to *Centrophorus* spp. (not *C. squamosus*) whereas Irish landings (<sup>2</sup>) are assigned to *C. granulosus*. Estimates from 2005 onwards were revised following WKSHARK2. Blank cells = no data; 0 = landings <0.5 t.**

	UK	Portugal <sup>1</sup>	Spain	Ireland <sup>2</sup>	Total
1990		1056			1056
1991		801			801
1992		958			958
1993		886			886
1994		344			344
1995		423			423
1996		242			242
1997		291			291
1998		187			187
1999		95			95
2000		54			54
2001		96			96
2002		159	8		167
2003	643	203			846
2004	481	89			570
2005		49		14	64
2006		100			100
2007		62			62
2008		56			56
2009		17			17
2010		7			7
2011		2	0		2
2012		1			1
2013		0			0
2014		0			0
2015		0			0
2016		0			0
2017		2			2
2018		4			4
2019		0			0
2020		0.5			0.5
2021		0			0
2022		0			0



**Table 5.2. Other deep-water sharks and skates from the Northeast Atlantic. Working Group estimates of landings of birdbeak dogfish (*Deania calceus*), in tonnes. Estimates from 2005 onwards were revised following WKSHARK2. Blank cells = no data; 0 = landings <0.5 t.**

	Ireland	Spain	UK	France	Portugal	Norway	Total
1990							
1991							
1992							
1993							
1994							
1995							
1996							
1997							
1998							
1999							
2000					13		13
2001			1		37		38
2002		5	+		67		72
2003			3		72		75
2004			38		157		195
2005			50		146		195
2006			22		75		96
2007					37		37
2008				5	57		62
2009				2	22		25
2010				+	3		3
2011					1		1
2012	2				1		3
2013					0	0	0
2014						0	0
2015					0	0	0
2016						0	0
2017					2	0	3
2018					1	0	1
2019					5	0	5
2020					2	0	2
2021						0	0
2022						0	0

**Table 5.3. Other deep-water sharks and skates from the Northeast Atlantic. Working Group estimates of landings of longnose velvet dogfish (*Centroscymnus crepidater*), in tonnes. Estimates from 2005 onwards were revised following WKSHARK2. Blank cells = no data; 0 = landings <0.5 t.**

	France	Ireland	UK	Portugal	Spain	Total
1990						
1991						
1992						
1993						
1994						
1995						
1996						
1997						
1998						
1999	0		0			0
2000	0		0	1	85	86
2001	0		0	3	68	71
2002	13		0	4		17
2003	10		21	2		33
2004	8		7	1		16
2005	10		209	3		222
2006	4		409	7		420
2007	2	2	109	18		131
2008	4			33		37
2009	6			27		33
2010	40			0		40
2011						
2012						
2013						
2014				0		0
2015				0		0
2016	0			0		0
2017				1		1
2018				1		1
2019				1		1
2020				0		0
2021						
2022						

**Table 5.4. Other deep-water sharks and skates from the Northeast Atlantic. Working Group estimates of landings of black dogfish (*Centroscyllium fabricii*), in tonnes. Estimates from 2005 onwards were revised following WKSHARK2. Blank cells = no data; 0 = landings <0.5 t.**

	France	Iceland	UK	Spain	Total
1990					
1991					
1992			1		
1993					
1994					
1995			1		
1996			4		
1997					
1998					
1999	0				
2000	382			85	467
2001	395			91	486
2002	47	0			47
2003	90	0	0		90
2004	49	.	0		49
2005	12		5		17
2006	3				3
2007	6				6
2008	136				136
2009	99	1			101
2010	85	10			95
2011	0	1			1
2012	1	3			3
2013	0	1			1
2014	9	0			9
2015	0	2			2
2016	0	0			0
2017					0
2018					
2019					
2020		0			0
2021		0			0
2022		0			0

**Table 5.5. Other deep-water sharks and skates from the Northeast Atlantic. Working Group estimates of landings of velvet belly lanternshark (*Etmopterus spinax*), in tonnes. Blank cells = no data; 0 = landings <0.5 t.**

	Norway	Denmark	Spain	France	Total
1990					
1991					
1992					
1993		27			27
1994		0			0
1995		10			10
1996		8			8
1997		32			32
1998		359			359
1999		128			128
2000		25			25
2001		52			52
2002			85		85
2003					
2004					

**Table 5.6. Other deep-water sharks and skates from the Northeast Atlantic. Working Group estimates of landings of *Etmopterus* spp., in tonnes. Estimates from 2005 onwards were revised following WKSHARK2. Blank cells = no data; 0 = landings <0.5 t.**

	Denmark	Norway	France	Spain	Portugal	UK	total
1990							
1991							
1992							
1993							
1994			846		0		846
1995			2388		0		2388
1996			2888		0		2888
1997			2150		0		2150
1998			2043				2043
1999			0				0
2000			0	38	0		38
2001			0	338			338
2002			0	99			99
2003			0				0
2004			0		0		0
2005	16			2	0	9	27
2006	17			27	0		44
2007	9			87		8	103
2008	46		0	6		20	72

	Denmark	Norway	France	Spain	Portugal	UK	total
2009			1	9			9
2010	4	9	2				15
2011		4	1	1*	0	0	5
2012		13	0	2*	0		13
2013		19	0			0	19
2014		47				0	47
2015		27	1		0	0	28
2016		59	0				59
2017		129	0				129
2018		106**				4**	110
2019		163**				7**	170
2020		171**					171
2021		117**				0.52**	118
2022		136**					136

\* assigned to *Etmopterus pusillus*

\*\* assigned to *Etmopterus spinax*

**Table 5.7. Other deep-water sharks and skates from the Northeast Atlantic. Working Group estimates of landings by species since 2005, after revision following WKSHARK2 (in tonnes), (DWS = Unspecified deep-water sharks). Blank cells = no data; 0 = landings <0.5 t.**

Species	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Gulper shark	64	100	62	56	17	7	2	1	0	0	0	0	2	4	0	1	0	0
<i>Centroscymnus</i> spp.	545	514	699	537	384													
Birdbeak dogfish	195	96	37	62	25	3	1	3	0	0	0	0	3	1	5	2	0	0
Longnose velvet dogfish	222	420	131	37	33	40				0	0	0	1	1	1	0		
Black dogfish	17	3	6	136	101	95	1	3	1	9	2	0				0	0	0
Lanternsharks	27	44	103	72	9	15	5	13	19	47	28	59	129	110	170	171	118	136
Knifetooth dogfish	65	56	161	156	36	53	2	3	0	0								
Arrowhead dogfish			1		0	1	2	1			0		1					
Bluntnose sixgill shark	13	13	54	2	5	2	2	1	2	0	1	0				0		
Mouse catshark			0	0	3	2	5	1	4	4	2	3						
Unidentified DWS*	110	62	111	51	37	40	42	175	89	118	85	91	131	150	168	155		

\* Also allocated to "Squaliformes" and "unidentified deep-water squaloid sharks and dogfishes"



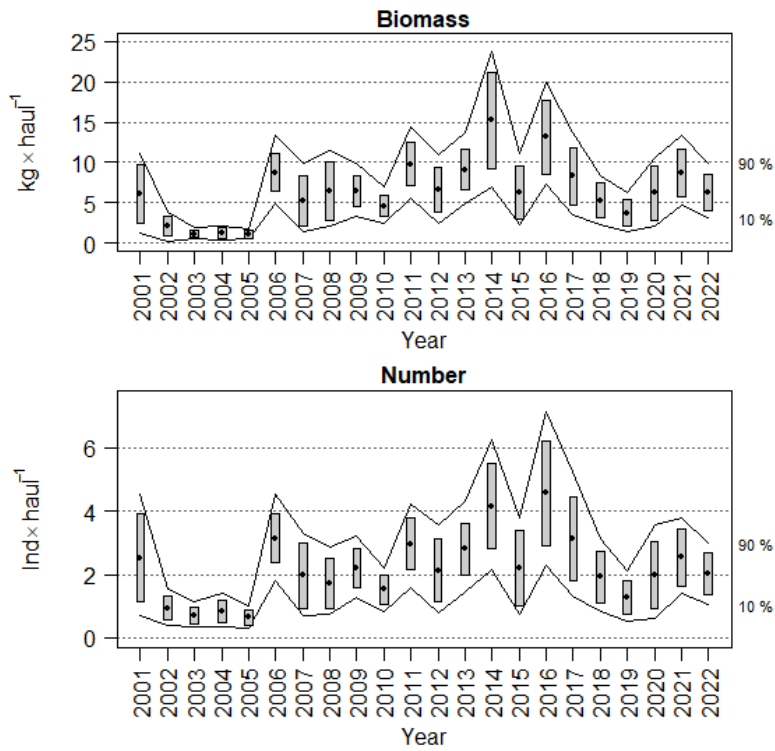


Figure 5.1. Other deep-water sharks and skates from the Northeast Atlantic. *Deania* spp., mainly birdbeak dogfish *Deania calceus* biomass index (kg haul<sup>-1</sup>) from the Spanish Porcupine survey time-series (SpPGFS-WIBTS-Q4, 2001–2022). Boxes show parametric standard error of the stratified biomass index. Lines mark bootstrap confidence intervals ( $\alpha = 0.80$ , bootstrap iterations = 1000). From Ruiz-Pico *et al.*, 2023. (WD - 2023).



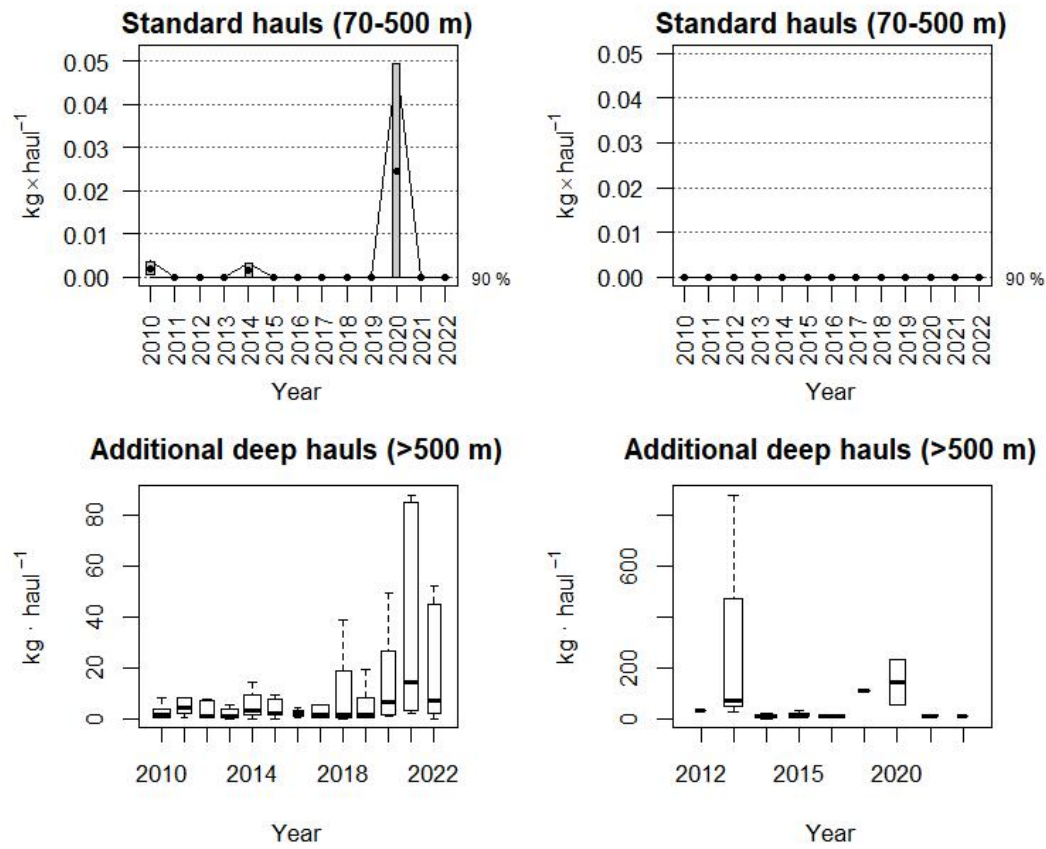


Figure 5.2. Other deep-water sharks and skates from the Northeast Atlantic. Evolution of *Deania profundorum* and *Deania calceus* stratified biomass index in standard hauls and in additional deep hauls during the North Spanish shelf bottom trawl survey time series (SpGFS-WIBTS-Q4, 2009–2022). Boxes mark parametric standard error of the stratified biomass index. Lines mark bootstrap confidence intervals ( $\alpha = 0.80$ , bootstrap iterations = 1000). From Fernández-Zapico *et al.* (WD - 2023).

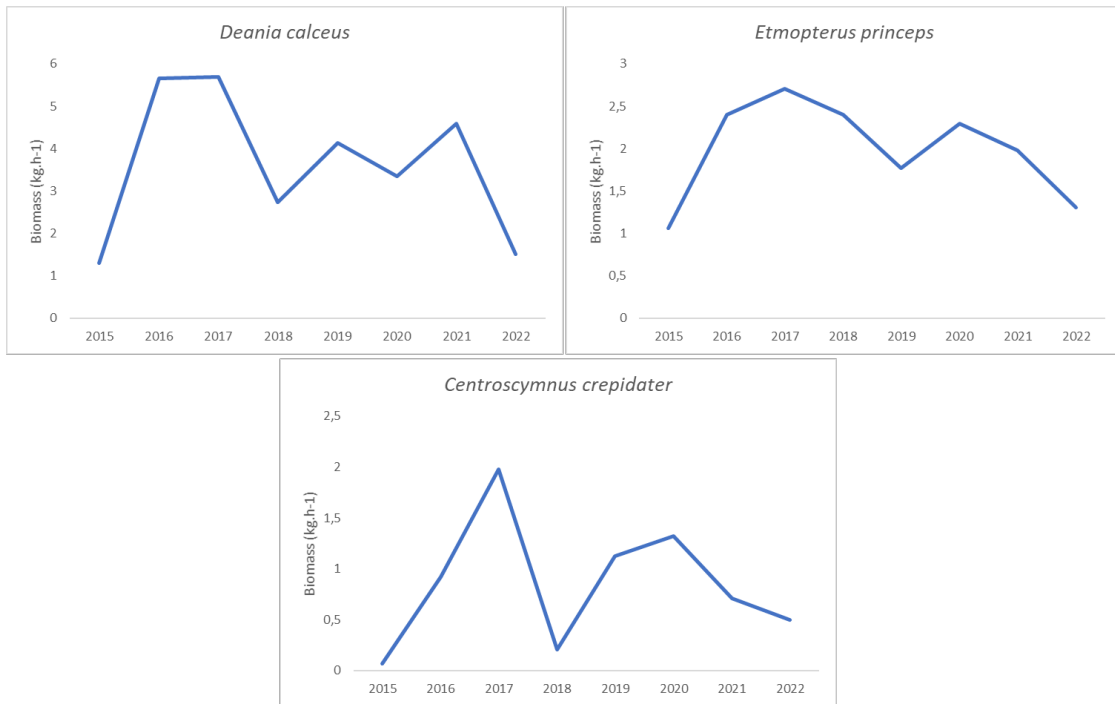


Figure 5.3. Other deep-water sharks and skates from the Northeast Atlantic. CPUE of *Deania calceus*, *Etmopterus princeps* and *Centroscygnus crepidater* caught by the PALPROF survey conducted in the coast along the Basque Country in the period 2015–2022.

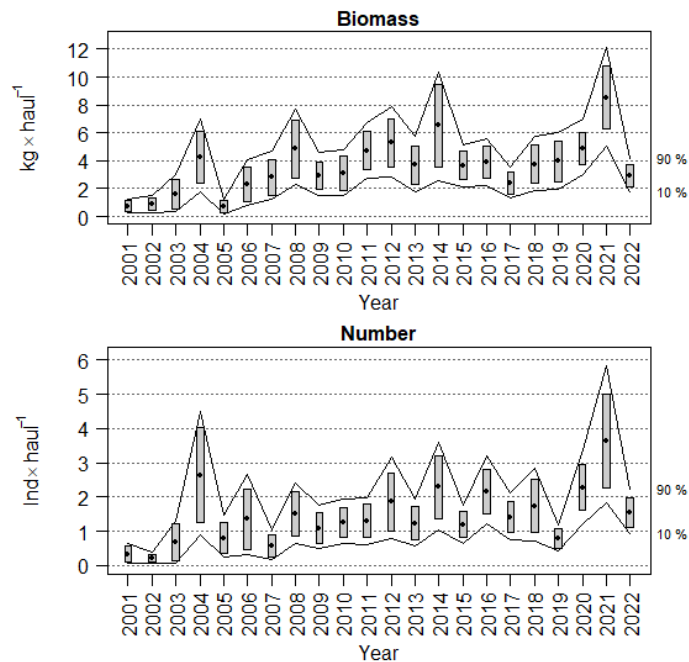


Figure 5.4. Other deep-water sharks and skates from the Northeast Atlantic. Knifetooth dogfish *Scymnodon ringens* biomass index (top, kg haul<sup>-1</sup>) and abundance index (bottom, numbers). Haul in the Spanish Porcupine survey time-series (SpPGFS-WIBTS-Q4, 2001–2022). Boxes mark parametric standard error of the stratified biomass index. Lines mark bootstrap confidence intervals ( $\alpha = 0.80$ , bootstrap iterations = 1000). From Ruiz-Pico *et al.*, 2023. (WD - 2023).

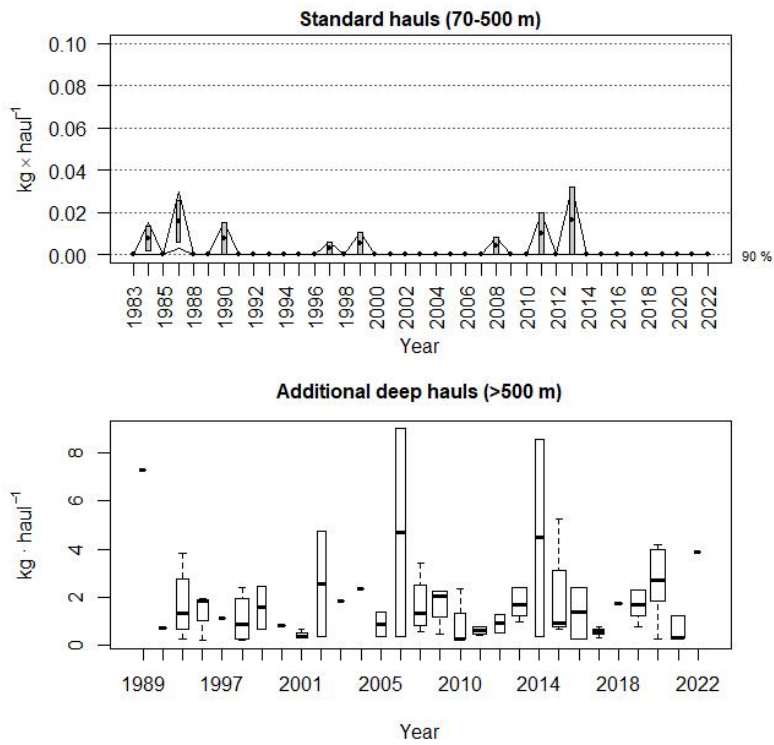


Figure 5.5. Other deep-water sharks and skates from the Northeast Atlantic. Evolution of *Scymnodon ringens* stratified biomass index in standard hauls and in additional deep hauls during the North Spanish shelf bottom trawl survey time series (SpGFS-WIBTS-Q4, 1983–2022). Boxes mark parametric standard error of the stratified biomass index. Lines mark bootstrap confidence intervals ( $\alpha = 0.80$ , bootstrap iterations = 1000). From Fernández-Zapico *et al.* (WD - 2023).

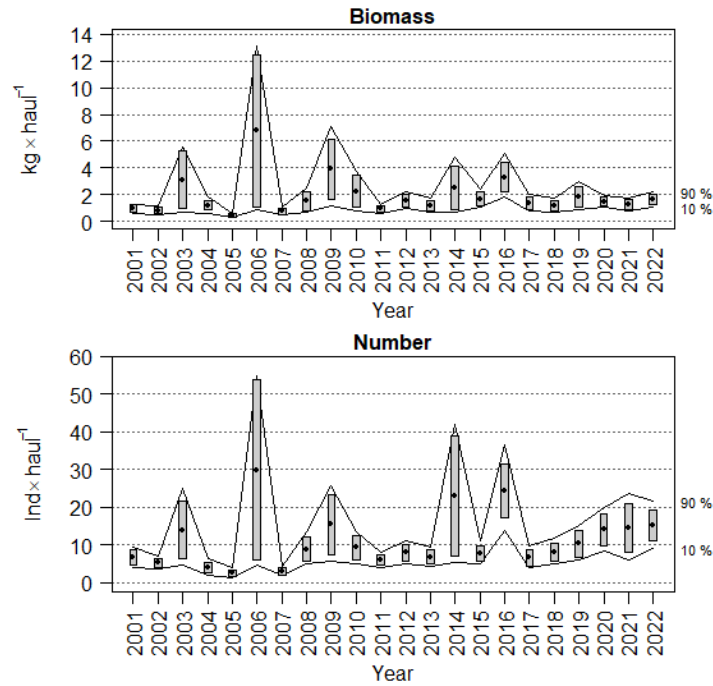


Figure 5.6. Other deep-water sharks and skates from the Northeast Atlantic. *Etmopterus spinax* biomass index (top, kg haul<sup>-1</sup>) and abundance index (bottom, numbers haul<sup>-1</sup>) during Porcupine survey time-series (SpPGFS-WIBTS-Q4, 2001–2022). Boxes mark parametric standard error of the stratified biomass index. Lines mark bootstrap confidence intervals ( $\alpha = 0.80$ , bootstrap iterations = 1000). From Ruiz-Pico *et al.*, 2023. (WD - 2023).

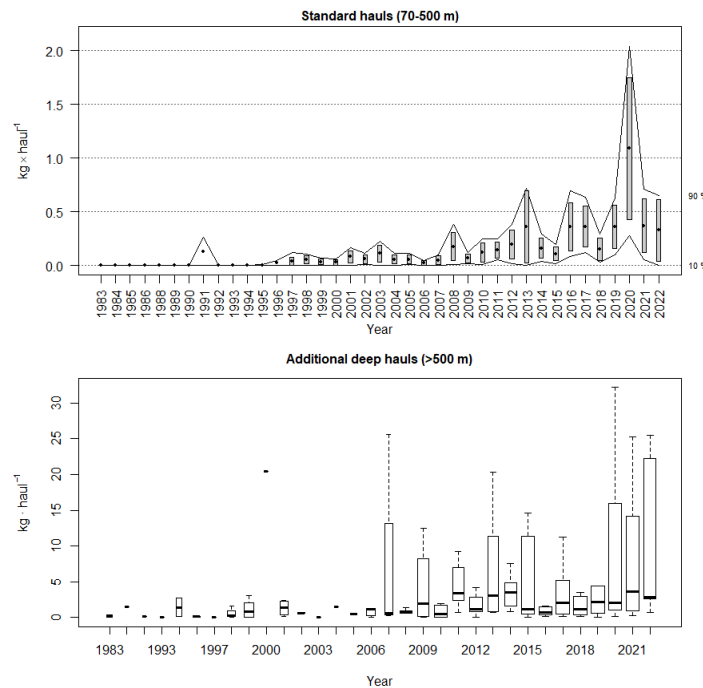


Figure 5.7. Other deep-water sharks and skates from the Northeast Atlantic. Evolution of *Etmopterus spinax* stratified biomass index in standard hauls and in additional deep hauls during the North Spanish shelf bottom trawl survey time series (SpGFS-WIBTS-Q4, 1983–2022) covered by the survey. Boxes mark parametric standard error of the stratified biomass index. Lines mark bootstrap confidence intervals ( $\alpha = 0.80$ , bootstrap iterations = 1000). From Fernández-Zapico *et al.* (WD - 2023).

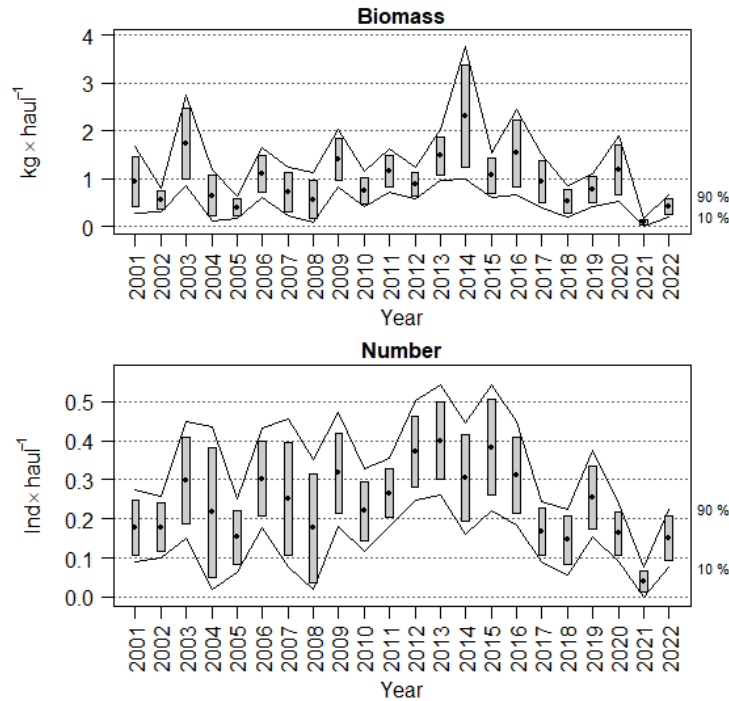


Figure 5.8. Other deep-water sharks and skates from the Northeast Atlantic. Changes in bluntnose six-gill shark *Hexanchus griseus* biomass index ( $\text{kg haul}^{-1}$ ) during Porcupine survey time-series (SpPGFS-WIBTS-Q4, 2001–2022). Boxes mark parametric standard error of the stratified biomass index. Lines mark bootstrap confidence intervals ( $\alpha = 0.80$ , bootstrap iterations = 1000). From Ruiz-Pico *et al.*, 2023. (WD - 2023).

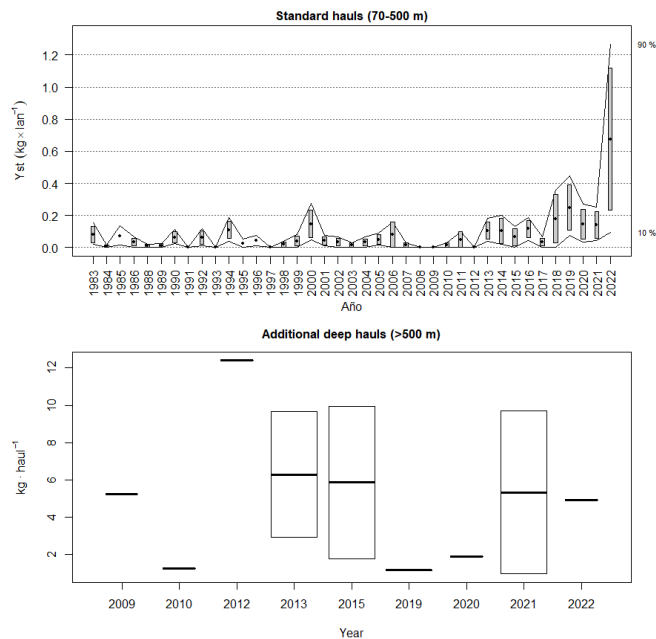


Figure 5.9. Other deep-water sharks and skates from the Northeast Atlantic. Evolution of *Hexanchus griseus* stratified biomass index in standard hauls and in additional deep hauls during the North Spanish shelf bottom trawl survey time series (SpGFS-WIBTS-Q4, 1983–2022). Boxes mark parametric standard error of the stratified biomass index. Lines mark bootstrap confidence intervals ( $\alpha = 0.80$ , bootstrap iterations = 1000). From Fernández-Zapico *et al.* (WD - 2023).

## 6 Porbeagle in the Northeast Atlantic (subareas 1–14)

### 6.1 Stock distribution

WGEF consider that there is a single stock of porbeagle *Lamna nasus* in the Northeast Atlantic (NEA) that occupies the entire ICES area (subareas 1–14), extending southwards to 5° N.

The supporting information is provided in the Stock Annex.

### 6.2 The fishery

#### 6.2.1 History of the fishery

Porbeagle has been exploited primarily in the NEA by four directed longline fisheries with the first notable landings in 1926 until applicable management largely reduced landings in 2010 (see Section 6.2.4). Norway first developed a directed fishery from 1926 to 1986, then Denmark from 1946 to probably the 1970s or in the early 1980s, followed by the Faroe Islands from 1953 to 1960, and finally France from 1971 to 2009. All together, these four countries contributed 98% of the total landings from 1926 to 2009. A detailed history of the fishery can be found in the Stock Annex.

#### 6.2.2 The fishery in 2022

The WGEF estimated landings are 9.6 t in 2022 and since the zero TAC was implemented in 2010, the mean (2010–2022) WGEF estimate is 18 t per year (Table 6.1). However, since 2010 data must be considered as unrepresentative of removals, as dead discards are not quantified. Discards are expected to have increased with the absence of landing opportunities.

#### 6.2.3 ICES advice applicable

In 2022, following the WKELASMO benchmark (ICES 2022a), the stock was upgraded to assessment category 2. It was first assessed under this new status in 2022 using a surplus production model (SPiCT, Pedersen and Berg, 2017). A summary of the conclusions of WKELASMO is provided in Section 6.9.2. The 2022 advice, based on the 15<sup>th</sup> percentile of the expected catch distribution when applying  $F_{MSY}$ , led to a recommendation of catches of 219 tonnes and 231 tonnes for 2023 and 2024, respectively.

#### 6.2.4 Management applicable

EC Regulation 1185/2003 prohibits the removal of shark fins and subsequent discarding of the body of this species. This regulation is binding on EC vessels in all waters and non-EC vessels in Community waters. In June 2023, 'The Shark Fins Act 2023' was passed in the UK banning the import and export of detached shark fins, including all products containing shark fins.

EC Regulation 40/2008 first established a TAC (581 t) for porbeagle taken in EC and international waters from ICES Subareas 1–12 and 14 for 2008. The TAC was reduced by 25% in 2009 and a maximum landing length of 210 cm (fork length) was implemented.

From 2010–2014, successive EC Regulations (23/2010, 57/2011, 44/2012, 39/2013 and 43/2014) had established a zero TAC for porbeagle in EU waters of the ICES area and prohibited EU vessels to fish for, to retain on board, to tranship and to land porbeagle in international waters.

Since 2015 it has been prohibited for EU vessels to fish for, to retain on board, to tranship or to land porbeagle, with this applying to all waters (Council Regulation (EU) 2015/104, 2016/72, 2017/127, 2018/120, 2019/124, 2020/123, 2021/92 and 2022/119). Fisheries consultations between the UK and the EU in 2021 and 2022 have also included porbeagle in the list of prohibited species in Union and UK waters<sup>1</sup>. Porbeagle was maintained on this list despite the non-zero catch advice emitted by ICES in 2022.

It has been forbidden to catch and land porbeagle in Sweden since 2004; and in 2007, Norway banned all direct fisheries for porbeagle but bycatch could be landed up to 2011. Since that year, live specimens must be released, whereas dead specimens can be landed, but this was not mandatory. The species is therefore exempt from the general Norwegian landings obligation, and the payment is therefore withdrawn, except for 20% to cover the cost of landing.

In 2017, a regulation was issued to ban all targeted fishing in Icelandic waters for spurdog, porbeagle and basking shark and stipulating that all viable catch in other fisheries must be released.

## 6.3 Catch data

### 6.3.1 Landings

Landings of porbeagle in the Northeast Atlantic from 1926 to 2022 are shown in Table 6.1 and Figure 6.1 and 6.2.

These data were revised during the WKELASMO meeting (ICES, 2022a). The main changes from the WGEF landings tables in 2021 were: Faroe Islands landings added from 1953 to 1960 (from ICCAT database), French landings revised (mainly 1972 to 1977), conversion of Norwegian landings from gutted weight to round weight units (1926 to 1968, excepted 1958-60, and 1971), Spanish landings from 2008 (ICCAT landings series adopted). In addition to these revisions, 2021 landing figures were included (7t) and Danish landings were updated for the years 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2009 (one tonne added each year), as these data were not previously provided in response to the 2021 WKELASMO data call. Since 2010, landings are below 50t and mainly occur in the Faroe Isles and Norway.

More detailed information on landings is presented in the Stock Annex.

### 6.3.2 Discards

Because of the historically high value of this species, it is likely that most specimens caught incidentally were landed prior to the zero quota from 2010. Analysis of at-sea observer programme for UK (E&W) fisheries confirms this (Silva and Ellis, 2019). Historical discards are consequently thought to be negligible.

Since the EU zero TAC was introduced in 2010, discards are likely a large proportion of the catches but they are unquantified. In recent years, the only discard estimate available was provided by France in 2018 (88 t). However, it should be noted that this may be an imprecise estimation as the underlying data relate to few observations and specimens. Porbeagle discards have

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<sup>1</sup> Fisheries: consultations between the UK and the EU in 2021 and 2022 - GOV.UK ([www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk), [https://oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/news/eu-and-uk-reach-agreement-fishing-opportunities-2022-2021-12-22\\_en](https://oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/news/eu-and-uk-reach-agreement-fishing-opportunities-2022-2021-12-22_en))

been more frequently reported in log-books of French vessels in recent years (e.g. 5.8 t. in 2022). However, the observed increase in reporting frequency is not thought to reflect an increase in porbeagle discards, with the corresponding values being likely to be much lower than actual discards. Anecdotal information suggests that French pelagic trawlers and tuna long liners discard porbeagle, but their total dead discards are unknown as are seasonal discards in some métiers (e.g. in the Celtic Sea (Bendall *et al.*, 2012a, b; Ellis and Bendall, 2015)). Porbeagle is also a regular bycatch in the Norwegian pelagic trawl fishery for blue whiting in the Norwegian Sea. All specimens are reportedly dead when brought to the vessels.

This species is taken by recreational fishers in some areas. However the full extent of fish captured through this method has not been quantified. A time series of catch is only available for the UK catch and release fishery (Jones *et al.*, 2021). The porbeagle catches are largely incidental bycatch of blue shark recreational fisheries. Catches increased from zero between 199–2011 to 333 individuals between 2015 and 2020. Other recreational fisheries are known to occur in Ireland and the Faroe Islands, but no data are available. No data are available either to estimate the post-release mortality of individuals caught and released in recreational fisheries.

More detailed information on discards is presented in the Stock Annex.

### 6.3.3 Quality of catch data

The quality of the catches from 1926 to 2009 can be considered good after the revisions made by the WKELASMO (ICES, 2022a).

Since the EU zero TAC / prohibited listing was introduced, discards have likely increased, but no estimates of discards are available.

More detailed information on quality of catch is presented in the Stock Annex.

### 6.3.4 Discard survival

Data on discard survival are too limited to estimate dead discards. Available data are presented in the Stock Annex.

## 6.4 Commercial catch composition

Only limited length data are available. However, length-distributions by sex are available for 2008 and 2009 for the French longline fishery that targeted porbeagle until 2009 (Hennache and Jung, 2010; Figure 6.3). These distributions are considered representative of international catches because during that period France was the major contributor to catch (Figures 6.1 and 6.2).

Catch data derived from the French longline fishery highlighted the dominance of porbeagle (89%) on the total catch. Other species included blue shark (10%), common thresher (0.6%) and tope (0.3%).

Additional information on commercial catch composition is presented in the Stock Annex.

### 6.4.1 Conversion factors

Length–weight relationships are available for different geographic areas and time periods (Table 6.2). Relationships between alternative length measurements with total length in porbeagle are presented in the Stock Annex.



## 6.5 Commercial catch and effort data

Three commercial CPUE series are available for the NEA porbeagle stock, all standardized using a GLM:

- A Norwegian longline CPUE series from 1950 to 1972, in number of fish by day, from personal logbooks of five vessels of the Norwegian directed fishery, in number of fish by day (Biais, 2022a,b);
- A French longline CPUE series from 1972 to 2009, in weight by trip, from logbooks of 19 vessels of the French directed fishery (Biais, 2022c,d);
- A Spanish longline CPUE series from 1986 to 2007, in weight per thousand hooks by trip, from the surface longline targeting swordfish (Mejuto *et al.*, 2010).

They are briefly presented in the following sections. Further information can be found in the Stock Annex as well as in the report of the WKELASMO (ICES, 2022a).

### 6.5.1 The Norwegian longline CPUE series

The Norwegian CPUE series was obtained from logbooks for five longliners of the directed fishery. This provided daily catches in numbers per  $1^\circ \times 1^\circ$  rectangle for the period 1950 to 1972 (years 1965-67 missing) and for an area extending from  $49^\circ\text{N}$  to  $69^\circ\text{N}$ . To avoid autocorrelations, CPUEs were selected when there were least five days between successive catches when taken in same or contiguous rectangles, based on Kendall's rank correlations ( $p$ -value $<0.05$ ).

The CPUEs were standardized comparing three GLM approaches. On the basis on five-fold cross validations, Akaike's Information Criteria and quantile residual plots, the GLM model involving the effects of year, month and subarea and using a negative binomial error structure was selected as final model. The series of relative annual abundance indices obtained with this model shows a downward trend in the second half of the 1950s, but this trend seems to have stabilized in the early 1960s, followed by a slight increase in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Figure 6.4).

Relative biomass indices were derived from these abundance indices using mean catch weight calculated from landing weights available for most of the trips in the logbooks.

### 6.5.2 The French longline CPUE series

CPUEs of longliners in the French directed fishery are available from 1972 to 2009. These CPUEs are in weight per trip for a fishing area which extends mainly on the shelf edge of the Bay of Biscay, but also in the Celtic Sea. Nineteen boats were selected in order to avoid short participations. CPUEs were standardized with a GLM, using a Gamma error distribution with a log link. The variables considered were the year, the month, the area (ICES divisions 7 a&f-g, 7 h-j-k and 8), the vessel and their interactions. The selection of the final model was performed as for the Norwegian CPUEs. This model involves the four variables considered but not their interactions. The relative abundance index obtained decreases in the 1970s, but thereafter varies without trend (Figure 6.5).

### 6.5.3 The Spanish longline CPUE series

The Spanish longline CPUEs are bycatch by trip (in weight per thousand hooks) of the surface longline fishery targeting swordfish in eastern Atlantic (East  $20^\circ\text{W}$  from  $35^\circ\text{N}$  to  $55^\circ\text{N}$ ). Data are available from 1986 to 2007. The portion of this area north of  $45^\circ\text{N}$  comprises about half of these catches, although it is reported that traditional longline occurs in this area only sporadically

during certain years and quarters, taking advantage of local concentrations of porbeagle. CPUEs were standardized using GLM procedures assuming a delta-lognormal error distribution. The final model was selected using Akaike's Information Criterion, Bayesian Information Criterion and the likelihood ratio test (variables included: year, area, quarter, bait, year\*area, year\*quarter). The relative abundance index obtained (Figure 6.6) includes higher values in the 2000s, with large interannual variations.

## 6.6 Recreational catch and effort data

CPUE (fish by trip) of the United Kingdom recreational porbeagle catches are available from 1960 to 2020 in Division 7e (Jones *et al.*, 2021). This fishery has been conducted on a catch and release basis since 1994, largely as an occasional bycatch of blue shark recreational fisheries. The data are collated from historical records of the Shark Angling Club of Great Britain (SACGB) from 34 different boats with additional data from 13 skippers. Since 2015, resulting CPUEs have significantly increased (Figure 6.7). Available length distributions indicate that this increase has been driven by the abundance of small fish in Division 7e (median length close to 100 cm).

Further information can be found in the stock annex.

## 6.7 Fishery-independent surveys

A composite CPUE survey series is also available for the porbeagle stock in the NEA. This series was thus named because it combines the CPUE of a French commercial vessel, from 2000 to 2009, with the CPUE of a fishery-independent survey carried out in 2018-2019. This was done to construct a series long enough to provide information on the trend in abundance in the absence of commercial CPUEs since the zero TAC/prohibited species listing on which an assessment could be based.

The survey was carried out for around 6 weeks in May-June 2018 and 2019, using a chartered longliner. The gear was a longline with 336 hooks. Two sets per day were planned in the same ICES rectangle, with one to three fishing days by statistical rectangle (but generally two) that must be at least 10 days apart. The survey area comprised 16 ICES rectangles extending along the shelf edge of the Bay of Biscay and the southern Celtic Sea (Biais, 2022e).

Combining the CPUE from this survey with a commercial CPUE was made possible by obtaining detailed data from personal logbooks provided by a vessel captain involved in the directed fishery for the years 2000 to 2009. This vessel contributed about 10% of the total French landings each year from 2000 to 2008. Sets with 252 or 336 hooks were considered comparable to the survey CPUEs (after scaling to 336 hooks when 252 hooks are deployed) because the same fishing gear and technique were used in both cases, assuming that catchability is not affected by a small difference in the number of hooks. Complementing this 2000-2009 commercial CPUE with the fishery-independent survey CPUE required a double selection for consistency. On the one hand, the commercial CPUE were selected to have independent observations of abundance, as were the survey CPUE due to the sampling plan, using the same process as for the Norwegian CPUE (Biais, 2022f). On the other hand, the survey CPUE were selected so that the spatial distribution was comparable to that of the commercial CPUE (Biais, 2022g).

The commercial and survey CPUE thus obtained were merged (with "short" for longline type) to form a CPUE series that was supplemented with the commercial CPUEs provided based on 756 or 840 hooks (included with "long" for longline type), after scaling to the same number of hooks and selecting to have independent observation series. The resulting composite CPUE series was standardized with a GLM using a Tweedie distribution with a log link. The model involving year, type of longline and area was selected (Biais, 2022 f, g) based on five-fold cross validations,

the Akaike's Information Criterion (AIC), analysis of deviance tables and quantile residual plots. The relative abundance index series obtained shows a moderate increase in abundance of porbeagle in the Bay of Biscay and the southern Celtic Sea area from 2009 to 2019 (Figure 6.8).

Relative biomass indices were derived from the abundance indices using 2008-2009 mean individual weight (from data provided by Hennache and Jung, 2010) for years 2000 to 2009, because available information supports the assumption that mean weights have not changed much in the 2000s. The 2018 and 2019 indices were calculated using the mean individual weights given by the weight-length relationship and the length distributions from survey catches.

Further information can be found in the Stock Annex.

## 6.8 Life-history information

Life-history information (including habitat description) is presented in the Stock Annex.

### 6.8.1 Movements and migrations

Migrations of three porbeagle tagged off Ireland with pop-up satellite archival tags (PSATs) in 2008 and 2009 are described by Saunders *et al.* (2011). One specimen migrated 2400 km to the northwest off Morocco, residing around the Bay of Biscay for about 30 days. The other two remained in off-shelf regions around the Celtic Sea/Bay of Biscay and off western Ireland. They occupied a vertical distribution ranging from 0–700 m and at temperatures of 9–17°C, but during the night they preferentially stayed in upper layers.

The UK (CEFAS) launched a tagging program in 2010 to address the issue of porbeagle bycatch and to further promote the understanding of porbeagle movement patterns in UK waters. Altogether, 21 PSATs were deployed between July 2010 and September 2011, and 15 tags popped up after two to six months. However, four tags failed to communicate. The tags attached to sharks in the Celtic Sea generally popped up to the south of the release positions while those to sharks off the northwest coast of Ireland popped up in diverse positions. One tag popped up in the western part of the North Atlantic, one close to the Gibraltar Straits and another in the North Sea. Several tags popped up close to the point of release (Bendall *et al.*, 2012b).

From 2011 to 2019, France (IFREMER, with IRD and CEFAS in 2011; see Biaïis *et al.*, 2017) deployed 60 PSATs that yielded 43 reconstructed tracks. They were used to map the spatiotemporal distributions by sex and length class of the exploitable fraction of the porbeagle stock present in the Bay of Biscay and the southern Celtic Sea in May-June (Biaïis *et al.*, 2022e). Quantitative estimates of area and period occupancy were derived. Based on 21 deployments that lasted more than 11 months (336 days), an estimated 76-86% of porbeagle exhibited annual return to the Celtic Sea and Bay of Biscay after frequent migrations far into the North Atlantic Ocean.

### 6.8.2 Reproductive biology

A research programme carried out by the NGO APECS (Hennache and Jung, 2010) provided information based on a large sampling ( $n = 1770$ ) of the French catch in 2008–2009. Spatial sex-ratio segregations are documented and information is provided on the likelihood of a nursery ground in St. George's Channel and of a pupping area in the grounds along the western Celtic Sea shelf edge. Further evidence of parturition close to the western European shelf was provided by the captures of 9 newborn pups on the Bay of Biscay shelf break in May 2015 and July 2016 (Biaïis *et al.*, 2017) as well as by the captures of pregnant females during the 2018 and 2019 fishery-independent survey. Historic information (Gauld, 1989) indicated that parturition might be

slightly later (summer or autumn) in more northern areas such as east Scotland and the Shetland Isles.

### 6.8.3 Genetic information

A first study of the genetic diversity (mitochondrial DNA haplotype and nucleotide diversities) was carried out by Pade (2009). This study was based on 156 individuals caught both on the Northeast and Northwest Atlantic; the results obtained show no significant population structure across the North Atlantic. These findings were supported by another study which examined 224 specimens from eight sites across the North Atlantic and the Southern Hemisphere (Testerman, 2014). However, this study showed strong genetic difference between the North Atlantic and Southern Hemisphere, which indicates two genetically distinct populations.

Pade (2009) found also that while the mtDNA haplotype diversity was very high, sequence diversity was low, which suggests that most females breed in particular places, which also indicates the stock is likely to be genetically robust.

Viricel *et al.* (2021) observed also high levels of genetic diversity at the mitochondrial DNA control region in North Atlantic, using 49 individuals caught in the Bay of Biscay from 2013 to 2019, 6 individuals from the Indian Ocean and 155 sequences obtained from Genbank from both North and South Atlantic. A significant genetic difference was found between individuals sampled in Norway and Denmark and others selected among samples from the Bay of Biscay and Celtic Sea, based on westward migrations. These results are considered preliminary, as they were obtained using a single locus and small sample sizes. They need to be complemented with Single Nucleotide Polymorphism (SNP) analysis, more robust for low sample sizes.

Further studies examining genetic structure of Mediterranean Sea porbeagle are still required.

## 6.9 Exploratory assessment models

### 6.9.1 Previous studies

The first assessment of the Northeast Atlantic stock was carried out in 2009 by the joint IC-CAT/ICES meeting (ICCAT, 2009; ICES, 2009) using a Bayesian Surplus Production (BSP) model (Babcock and Cortes, 2009) and an Age-Structured Production (ASP) model (Porch *et al.*, 2006).

Using the French CPUE series as well as the Spanish CPUE series, stock projections based on the BSP model demonstrated that low catches (below 200 t) may allow the stock to increase under most credible model scenarios and that the recovery to  $B_{MSY}$  could be achieved within 25–50 years under nearly all model scenarios. More detailed results from these are detailed in the Stock Annex.

### 6.9.2 Benchmark

A benchmark of the stock was conducted jointly by ICES and ICCAT in 2022. A total of 27 Surplus Production in Continuous Time (SPiCT) exploratory assessment runs (Pedersen and Berg, 2017) were submitted to WKELASMO (ICES, 2022a) with two additional JABBA exploratory assessments. For all assessments, the 1926–2020 landings, revised as part of the WKELASMO meeting were used for the catches. Considering that discards were negligible before 2010, but unknown afterwards, the standard deviation of the observed catches was multiplied by 5 from 2010 onwards. The biomass indices provided by standardizing the three available commercial CPUE series and the composite CPUE survey series were used (Figure 6.9), with the ratios of their standard errors from the GLMs to their respective means (CV) as input for the relative standard

deviations of indices. The biomass was assumed close to the virgin state in 1926 as all available information shows that porbeagle were only caught incidentally in limited quantities by Norwegian fisheries in the absence of a local market (informative prior set for initial  $B/K=0.99$ ).

All the exploratory assessments set the median of the prior for the intrinsic rate of increase  $r$  to 0.059, as per the 2020 ICCAT stock assessment (Cortes and Semba, 2020), and the shape parameter of the surplus production function  $n$  to 2, which implies a Schaefer production model. The exploratory runs focused primarily on the effect of having informative ( $sd=0.2$ ) or semi-informative ( $sd=0.5$ ) priors for these parameters as well as on the inclusion of the Spanish longline biomass index in the assessment. Setting the  $sd$  of  $\log(n)$  to 0.5, led to a posterior  $n$  close to 1 which was in contradiction with a low prior for  $r$ . Therefore, the  $sd$  was set to 0.2 for  $\log(n)$  for further exploratory assessments. For the prior for  $r$ , a  $sd$  set to 0.5 was retained because the acceptance criteria for a SPiCT assessment (ICES, 2020b) are met without restriction only for this input. After several sensitivity runs with different priors for the  $sd$  of the Spanish longline biomass index, it was incorporated with a large and informative prior for its  $sd$  (median=1.1) in the final assessment, on the basis of acceptance criteria.

With respect to the comparison between the JABBA and SPiCT assessments, it should be noted that, despite some differences in model configuration, the two modelling approaches provided very similar outlooks of the status of the NEA porbeagle stock.

## 6.10 Stock assessment

The 2022 stock assessment was carried out using the SPiCT model with priors agreed upon during the final benchmark assessment (prior for  $B_{2026}/K$ : median=0.99,  $sd$  of  $\log(B_{2026}/K)=0.2$ ; prior for  $n$ : median=2,  $sd$  of  $\log(n)=0.2$ ; prior for  $r$ : median=0.059,  $sd$  of  $\log(r)=0.5$ ; priors for the  $sd_{sp}$  of the Spanish longline biomass index: median=1.1, with  $sd$  of  $\log(sd_{sp})=0.1$ ). The landings were updated but the biomass indices remained the same, because the survey was not carried out in 2020. In addition, the version 1.3.6 of the SPiCT package was used. It includes some improvements in the management functionality and also in the retrospective function for time series that have missing values in the last years (such as this assessment).

The posterior  $n$  is the same as that of the final benchmark assessment (median=1.7). The model is thus close to a Schaefer model, with an inflection point of the production curve close to  $B_{MSY}/K=0.5$ . The posterior of  $r$  is also the same as that of the final benchmark assessment (median=0.089). The exploited biomass decreases below  $B_{MSY}$  in the early 1950s (Figure 6.10). Despite an increase in the 2010s due to the fishing restriction in place since 2010,  $B/B_{MSY}$  was well below  $B_{MSY}$  in 2020, but above  $B_{trigger}$  ( $0.5 \cdot B_{MSY}$ ; see section 6.13). Overfishing was no longer occurring, with the low values of current  $F$  consistent with the landing prohibition in effect since 2010 (Figure 6.11).

The retrospective patterns are consistent although the Mohn's rho of the relative  $F$  analysis is above 0.2 (Figure 6.12). This was not observed in the retrospective analysis made at the WKELASMO for the final assessment but occurred for the 2022 assessment when using the SPiCT package 1.3.6 with the same landings as during the benchmark. However, given the very low catches in recent years, a Mohn's rho of the relative  $F$  analysis slightly above 0.2 cannot be considered a relevant criterion for not accepting the assessment, as was agreed during the WKELASMO for some exploratory assessments.

## 6.11 Forecasts

The Benchmark Oversight Group (BOG) accepted the conclusions of the WKELASMO (ICES, 2022a). Therefore, the porbeagle stock in the NEA became an ICES Category 2 stock in 2022, as

its status can be assessed with SPiCT. According to the ICES technical guidance for harvest control rules and stock assessments for stocks in category 2 (ICES, 2022b), the default rule for the catch advice is to use the fractile rule with the 35<sup>th</sup> percentile of the predicted catch distribution estimated when applying  $F_{MSY}$ .

During the meeting, catch scenarios were established for two years, considering that a four-year advice as in 2019 was justified by a zero-catch advice then, but that if this was to change, an advice every two years would be more suitable for monitoring the exploitation of the porbeagle stock. However, there were some concerns raised by ICCAT experts about the approach of applying the ICES default rule for the porbeagle catch advice when they may not have been tested on a long-lived species. This warning suggested making long-term projections (to 2053 to encompass two generations) with constant catch options to provide tables of probabilities  $p(B > B_{MSY})$ ,  $p(F < F_{MSY})$  and  $p(B > B_{MSY} \& F < F_{MSY})$ , as required for ICCAT advice. This was considered useful to ensure consistency between ICCAT and ICES advice, although long-term projections are not required for ICES catch advice. An online meeting was agreed upon for mid-July to review the results of these long-term projections and possible additional catch scenarios to be considered for the catch advice for 2023 and 2024. Unfortunately, the results showed some inconsistencies for the early years of the long-term forecast with constant catches that could not be resolved quickly. These were due to the way SPiCT accommodates large increase in projected catches (i.e. it produces an increase in  $B$  to limit the variation of  $F$ ). However, these problems do not arise when making long-term projections for constant fishing mortalities, which are relevant for ICES advice because they allow estimation of  $F_{p05}$ , the fishing mortality that results in a less than 5% probability of  $SSB < B_{lim}$  in the long term (ICES, 2022c). Probability tables for constant fishing mortalities were sent in July by the stock coordinator to WGEF members, with the addition of probabilities  $p(B > B_{trigger})$  and  $p(B > B_{lim})$  to include ICES biomass reference points (Table 6.3 a, b & c). The probability  $p(B > B_{MSY})$  is above 0.5 in 2053 when  $F = 0.7 \cdot F_{MSY}$ . The probability  $p(B > B_{lim})$  is above 0.95 in 2053 when  $F = 0.3 \cdot F_{MSY}$  ( $F_{p0.5}$ ). The latter option was included in the catch scenario tables for 2023 and 2024 of the draft for the advice.

## 6.12 Quality of assessments

In 2022, WGEF meeting participants included scientists involved in ICCAT shark assessments. Previously, several of them participated in WKELASMO, of which the chair of the 2020 ICCAT porbeagle assessment meeting was an external expert. Therefore, the porbeagle benchmark by the WKELASMO and the following assessment by the WGEF were conducted in cooperation with ICCAT scientists. It was the first time since the ICCAT 2009 Porbeagle Stock Assessments Meeting which was held as a joint meeting of WGEF and the ICCAT Shark species group (ICCAT, 2009; ICES, 2009). At this 2009 meeting, the lack of CPUE data for the peak fishery was highlighted as a major caveat to the quality of the assessment by a surplus production model. This issue has been resolved with the availability of the Norwegian longline CPUE series which begins in 1950, when catches were still above 3000t.

The 2009 request for an independent survey of the fishery was also taken into account with the organisation of two fishery-independent abundance surveys in 2018 and 2019. This generated a composite survey series combining commercial and survey CPUEs, obtained after successive improvements (Biais 2022 e-g). This work greatly benefited from the participation of members of the ICCAT shark species group at WKELASMO, as did the standardization of the Norwegian and French CPUE series (Biais 2022a-d). Members of the ICCAT shark species group provided also additional assessments using JABBA, with very similar results giving the same perception of the stock as the final accepted SPiCT assessment.

Treatments to avoid autocorrelation of CPUE addressed warnings about the potential for index hyperstability that searching for concentrations generates in directed fisheries (Biais, 2022a and

f). It should also be noted that the standardization of the French longline CPUE series, already used in the 2009 exploratory assessment, is now documented (Biais, 2022c and d). The validity of including the Spanish longline index in the assessment was questioned during WKELASMO, due to its large variation and the area selected to build the CPUE series. Nevertheless, this index was used, but with a large standard deviation. An examination of the possibility of increasing the quality of this index would be of interest as well as its extension beyond 2007. Furthermore, the porbeagle subgroup of the WGEF indicated that any future WKLIFE meetings could be asked to examine the assessment of a lower productivity species such as porbeagle with a surplus production model.

The quality of porbeagle assessment would benefit from improved knowledge of stock structure. While there seemed to be strong indication of site fidelity and repeated migration routes, the genetic differentiation among different regions in the Northeast Atlantic was not strong, and based on a limited number of samples (ICES, 2022a). In its porbeagle subgroup, the WGEF held discussions on ongoing genetics and tagging studies and how collaborations and the sharing of materials can be developed to improve our understanding of the stock structure in the Northeast Atlantic. Any future joint ventures or assessments would benefit from a more coordinated approach with collaborative drafting of agendas, ToR and more advanced planning to ensure that the aims, expectations and results are as aligned as possible within the operational constraints of each organisation.

### 6.13 Reference points

SPiCT provides relative fishing mortality ( $F/F_{MSY}$ ) and relative biomass ( $B/B_{MSY}$ ) reference points.  $F_{MSY}$  and  $B_{MSY}$  are estimated directly from the SPiCT assessment model and, therefore, change when the assessment is updated.

For the MSY approach, the reference points are  $F_{MSY}$  and  $B_{trigger} = 0.5 B_{MSY}$  (ICES, 2021).

For the precautionary approach, the reference points are  $F_{lim} = 1.7 \times F_{MSY}$  (ICES, 2017) and  $B_{lim} = 0.3 B_{MSY}$  (ICES, 2021).

### 6.14 Conservation considerations

The porbeagle shark subpopulation of the Northeast Atlantic was listed as Critically Endangered in the IUCN red list in 2015 (Ellis *et al.*, 2015). In 2019, IUCN assigned the porbeagle to the vulnerable category in a global assessment of the species (Rigby *et al.*, 2019a). This review was carried out using a Bayesian state space tool for each region where data were available (Rigby *et al.*, 2019b). In the NEA, the results of the 2009 ICCAT-ICES meeting were used. The median population decrease over three generations was estimated to be 56% in 2009. As a result, the global assessment is based on a NEA population classified in the endangered category.

In 2013, a renewed proposal to list porbeagle shark on Appendix II of CITES was accepted at the Conference of Parties (16) Bangkok, and it has been listed since September 2014.

### 6.15 Management considerations

A dedicated longline survey covering the main parts of the stock area is needed to monitor stock status appropriately in the future. The surveys carried out by France in 2018 and 2019 have shown that a fixed-station survey design can provide consistent annual indices. Continuing this spring-summer survey with an expansion to other areas within the stock distribution would be advantageous, as this would provide the necessary sampling effort to take the large distribution

of porbeagle into account in order to monitor stock size. This species has low population productivity, and is thus highly susceptible to overexploitation. Consequently, WGEF considers that target fishing should not proceed without a programme to monitor stock abundance feeding into regular updates of the NEA porbeagle stock assessment. The current fishing ban renders estimates of discards difficult to obtain, but they are considered to have increased in recent years in the Bay of Biscay as well as in northern part of the distribution area of the stock.

A maximum landing length (MLL) was adopted by the EC in 2009. It was considered a potentially useful management measure in targeted fisheries, as it could deter targeting areas with mature females. However, the fishery-independent survey data question both the efficacy and practicality of such a measure, and given the short time period of implementation prior to a zero TAC the effectiveness remains unevaluated.

Studies on porbeagle bycatch should be continued to develop operational ways to reduce bycatch, to decrease at-vessel mortality and to improve the post-release survivorship of discarded porbeagle.

All fisheries-dependent data should be provided by countries having fisheries for this stock, including countries targeting other species with longlines in the stock area.

During the WGEF, discussions were initiated regarding both the process and timeline of advice provision within ICES and similarly within ICCAT. The timelines to provide final advice, and management programmes of both organisations differ, with the ICES advice released after the ICCAT meeting of the Standing Committee on Research and Statistics (SCRS). This has the potential to lead to inconsistent perceptions of the stock status and any associated catch advice. Consistency between the advice from each organisation is important and future alignment of process and outcomes may be facilitated by an MoU between ICES and ICCAT.

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## 6.17 Tables and Figures

Table 6.1 Porbeagle in the Northeast Atlantic. Working Group estimates of porbeagle landings data (tonnes) by country (1926–2021). Data derived from ICCAT, ICES data calls and national data. Note: blank when no catch,; '0' = < 0.5 t.

Year	Denmark	Faroe Islands	France	Germany	Iceland	Ireland	Netherlands	Norway	Portugal	Spain	Sweden	UK	Japan	Total
1926								363						363
1927								595						595
1928								794						794
1929								1082						1082
1930								1957						1957
1931								1438						1438
1932								2084						2084
1933								5049						5049
1934								4714						4714
1935								2591						2591
1936								3197						3197
1937								3647						3647
1938								3553						3553
1939								2877						2877
1940								135						135
1941								368						368
1942								374						374
1943								458						458
1944								417						417
1945								1206						1206
1946	1400							1414						2814
1947	3300							3671						6971
1948	2100							2490						4590
1949	1700							1626						3326
1950	1900							1765		4				3669
1951	1600							1013		3				2616
1952	1600							789		3				2392
1953	1100	100						927		4				2131
1954	651	300						772		1				1724
1955	578	100						1167		2				1847
1956	446							1132		1				1579
1957	561	100						1426		3				2090
1958	653	300						1080		3		7		2043
1959	562	600						1183		3		9		2357

Year	Denmark	Faroe Islands	France	Germany	Iceland	Ireland	Netherlands	Norway	Portugal	Spain	Sweden	UK	Japan	Total
1960	362	500						1929		2		10		2803
1961	425							1369		5		9		1808
1962	304							577		7		20		908
1963	173							157		3		17		350
1964	216							116		6		5		343
1965	165							265		4		8		442
1966	131							283		9		6		429
1967	144							397		8		7		556
1968	111							880		11		7		1009
1969	100							909		11		3		1023
1970	124							269		10		5		408
1971	311	1	550					208		11		7		1088
1972	523		1317					293		10		19		2162
1973	158	5	1350	6	2			209		12		27		1769
1974	170		967	3	2			165		9		15		1331
1975	265		1251	4	4			304		12	3	16		1859
1976	233	1	1373		3			259		9		25		1903
1977	289	5	1188		3			78		10				1573
1978	112	9	538					76		11	5			751
1979	72	25	703		1			106		8	1	1		917
1980	176	8	589		1			84		12	8	3		881
1981	158	6	451		1			93		12	5	2		728
1982	84	17	450		1			32		14	6	1		605
1983	45	12	517		1			33		28	5	2		643
1984	38	14	307		1			118		20	9	5		512
1985	72	12	200		1			79		23	10	12		409
1986	114	12	246		1			23		26	8	6		436
1987	56	33	223		1			25	3	30	5	3		379
1988	33	14	350		1			12	3	69	3	3		488
1989	33	14	357		1			27	2	42	3	15		494
1990	46	14	577		0			46	2	26	2	9		722
1991	85	7	292		0			34	1	47	2			468
1992	80	20	452		1			43	0	15	4			615
1993	91	76	632	1	3			24	1	21	3			852
1994	93	48	815		4			26	1	52	2			1041
1995	86	44	635		5			27	1	19	2	0		819
1996	72	8	442		3			28	1	41	1		3	599
1997	69	9	489		2			17	1	25	1		2	615

Year	Denmark	Faroe Islands	France	Germany	Iceland	Ireland	Netherlands	Norway	Portugal	Spain	Sweden	UK	Japan	Total
1998	85	7	428	2	3			27	1	25	1	1		580
1999	107	10	306	0	3	8		32	0	18	1	6		491
2000	73	13	385	17	2	2	0	23	15	13	1	7		551
2001	76	8	380	1	4	6		17	4	24	1	10		531
2002	42	10	528	3	2	3		14	11	54		7		674
2003	21	14	443	5	0	3	0	19	4	27		25		561
2004	20	5	423	6	1	0		24	57	11	5	24		576
2005	3	18	298	5	0	3	0	12		14	0	24		378
2006	3	21	223	0	1	4		27		34		12		325
2007	2	14	369	2	0	8	0	10		8	0	26		439
2008	2	10	319	2	1	7		12		41	0	15		409
2009	4	13	291		1	3		10		77		11		410
2010		14	7		1	0	0	12						34
2011	2	18	1		1			11						33
2012	3	25	2		1			17				0		48
2013		17	1		1			9						28
2014		15	1		0			5						21
2015		7			1		0	4						12
2016	0	3			2			6						11
2017	0	1	1		1			6						9
2018		1	1		1			3						6
2019	1	1	2		3			4						11
2020	0	1			3			3						7
2021		2						5						7
2022		0	0		2			8				0		10

**Table 6.2. Porbeagle in the Northeast Atlantic. Length–weight relationships of porbeagle from scientific studies.**

Stock	L-W relationship	Sex	n	Length range	Source
NW Atlantic	$W = (1.4823 \times 10^{-5}) L_F^2.9641$	C	15	106–227 cm	Kohler <i>et al.</i> , 1995
NE Atlantic (Bristol Channel)	$W = (1.292 \times 10^{-4}) L_T^2.4644$	C	71	114–187 cm	Ellis and Shackley, 1995
NE Atlantic (N/NW Spain)	$W = (2.77 \times 10^{-4}) L_F^2.3958$	M	39		Mejuto and Garcés, 1984
	$W = (3.90 \times 10^{-6}) L_F^3.2070$	F	26		
NE Atlantic (SW England)	$W = (1.07 \times 10^{-5}) L_T^2.99$	C	17		Stevens, 1990
NE Atlantic (Biscay / SW England/ W Ireland)	$W = (4 \times 10^{-5}) L_F^2.7316$	M	564	88–230 cm	Hennache and Jung, 2010
	$W = (3 \times 10^{-5}) L_F^2.8226$	F	456	93–249 cm	
	$W = (4 \times 10^{-5}) L_F^2.7767$	C	1020	88–249 cm	









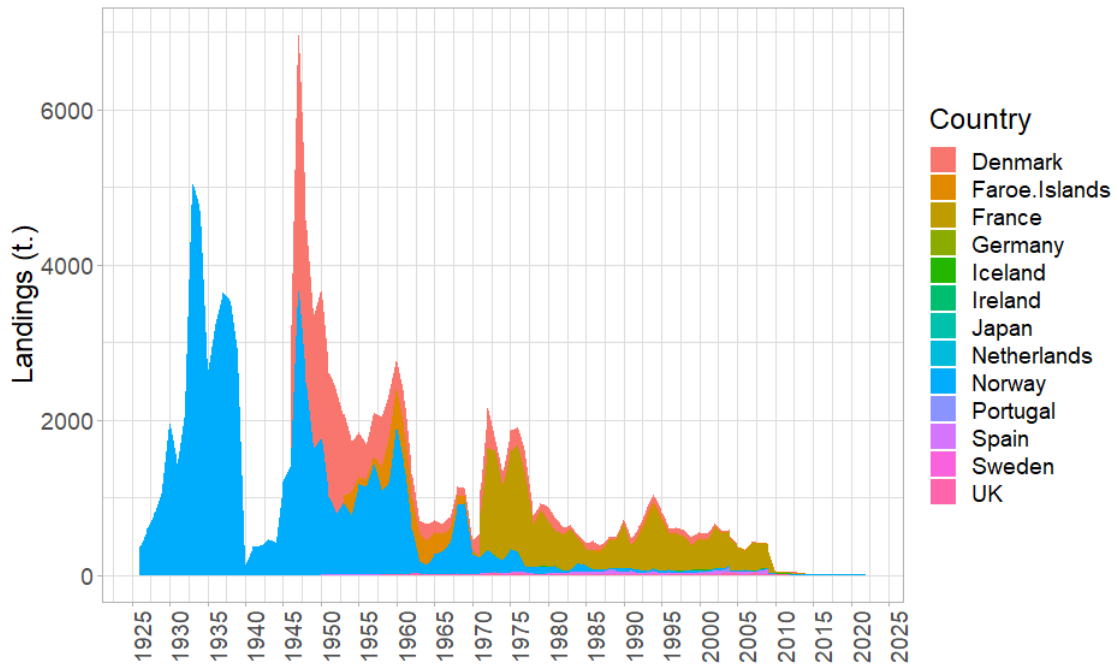


Figure 6.1. Porbeagle in the Northeast Atlantic. Working Group estimates of longer-term trend in landings of porbeagle in the Northeast Atlantic (1926–2022).

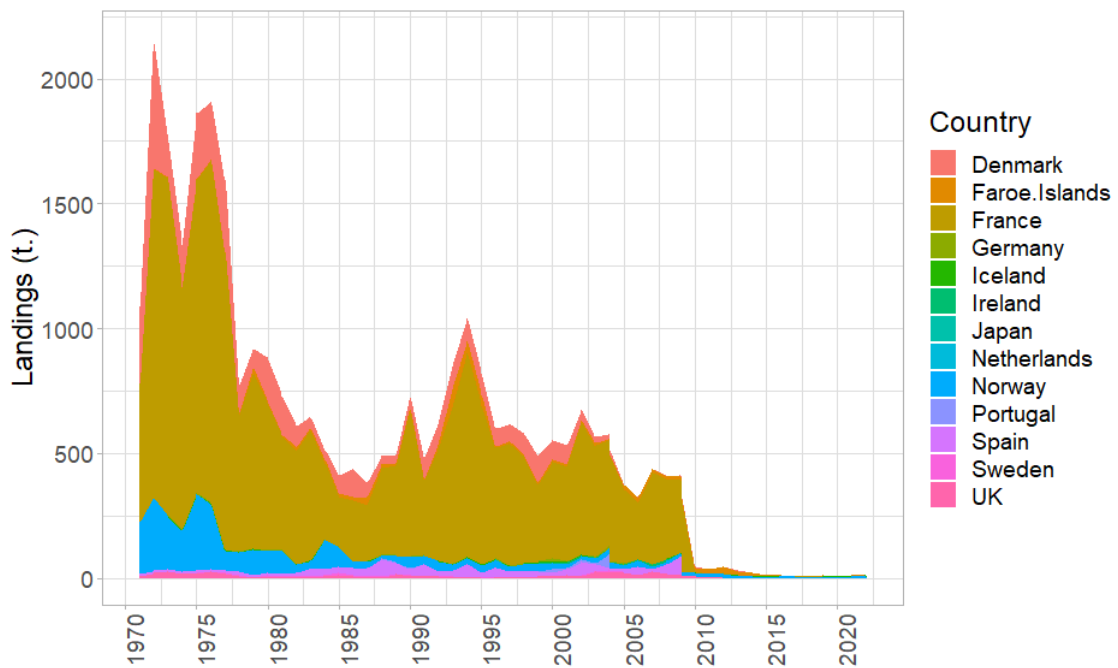


Figure 6.2. Porbeagle in the Northeast Atlantic. Working Group estimates of landings of porbeagle in the Northeast Atlantic for 1971–2022 by country.

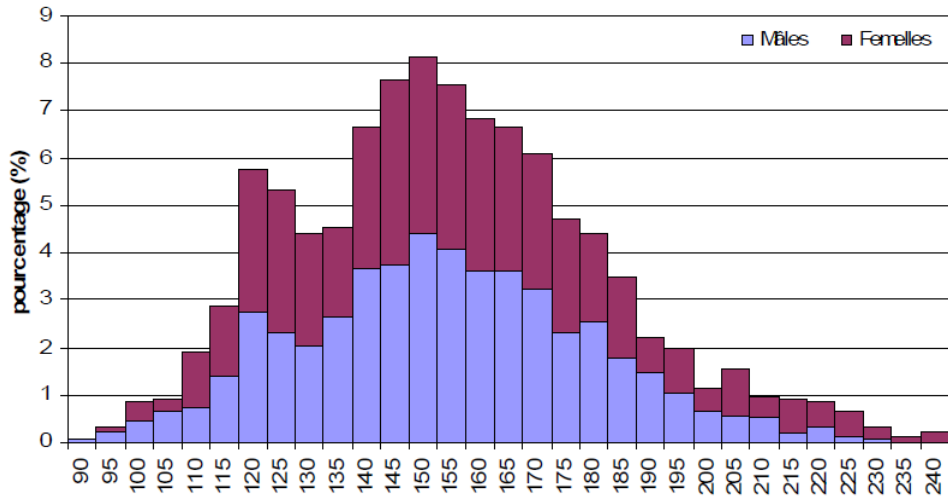


Figure 6.3. Porbeagle in the Northeast Atlantic. Length–frequency distribution of the landings of the Ile d’Yeu target fishery for porbeagle (2008–2009; n = 1769). Source: Hennache and Jung (2010).

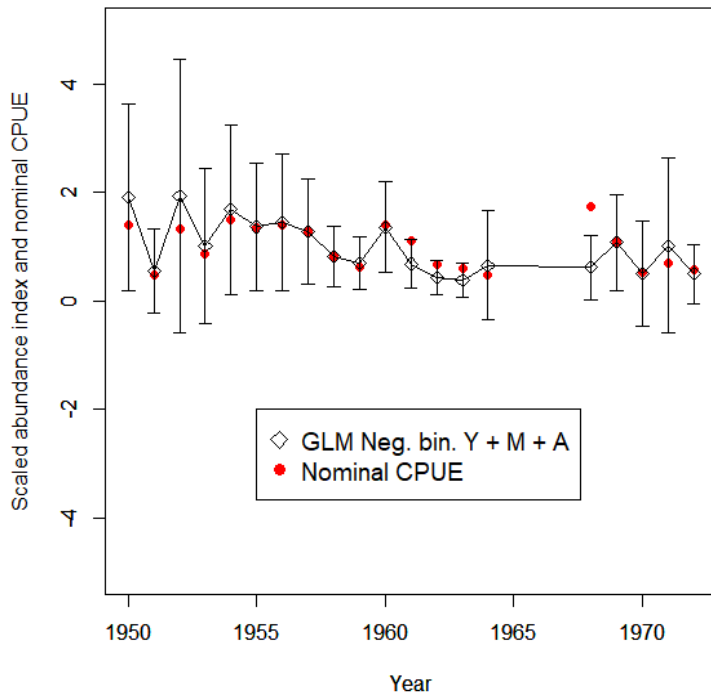


Figure 6.4. Porbeagle in the Northeast Atlantic. Relative abundance annual indices ( $\pm$  SE) provided by the standardization of CPUE of five longliners of the Norwegian directed fishery (with a GLM using a negative bi-nomial error distribution with a log link; variables included: year, month and area) with the nominal CPUEs (both scaled by the mean). Source: ICES 2022.

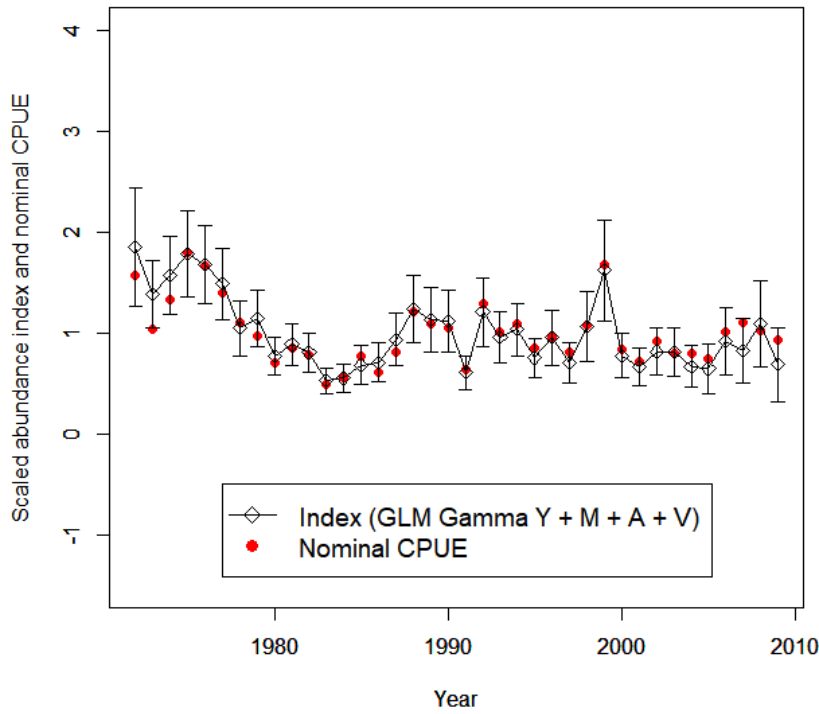


Figure 6.5. Porbeagle in the Northeast Atlantic. Relative abundance annual indices ( $\pm$  SE) provided by the standardization of CPUE of 19 longliners of the French directed fishery (with a GLM using Gamma error distribution with a log link; variables included: year, month, area and vessel) with the nominal CPUEs (both scaled by the mean). Source: ICES, 2022.

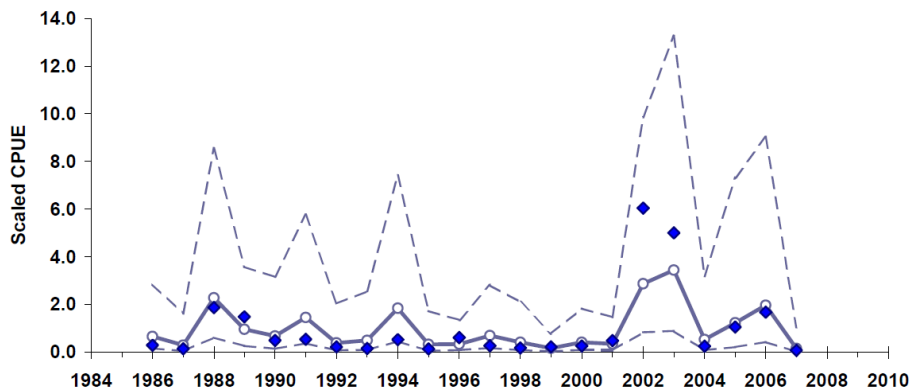


Figure 6.6. Porbeagle in the Northeast Atlantic. Relative abundance annual indices provided by the standardization of CPUE of the Spanish surface longline fishery targeting swordfish (with a GLM using delta-lognormal error distribution; variables included: year, zone, quarter, bait, year\*zone, year\*quarter) with confidence limits and the nominal CPUEs (blue rhombuses, scaled by the mean as the indices). Source: Mejuto *et al.*, 2010.

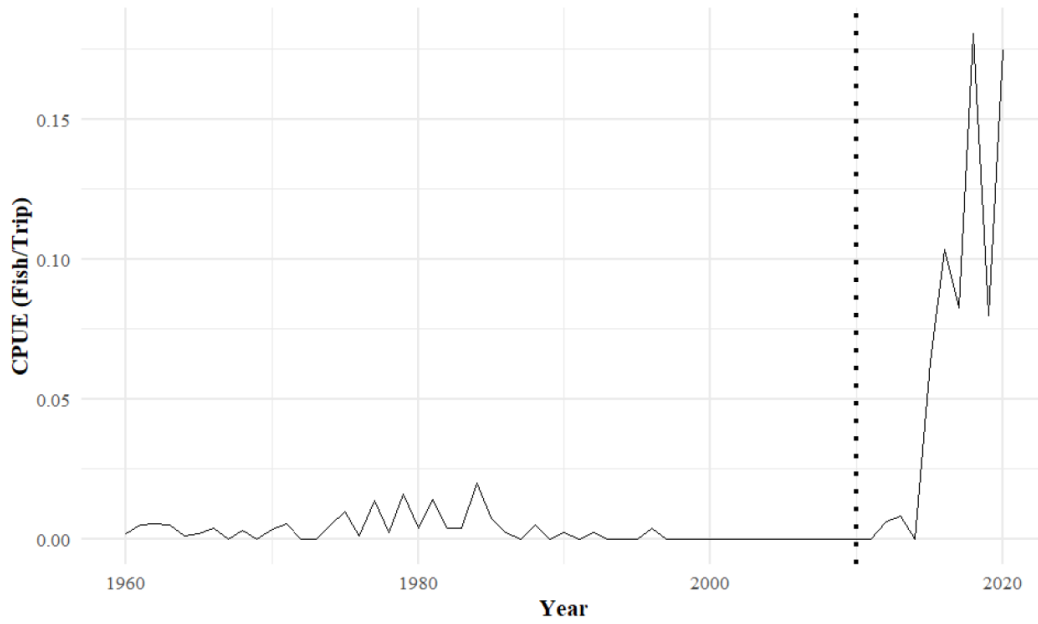


Figure 6.7. Porbeagle in the Northeast Atlantic. Temporal trends in CPUE (fish/ trip) of the UK recreational fishery in ICES Division 7e from 1960 to 2020 (n=478). Vertical dotted line represents imposition of zero TAC for the species by the EU. Source: Jones *at al.*, 2020.

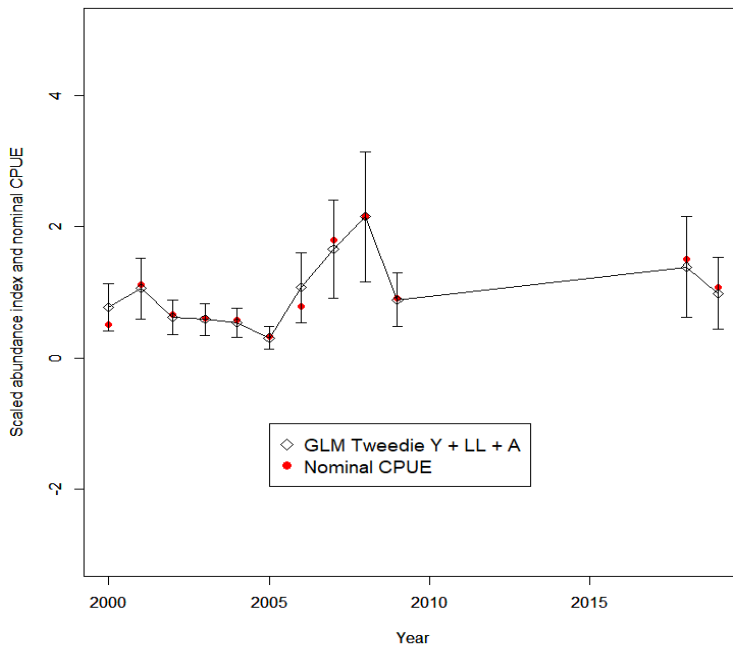


Figure 6.8. Porbeagle in the Northeast Atlantic. Relative abundance annual indices ( $\pm$  SE) provided by the standardization of CPUE of the composite survey CPUEs (with a GLM using Tweedie error distribution with a log link; variables included: year, type of longline and area) with the nominal CPUEs (both scaled by the mean). Source: ICES, 2022.

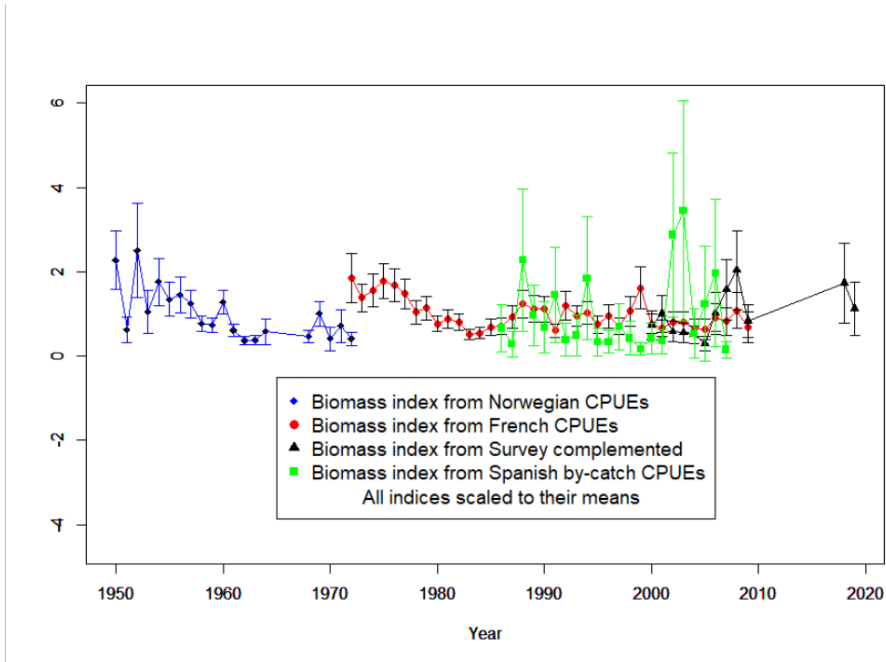


Figure 6.9: Porbeagle in the Northeast Atlantic. Relative biomass indices used in the porbeagle SPiCT assessments provided by the standardization of the four available CPUEs series. Source: ICES, 2022.

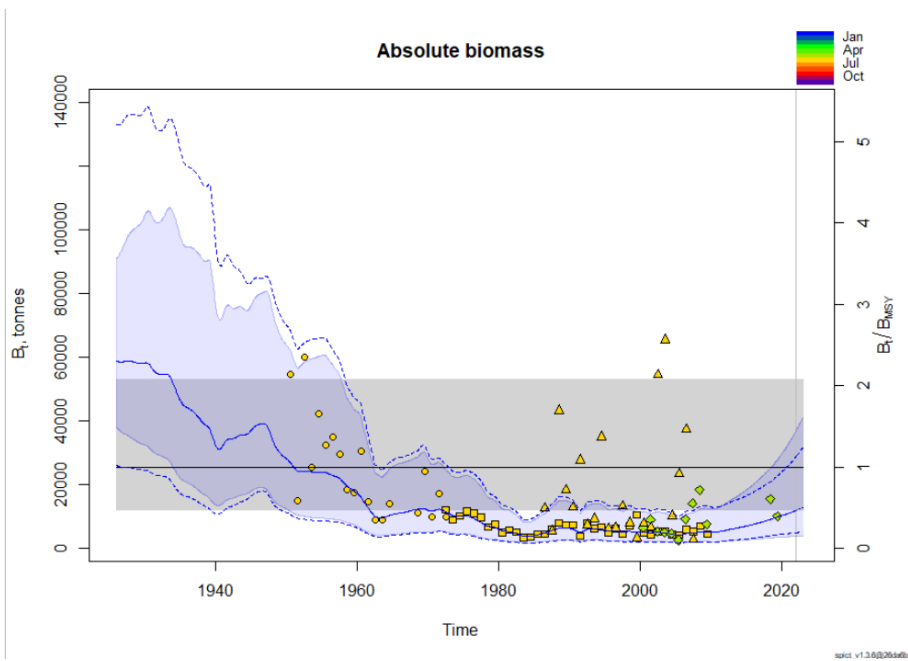


Figure 6.10: Porbeagle in the Northeast Atlantic. Absolute and relative biomasses from the 2022 SPiCT assessment.

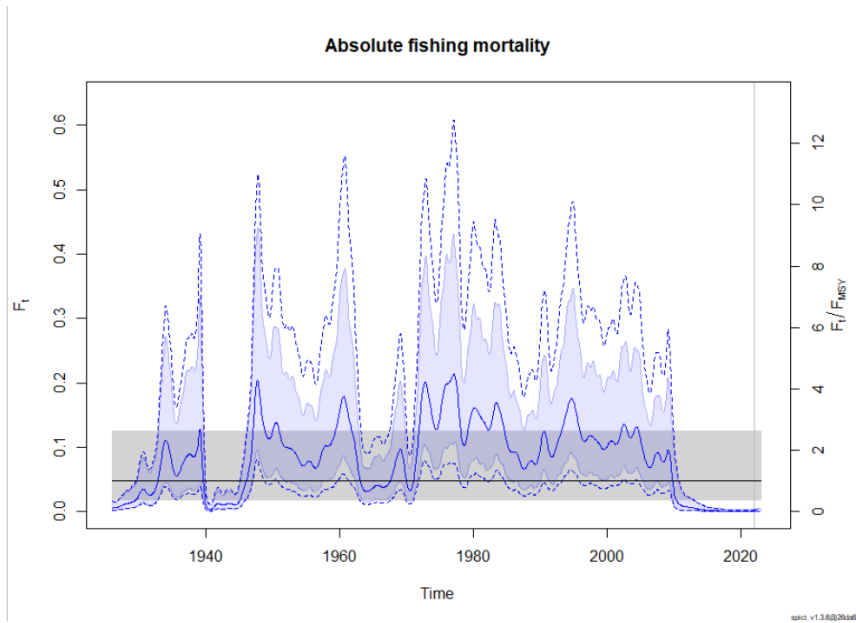


Figure 6.11: Porbeagle in the Northeast Atlantic. Absolute and relative fishing mortalities from the 2022 SPiCT assessment.

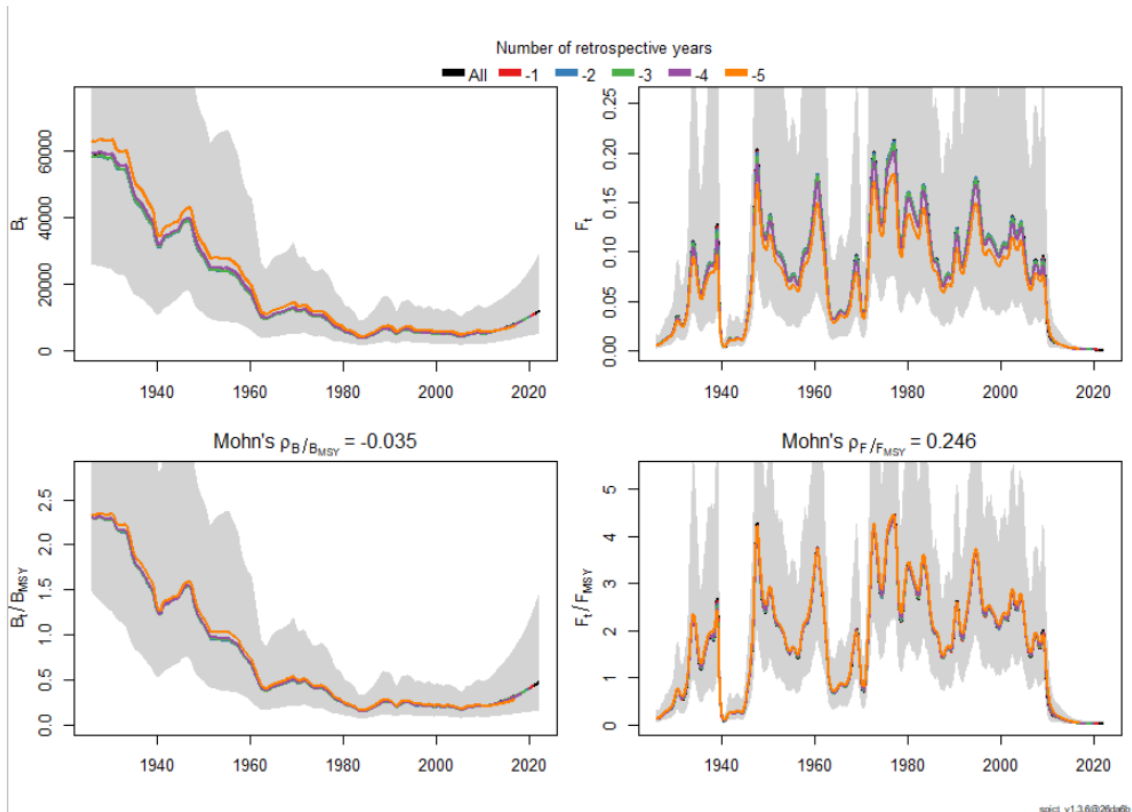


Figure 6.12: Porbeagle in the Northeast Atlantic. Retrospective plots from the 2022 SPiCT assessment.

## 7 Basking Shark in the Northeast Atlantic (ICES areas 1–14)

### 7.1 Stock distribution

In the Northeast Atlantic, basking shark *Cetorhinus maximus* is present from Iceland, and the White Sea (southern Barents Sea) southwards to the Mediterranean Sea and north-west Africa (Compagno, 1984; Konstantinov and Nizovtsev, 1980) with known aggregation sites around the British Isles (Sims, 2008). WGEF considers that basking shark in the ICES area exists as a single stock and management unit. However, the WGEF is aware of tagging studies showing both transatlantic and transequatorial migrations, as well as movements into tropical areas and mesopelagic depths (Gore *et al.*, 2008; Skomal *et al.*, 2009; Braun *et al.*, 2018; Dewar *et al.* 2018). A genetic study by Hoelzel *et al.* (2006) indicated no differentiation between ocean basins, whereas Noble *et al.* (2006) suggested limited gene flow between the northern and southern hemisphere.

There are two rough estimates of effective population size using genetics, one global, to take with caution, by Hoelzel *et al.* (2006), of 8200 individuals and one for the Irish Sea of 382 individuals. Lieber *et al.* (2020) suggested that over 800 individuals frequented Isle of Man waters at some point during the year. A study west of the UK, using photo identification (Gore *et al.*, 2016), showed very few re-sightings after one year (0.5%), and satellite tracking showed that basking shark show behavioural plasticity and that most individuals use only a small fraction of the time feeding in the surface (Gore *et al.*, 2016; Doherty *et al.*, 2017). These results point to a relatively large stock, and/or that the stock size may not be adequately estimated by surface sightings.

### 7.2 The fishery

#### 7.2.1 History of the fishery

The fishery for basking shark goes back as far as the middle or end of the 1700s, in Norwegian, Irish and Scottish waters (Strøm, 1762; Moltu, 1932; Parker and Stott, 1965; Myklevoll, 1968; McNally, 1976; Fairfax, 1998; See also the Stock Annex). Up to 1000 individuals may have been taken in Irish waters each year at the height of the fishery. Such intensive fisheries stopped during the mid-1800s when the species became very scarce.

The Norwegian fleet resumed the fishery in 1920. The landings increased during the 1930s as the fishery gradually expanded to offshore waters across the North Sea and south and west of Ireland, Iceland and Faroes. During 1959–1980, landings ranged between 1266 and 4266 individuals per year, but subsequently declined (Kunzlik, 1988). The geographical and temporal distribution of the Norwegian domestic basking shark fishery changed markedly from year to year, possibly as a consequence of the unpredictable nature of the shark's inshore migration (Stott, 1982).

In Irish waters, the basking shark fishery started again in 1947. Between 1000 and 1800 individuals were taken each year from 1951 to 1955 (an average of 1475 per year), but there was a decline in recorded landings from 1956. Average annual landings were 489 individuals from 1956–1960, 107 individuals from 1961–1965, then about 50–60 individuals per year for the remaining years of the fishery (Parker and Stott, 1965; McNally, 1976).

The Scottish fishery started in the 1940s. In all, around 970 sharks were taken between 1946 and 1953 (during a period when Norwegian vessels were also catching basking sharks in these waters).

From 1977–2007, an estimated total of 12 347 basking sharks were landed by Norway and Scotland, and of these Norway landed 12 014 individuals with an annual maximum of 1748 individuals landed in 1979.

There is no longer any directed fishery for basking shark within the ICES area. Since 2007, the species has been listed as a prohibited species on EU fisheries regulations (Council Regulation (EC) No 41/2006), for details and currently valid regulation see Section 7.2.4. Norwegian vessels have not reported landings since 2013, though they may land dead specimens but should release live specimens. Since 2013, reported landings have been <1 t in total from all countries, with a maximum of 0.6 t landed in 2017.

### **7.2.2 The fishery in 2022**

No new information.

### **7.2.3 ICES advice applicable**

ICES first provided advice for basking shark in 2005, with this for a zero TAC. In 2012, ICES advised, based on the precautionary approach, that there should be no landings of basking shark and that it should remain on the Prohibited Species List. In 2019, ICES advised that “ICES advises that when the precautionary approach is applied, there should be zero catches in each of the years 2020–2023.”.

### **7.2.4 Management applicable**

Article 14 of Council Regulation (EU) 2019/124 prohibits Union fishing vessels from fishing for, retaining on board, transshipping or landing basking shark in all waters. Article 50 of Council Regulation (EU) 2019/124 prohibits third-country vessels fishing for, retaining on board, transshipping or landing basking shark from EU waters.

Based on ICES advice, Norway banned all directed fisheries and landing of basking shark in 2006 in the Norwegian Economical Zone and in ICES subareas 1–14. The ban has continued since. During this period, live specimens caught as bycatch had to be released immediately, although dead or dying specimens could be landed (NFD, 2013). Since 2012, bycatch that is not landed should also be reported, and landings of basking sharks are not remunerated. Bycatch should be reported both in number of individuals and weight (since 2009).

Basking shark has been protected from killing, taking, disturbance, possession and sale in UK territorial (twelve nautical miles) waters since 1998. They are also protected in two UK Crown Dependencies: Isle of Man and Guernsey (Anon., 2002).

Sweden has forbidden fishing for or landing basking shark since 2004.

## **7.3 Catch data**

### **7.3.1 Landings**

Landings data within ICES subareas 1–14 from 1977–2022 are presented in Table 7.1, and Figure 7.1, since 2014: <1 t is landed. Landings of basking shark peaked in 1979 at a total of 5266 t and declined rapidly towards 1988. Another peak in landings (1697 t) occurred in 1992. After the ban on directed fisheries in 2006–2007, annual landings declined to <30 t and are currently <1 t.



Reported landings data come from UK (Guernsey) in 1984 and 2009, Portugal (1991–2007, 2010–2013, 2016, 2021), France (1990–2006, 2008–2010, 2014, 2017–2018) and Norway (1977–2008, 2011–2012). Most landings are from Subarea 2 and are taken by Norway. For Portugal and France, the reported landings were between 0.01 and 1.5 t. Landings for France in 2005 were higher, with 3.5 t.

The conversion factors used for Norwegian landings (liver and fin weight to live weight) were revised during WGEF 2008. Data from the Norwegian Directorate of Fisheries revealed that the nominal value of fins increased dramatically from 1979 to 1992, was variable during 1993–2005, and decreased after 2005. Table 7.2 shows old and revised numbers.

Table 7.3 shows the proportions of landed basking sharks caught by various gears as reported to the Norwegian Directorate of Fisheries (1990–2011). During most of the 1990s, harpoon was the main gear, but remained at a relatively low level from 2000, except for 2005, which was the last year with a directed fishery. After the ban on directed fisheries in 2006, bycatch has been taken primarily in gillnets.

Further information on Norwegian landings of liver and fins, and corresponding official and revised landings in live weight and numbers are given in the Stock Annex.

### 7.3.2 Discards

Limited quantitative information exists on basking shark discarded bycatch. However, anecdotal information indicates that this species is an incidental bycatch in gillnet and trawl fisheries and individual basking sharks may be entangled in potting ropes. Most bycatch events occur in the summer as the species moves inshore. Total bycatch has not been estimated.

Normal discard observer programmes, such as DCMAP, may not record bycatch of large animals such as basking sharks, if they fall or are removed from gear before the catch is brought on board the vessel. Fisheries observer programmes are not designed to account for rare species (ICES, 2018).

Berrow and Heardman (1994) estimated 77–120 sharks were caught annually in the gillnet fishery in the Celtic Sea. These authors received 28 reports of specimens being entangled in fishing gear around the Irish coast in 1993. In the Isle of Man, bycatch in the herring fishery and the pot fishery (entanglement in ropes) was estimated at 14–20 sharks annually. Fairfax (1998) reported that basking sharks are sometimes brought up from deep-water trawls near the Scottish coast during winter, and Valeiras *et al.* (2001) reported that of twelve basking sharks being incidentally caught in fixed entanglement nets in Spanish waters between 1988 and 1998, three sharks were sold at landing markets, three live sharks were released, and three dead sharks were discarded at sea. More detailed information can be found in the Stock Annex.

The French NGO APECS reported on 15 accidental catches from the Irish Sea, Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean Sea (Jung *et al.*, 2012). More detailed information (catch location, gear, and biological data) is given in Table 7.4. This table also includes data on eleven bycatch events from the Norwegian coast, published in the Norwegian media (prior to 2013).

Accidental bycatch of three basking sharks were reported from The Smalls, Ireland (Division 7.g) in 2005. These sharks were released alive (Johnston, pers. comm. 2015). There are no other records of basking sharks in the Irish discard observer programme.

There were two records of female basking shark caught (and discarded) in the English and Welsh commercial fisheries (Silva and Ellis, 2019), which were caught by gillnet in the western English Channel in 2002 (382 cm L<sub>T</sub>) and Bristol Channel in 2012 (378 cm L<sub>T</sub>).

In 2009, observers from French national observer programmes reported three accidentally caught, but released, basking sharks (*ca.* 4 m long). Two basking sharks were recorded in Division 6.a and one in Division 4.a. One individual (*ca.* 8 m long) was recorded in 2010 from Division 6.a.

In April 2014, two basking sharks were stranded on south Brittany beaches: one male (5 m  $L_T$ , 650 kg) and one female (4 m  $L_T$ , 250 kg estimated). The female had a third of its dorsal body surface lacerated by a propeller wound.

Five basking sharks were caught and discarded by the Norwegian Coastal Reference Fleet in 2007–2009 (Vollen, 2010 WD). All specimens were caught in gillnets by vessels <15 m operating in ICES Subarea 2.

The requirement for EU and UK fleets to discard all basking sharks accidentally caught results in a lack of information on these catches. Similarly, for Norway, although reporting of released basking sharks is mandatory, there is currently no operative mechanism to facilitate such reporting.

A protocol for the standardised recording of bycatch and biological information from bycatch would benefit any future assessments of the stock.

### **7.3.3 Quality of the catch data**

The official Norwegian conversion factor used to convert from liver weight and fin weight to live fish was revised in 2008 (Table 7.2). The official Norwegian landing statistics were unchanged from 1977 to 1999, but from 2000–2008 the revised landings figures are applied. Further information on the revision of the conversion factor is included in the Stock Annex.

### **7.3.4 Discard survival**

Limited information available, and national observer programmes could usefully collect data on fate (released alive/released dead) of basking shark specimens caught.

## **7.4 Commercial catch composition**

There is some information on minimum, maximum and median weight of livers and fins, and corresponding live weights of individual basking sharks landed in Norway during 1992–1997. This information is included in the Stock Annex.

## **7.5 Commercial catch-effort data**

There are neither effort nor CPUE data available for recent years. Historical CPUE data from the Norwegian fishery (1965–1985) are given in the Stock Annex.

## **7.6 Fishery-independent surveys**

Several countries, e.g. Norway, Denmark, Ireland, conduct scientific whale-counting surveys. Observations of basking sharks are normally recorded in these surveys.

The Norwegian whale-counting survey observed a total of 87 basking shark in the Norwegian Sea during the period 1995–2014. Sightings seem to be heavily dependent on weather conditions, and 82 of the 87 sightings were made within nine short time periods (hours or 1–2 d). No apparent trends could therefore be identified. A number of Norwegian commercial vessels regularly

report observations of whales, and a request to report basking shark sightings might yield useful effort-related data. The Norwegian Shark Alliance (HAI Norge) has collected online public sightings of basking sharks from 2011–2014. In 2019, the Institute of Marine Research (IMR) started collecting public sighting data through an online reporting system as well as bycatch incidents from media reports.

A national sighting program also exists along French coastlines, including all scientific survey reports (managed by APECS). Between 40 and 270 sightings are recorded each year, mostly reported by sailors and fishers. Sightings occur mainly from April to June, and the major area is the southern and western coasts of Brittany. Early sightings have also been reported from off Corsica in February–March. In 2011, one basking shark was reported in Saint Pierre et Miquelon.

There are also sightings programmes in the UK (Marine Conservation Society, 2003; Southall *et al.*, 2005; and the Shark Trust, [https://recording.sharktrust.org/sightings/search\\_database](https://recording.sharktrust.org/sightings/search_database)), and in Ireland through the Irish Basking Shark Study Group and the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group.

In Scotland, Whale and Dolphin Trust for Hebrides and North West Scotland, runs a sighting programme; Sea Watch Foundation is doing so for the Northern islands and northeast Scotland coasts. Basking Shark Scotland collates public sightings data.

## 7.7 Life-history and other relevant information

A summary of the knowledge of basking shark habitat, reproduction, growth and maturity, food and feeding, and behaviour can be found in the Stock Annex.

Basking sharks undertake extensive horizontal and vertical movements throughout the year (Sims *et al.* 2003; Sims, 2008) with a variety of spatio-temporal movement patterns and distances (Doherty *et al.*, 2017; Dolton *et al.*, 2020) and seasonal patterns (Doherty *et al.*, 2017). Marked interannual and intra-annual variability of basking shark sightings have been reported, with significant correlation between the duration of the sightings season in each year and environmental/climatic factors like the North Atlantic Oscillation (Couto *et al.*, 2017; Witt *et al.*, 2012).

The Irish and Celtic Seas are important areas and studies show important migration corridors for sharks moving between NW Scotland, Isle of Man, SW England and western France (Berrow and Johnston, 2010 WD; Stéphan *et al.*, 2011, Lieber *et al.*, 2020).

In a study from 2008, the Irish Basking Shark Study Group tagged two basking sharks with archival satellite tags (Berrow and Johnston, 2010 WD). Both sharks remained on the continental shelf for most of the tagging period; ‘Shark A’ spent most time in the Irish and Celtic Seas with evidence of a southerly movement in winter to the west coast of France, whilst the movements of ‘Shark B’ were more constrained, remaining off the southwest coast for the whole period with locations along the shelf edge and in the Porcupine Bight (Figure 7.2). The greatest depths recorded were 144 m and 136 m, respectively, demonstrating that although ‘Shark B’ was located over deep water along shelf edge, it was not diving to large depths. The sharks were within 8 m of the surface for 10% and 6% of the time. The study demonstrated that basking sharks were present and active in Irish waters throughout the winter period.

Whilst for the NW Atlantic, Skomal *et al.* (2009) shed further light on apparent winter ‘disappearance’ of basking shark. Through satellite archival tags and a novel geolocation technique they demonstrated that sharks tagged in temperate feeding areas off the coast of southern New England moved to the Bahamas, the Caribbean Sea, and onward to the coast of South America and into the southern hemisphere. When in these areas, basking sharks descended to mesopelagic depths (200–1000 m) and in some cases remained there for weeks to months at a time. The authors concluded that basking sharks in the western Atlantic Ocean, which is characterized by dramatic seasonal fluctuations in oceanographic conditions, migrate well beyond their

established range into tropical mesopelagic waters. In the eastern Atlantic Ocean, however, only occasional dives to mesopelagic depths have been reported in equivalent tagging studies (Sims *et al.*, 2005). It is hypothesized that in this area, the relatively stable environmental conditions mediated by the Gulf Stream may limit the extent to which basking sharks need to move during winter to find sufficient food.

The NGO APECS and the Manx Basking Shark Watch tagged ten basking sharks in 2009 (Stéphan *et al.*, 2011). The sharks were tagged with pop-up archival tags (MK10PAT, Wildlife Computers). Eight tags were deployed around the Isle of Man in the Irish Sea and two in the Iroise Sea (West Brittany, France). All the sharks tagged in the Irish Sea moved south, within the Irish Sea or Celtic Sea, and one to the southern Bay of Biscay (Figure 7.3). One of the tags set in the Irish Sea in 2009 popped off after five days but the second after 38 days. During this short period, the shark moved quickly northwards past the west coast of Ireland to western Scotland. This study confirmed that at least some sharks are present in coastal waters during the cold season (October to March). They are then found in deeper waters, while continuing to perform daily vertical migrations. However, one particularly significant sector of winter distribution does emerge: the northwestern part of the Celtic Sea where basking sharks are notably distributed at depths of 50–100 m during the cold season (Figure 7.4). The track of one shark tagged in Brittany confirms that some sharks sighted at the entrance to the Channel can swiftly reach the waters of the Hebrides via the west of Ireland (Figure 7.3).

Since 2011, APECS have tagged two further sharks off south Brittany, a 7.5 m male in April 2011 and a 6.5 m female in June 2013. These tags popped off after 35 and 76 days, respectively. The first one moved about 150 nm west of the tagging location to the northern Bay of Biscay, and the second one in the Celtic Sea, about 40 nm south of Ireland. In May 2016, two SPOT tags were deployed on adult animals south of Brittany; the 6.5 m female showed up in May 2017 in the southern of Bay of Biscay after spending the winter off the Moroccan coast.

The Manx Basking Shark Watch also deployed tags in 2008 and 2011–2013 and have four basking sharks equipped with SPOT5 tags that can be tracked on the Wildlife Tracking website. The Irish Basking Shark Study Group also performed tagging in 2012 and 2013.

SPOT Tagging technology has been successfully applied in the Inner Hebrides (West Scotland) on basking shark since 2012: nine SPOTs were deployed in July 2012 (Witt *et al.*, 2013). Recent analyses (Witt *et al.*, 2016), revealed various spatio-temporal patterns in habitat use, from coastal movements to movements of thousands of kilometres (Figure 7.4). Long-distance movements of three adult basking shark from the Hebridean Sea to Madeira, Canary Islands and North African coasts were observed from SPOT and SPLASH-F tags. These represented movements of >3300 km (straight-line distance) over periods of 132–322 days. In contrast, other sharks demonstrated a degree of site fidelity to the Inner Hebrides (at various spatial scales) during the summer months (Figure 7.5). This study also lighted the importance of the Irish and Celtic Seas and important migration corridors for sharks moving from NW Scotland to the Isle of Man and southwest England.

## 7.8 Exploratory assessment models

No exploratory assessments have been undertaken.

## 7.9 Stock assessment

No stock assessment has been undertaken.

## 7.10 Quality of assessments

No assessments have been undertaken.

## 7.11 Reference points

No reference points have been proposed for this species.

## 7.12 Conservation considerations

Globally, basking shark is listed as Endangered on the IUCN Red List since 2019 (Rigby *et al.*, 2021) and, in European waters since 2015 (Sims *et al.*, 2005). It is also listed as Endangered on the Irish Red List (Clarke *et al.*, 2016) and on the Norwegian Red List since 2010 (Hesthagen *et al.*, 2021).

Basking shark is also listed on:

- Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species since 2003 (CITES 2002).
- Appendices I and II of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species (CMS) since 2005 (CMS, 2018).
- Annex I, Highly Migratory Species, of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS 1982).
- the OSPAR (Convention on the protection of the marine environment of the Northeast Atlantic) list of threatened and/or declining species since 2003 (OSPAR 2009, re-assessed in 2021).

## 7.13 Management considerations

The current status of the stock is unknown. At present, there is no directed fishery for this species, but the levels of incidental bycatch and mortality of discards are unknown. Improved estimations of bycatch, fate and discarding, by numbers and estimated weight, is required.


Where national legislation prohibits landing of bycaught basking sharks, measures should be put in place to ensure that incidental catches are recorded by (estimated) weight and number, and carcasses or biological material made available for research.

A number of national and regional sighting schemes operate in Northeast Atlantic waters, and coordinated analyses of such data may better elucidate knowledge of spatio-temporal patterns in abundance.

The low productivity and aggregating nature of basking shark makes it particularly vulnerable to overexploitation. It is susceptible to habitat degradation through anthropogenic impacts such as coastal development, pollution as well as boat and tourism interactions.

## 7.14 References

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## 7.15 Tables and Figures

**Table 7.1. Basking shark in the Northeast Atlantic. Total landings (t) of basking sharks in ICES subareas 1–14 (1977–2022)\*. “+” = <0.5 t. Data for 2022 updated following Data Call.**

Year	1 & 2	3 & 4	5a	5b	6	7	8	9	10	12	14	TOTAL
1977	3680											3680
1978	3349			14		278						3641
1979	5120					139	7					5266
1980	3642			83								3725
1981	1772			28								1800
1982	1970					186						2156
1983	967	734				60						1761
1984	873	1188				1						2062
1985	1465											1465
1986	1144											1144
1987	164							1				165
1988	96	10										106
1989	593							+				593
1990	781	116					1					897
1991	533	220					+	+				753
1992	1613	84					+	+				1697
1993	1374							+				1374
1994	920	157					+	1				1078
1995	604	23					1	1				629
1996	792						+	1				793
1997	425	43					2	1				471
1998	55						1					56
1999	31						1	1				33
2000	117						1	1				119
2001	80							2	1			83
2002	54	+						1				55
2003	128							1				129
2004	72							1	26			99
2005	218	+				2	1	2				223
2006	16					+	+	+				17
2007	26							+				26
2008	4						1					5
2009				1	+		+					1
2010				+	1			+				1
2011	2							+				2
2012	22							1				24
2013								+				+

Year	1 & 2	3 & 4	5a	5b	6	7	8	9	10	12	14	TOTAL
2014						+						+
2015												
2016								+				+
2017						1						1
2018												
2019												
2020							+	+				+
2021								+				+
2022												

\* The figures in the table are rounded. Calculations were done with unrounded inputs and computed values may not match exactly when calculated using the rounded figures in the table.

**Table 7.2. Basking shark in the Northeast Atlantic. Norwegian landings of liver (kg) and fins (kg) of basking shark (*Cetorhinus maximus*) during 1977–2008, estimated landings in live weight (conversion factors of 4.64 for liver and 40.0 for fins), estimated numbers of landed individuals (from landings of both liver and fins using an average weight per individual of 648.5 kg for liver and 71.5 kg for fins), ICES and Norwegian official landings (applying conversion factors of 10.0 for liver (1977–1995), 100.0 fins (1996–1999), 100.0 for fins (ICES 2000–2008), and 40.0 for fins (Norway 2000–2008)), and landings recommended used by ICES WGEF 2008. In 1995 and 1997, landings of whole individuals measuring 3760 kg (one individual) and 7132 kg (two individuals), respectively, were reported. These weights are included in the official and revised landings and in the estimation of landed numbers.**

Year	Liver (kg)	Fins (kg)	Catch from liver (tonnes)	Catch from fins (tonnes)	Landed numbers (livers – fins)	ICES official landings (tonnes)	Norway official landings (tonnes)	ICES estimates (2008)
1977	793 153	0	3680.2	0.0	1223	7931.5	7931.5	3680.2
1978	784 687	0	3640.9	0.0	1210	7846.9	7846.9	3640.9
1979	1 133 477	95 070	5259.3	3802.8	1748–1330	11 334.8	11 334.8	5259.3
1980	802 756	60 851	3724.8	2434.0	1238–851	8027.6	8027.6	3724.8
1981	387 997	27 191	1800.3	1087.6	598–380	3880.0	3880.0	1800.3
1982	464 606	31 987	2155.8	1279.5	716–447	4646.1	4646.1	2155.8
1983	379 428	24 847	1760.5	993.5	585–348	3794.3	3794.3	1760.5
1984	444 171	23 505	2061.0	940.2	685–329	4441.7	4441.7	2061.0
1985	315 629	16 699	1464.5	668.0	487–234	3156.3	3156.3	1464.5
1986	246 474	12 138	1143.6	485.5	380–170	2464.7	2464.7	1143.6
1987	35 244	3148	163.5	125.9	54–44	352.4	352.4	163.5
1988	22 761	1927	105.6	77.1	35–27	227.6	227.6	105.6
1989	127 775	10 367	592.9	414.7	197–145	1277.8	1277.8	592.9
1990	193 179	18 110	896.4	724.4	298–253	1931.8	1931.8	896.4
1991	162 323	18 337	753.2	733.5	250–256	1623.2	1623.2	753.2
1992	365 761	37 145	1697.1	1485.8	564–520	3657.6	3657.6	1697.1
1993	291 042	34 360	1350.4	1374.4	449–481	2910.4	2910.4	1374.4
1994	176 220	26 922	817.7	1076.9	272–377	1762.2	1762.2	1076.9
1995	10 450	15 571	52.2	626.6	17–219	108.3	108.3	626.6
1996	41 283	19 789	191.6	791.6	64–277	1978.9	1978.9	791.6
1997	57 184	11 520	272.5	467.9	90–163	1159.1	1159.1	467.9

Year	Liver (kg)	Fins (kg)	Catch from liver (tonnes)	Catch from fins (tonnes)	Landed numbers (livers – fins)	ICES official landings (tonnes)	Norway official landings (tonnes)	ICES estimates (2008)
1977	793 153	0	3680.2	0.0	1223	7931.5	7931.5	3680.2
1978	784 687	0	3640.9	0.0	1210	7846.9	7846.9	3640.9
1979	1 133 477	95 070	5259.3	3802.8	1748–1330	11 334.8	11 334.8	5259.3
1980	802 756	60 851	3724.8	2434.0	1238–851	8027.6	8027.6	3724.8
1981	387 997	27 191	1800.3	1087.6	598–380	3880.0	3880.0	1800.3
1982	464 606	31 987	2155.8	1279.5	716–447	4646.1	4646.1	2155.8
1983	379 428	24 847	1760.5	993.5	585–348	3794.3	3794.3	1760.5
1984	444 171	23 505	2061.0	940.2	685–329	4441.7	4441.7	2061.0
1985	315 629	16 699	1464.5	668.0	487–234	3156.3	3156.3	1464.5
1986	246 474	12 138	1143.6	485.5	380–170	2464.7	2464.7	1143.6
1987	35 244	3148	163.5	125.9	54–44	352.4	352.4	163.5
1988	22 761	1927	105.6	77.1	35–27	227.6	227.6	105.6
1989	127 775	10 367	592.9	414.7	197–145	1277.8	1277.8	592.9
1990	193 179	18 110	896.4	724.4	298–253	1931.8	1931.8	896.4
1991	162 323	18 337	753.2	733.5	250–256	1623.2	1623.2	753.2
1992	365 761	37 145	1697.1	1485.8	564–520	3657.6	3657.6	1697.1
1993	291 042	34 360	1350.4	1374.4	449–481	2910.4	2910.4	1374.4
1994	176 220	26 922	817.7	1076.9	272–377	1762.2	1762.2	1076.9
1995	10 450	15 571	52.2	626.6	17–219	108.3	108.3	626.6
1996	41 283	19 789	191.6	791.6	64–277	1978.9	1978.9	791.6
1997	57 184	11 520	272.5	467.9	90–163	1159.1	1159.1	467.9
1998	3	1366	0.0	54.6	19	136.6	136.6	54.6
1999	20	770	0.1	30.8	11	77.0	77.0	30.8
2000	51	2926	0.2	117.0	41	292.6	117.0	117.0

Year	Liver (kg)	Fins (kg)	Catch from liver (tonnes)	Catch from fins (tonnes)	Landed numbers (livers – fins)	ICES official landings (tonnes)	Norway official landings (tonnes)	ICES estimates (2008)
2001	0	1997.5	0.0	79.9	28	199.7	79.9	79.9
2002	0	1351.5	0.0	54.1	19	135.2	54.1	54.1
2003	0	3191.5	0.0	127.7	45	319.2	127.7	127.7
2004	0	1808.3	0.0	72.3	25	180.8	72.3	72.3
2005	0	2180.5	0.0	87.2	30	218.1	87.2	87.2
2006	0	160	0.0	6.4	2	16.0	6.4	6.4
2007	0	653	0.0	26.1	9	65.3	26.1	26.1
2008	0	98	0.0	3.9	1	9.8	3.9	3.9

**Table 7.3. Basking shark in the Northeast Atlantic. Proportions (%) of landed basking sharks caught in different gears as reported to the Norwegian Directorate of Fisheries from 1990–2011.**

Year	Division 2.a							Division 4.a	
	Harpoon	Gillnet	Driftnet*	Undefined nets	Bottom trawl	Danish seine	Hook and lines	Harpoon	Gillnet
1990	84.0		3.1					12.9	
1991	69.7		1.0					29.3	
1992	83.1		6.0		5.6		0.4	4.9	
1993	99.1	0.8			0.1				
1994	85.4							14.6	
1995	89.8	6.5							3.7
1996	89.1	10.3		0.2		0.4	0.1		
1997	66.7	23.7					0.5	9.1	
1998	67.2	28.5					4.4		
1999	9.1	81.8		7.8	1.3				
2000	33.4	58.7			7.8				
2001		96.0			4.0				
2002	16.3	78.5			5.2				
2003	3.4	89.7			7.2				
2004		100.0							
2005	54.1	44.5		0.5	1.4				
2006		100.0							
2007		100.0							
2008		100.0							
2009									
2010									
2011		50.0					50.0		

\* These driftnets for salmon were banned after 1992.

**Table 7.4. Basking shark in the Northeast Atlantic. Summary details of bycatch reported from France and Norway.**

Nation	Day	Month	Year	Geog. area	Lat	Lon	Gear	Depth	Length	Weight (kg)	Comment	Source
France		May	2009	Mediterranean	42.935	3.063	Gillnet		6–7 m			Unpublished data - APECS
France		May	2009	Mediterranean	42.935	3.063	Gillnet		6–7 m			Unpublished data - APECS
France		May	2009	Mediterranean	42.935	3.063	Gillnet		6–7 m			Unpublished data - APECS
France	31	May	2009	Atlantic	47.768	4.211			2.5–3 m		Released alive	Unpublished data - APECS
France	18	Nov	2009	Atlantic	43.427	1.695			3.5–4 m		Discarded	Unpublished data - APECS
France	27	Apr	2009	Mediterranean	45.841	1.531	Bottom trawl	20 m			Discarded	Unpublished data - APECS
France	20	May	2009	Mediterranean	43.051	-3.391	Pelagic trawl	45 m	5 m		Discarded	Unpublished data - APECS
France	25	Jan	2010	Iroise Sea	48.549	5.124	Gillnet		4–5 m		Released alive	Unpublished data - APECS
France	8	May	2010	Atlantic	46.236	1.592	Gillnet		4.6 m		Discarded	Unpublished data - APECS
France	27	May	2010	Atlantic	47.247	2.964	Gillnet		3.4 m		Discarded, samples, museum collection	Unpublished data - APECS
France	30	May	2011	Mediterranean	43.328	-5.203	Gillnet		3–6 m		Released alive	Unpublished data - APECS
France	3	Aug	2011	Iroise Sea	48.233	4.483	Gillnet		3–6 m		Discarded, samples	Unpublished data - APECS
France	19	Apr	2011	Atlantic	47.760	4.205	Gillnet	30 m	3–6 m		Discarded, samples, immature	Unpublished data - APECS
France	6	May	2011	Atlantic	47.745	4.218	Gillnet		3–6 m		Released alive, genetic sample	Unpublished data - APECS
France	4	Nov.	2011	Celtic Sea					4 m		Genetic sample	Obsmer data
France	17	May	2013	Atlantic	47.780	4.210	Gillnet		3.3 m		Discarded, samples, immature male	Unpublished data - APECS
France	15	April	2014	Atlantic	47.78	3.77			5 m	650	Discarded	Media
Norway		Dec	2006	Atlantic	59.03	9.80	Gillnet	50 m	3.5 m	350	Approx. position	Media
Norway		Sep	2006	Atlantic	58.81	9.90	Gillnet		~4 m	500	Discarded, approx. position	Media
Norway		Aug	2007	Atlantic	61.97	5.02	Gillnet		4.5 m	250	Discarded, approx. position	Media
Norway			2007	Atlantic	64.13	8.20	Gillnet		4 m	500	Approx. position	Media

Nation	Day	Month	Year	Geog. area	Lat	Lon	Gear	Depth	Length	Weight (kg)	Comment	Source
Norway		Sep	2007	Atlantic	58.45	8.86	Gillnet		4–5 m		Approx. position	Media
Norway		July	2008	Atlantic	68.11	14.18					Approx. position	Media
Norway		July	2008	Atlantic	62.36	47.00	Gillnet				Released alive, approx. position	Media
Norway		July	2011	Atlantic	70.29	27.28	Gillnet		~10 m		Discarded, approximate position	Media
Norway		July	2011	Atlantic	71.11	23.96	Gillnet				Released alive, approx. position	Media
Norway		May	2012	Atlantic	68.78	11.86	Gillnet		~10 m	~1 t	Landed, approx. position	Media
Norway		May	2012	Atlantic	62.48	5.86	Gillnet				Landed, approx. position	Media
Norway	13	Sept	2014	Atlantic	65.60	12.10	Gillnet		12 m		Approx. position	Media



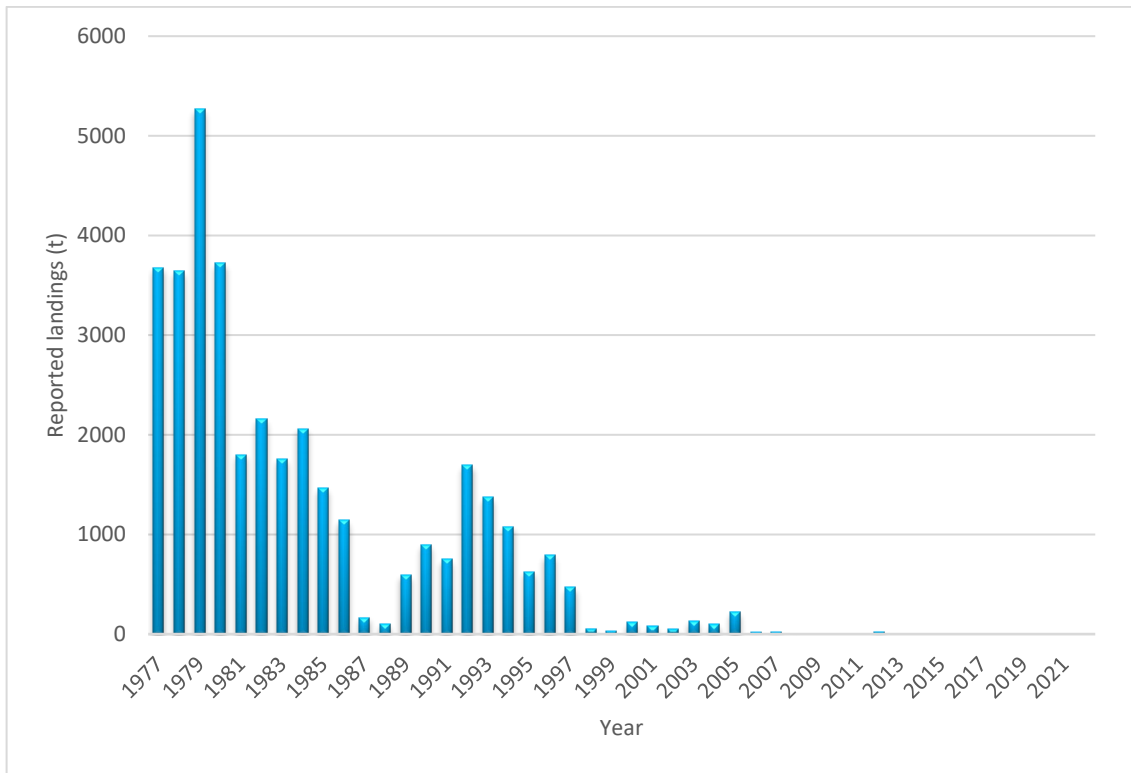


Figure 7.1. Basking shark in the Northeast Atlantic. Total landings (t) of basking sharks in ICES subareas 1–14 from 1977–2022, since 2013: < 1 t landed.

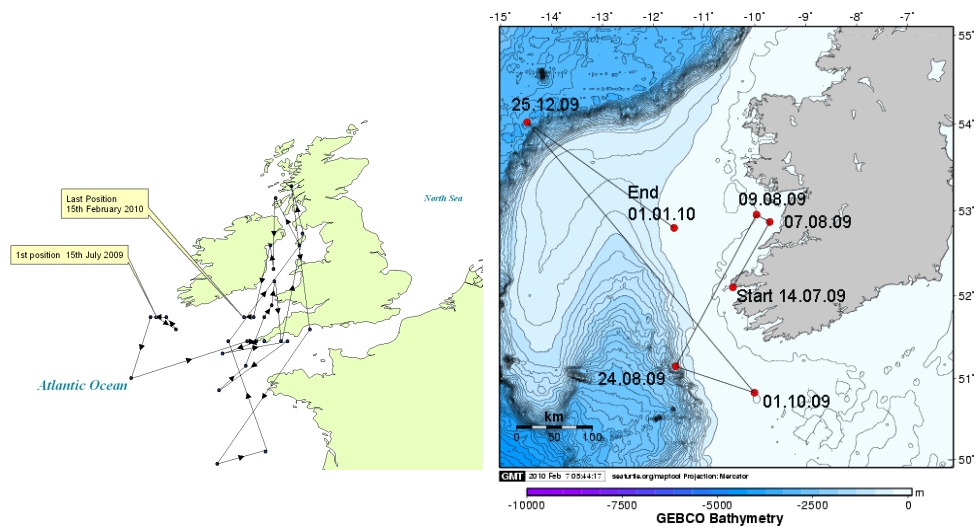


Figure 7.2. Basking shark in the Northeast Atlantic. Geolocations from basking shark A (left, sex = male) and B (right, sex = unknown). Source: Berrow and Johnston (2010 WD).

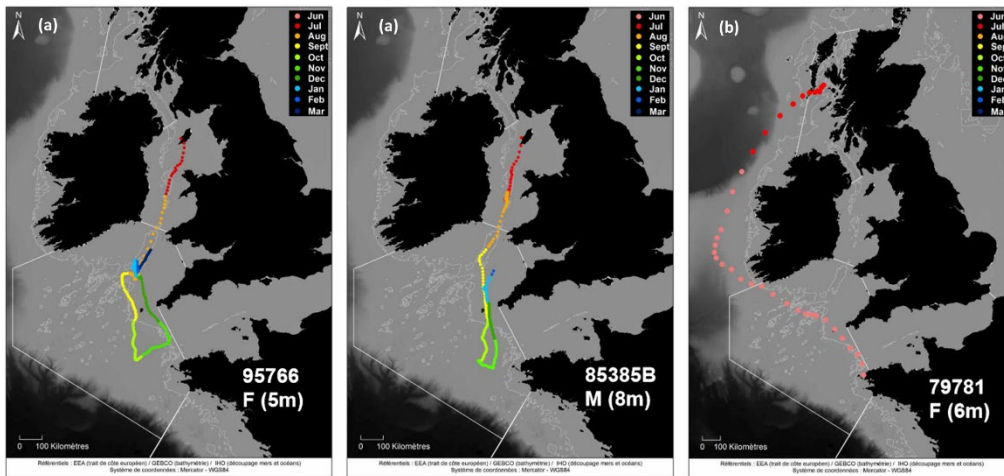


Figure 7.3. Basking shark in the Northeast Atlantic. Most probable tracks for (left) shark 95766 (5 m female) and (centre) shark 85385 (8 m male), tracked for more than 200 days and which stayed in the Irish Sea and Celtic Seas, and (right) most probable track for shark 79781 (6 m female) tracked for 38 days. Source: Stéphan *et al.* (2011).

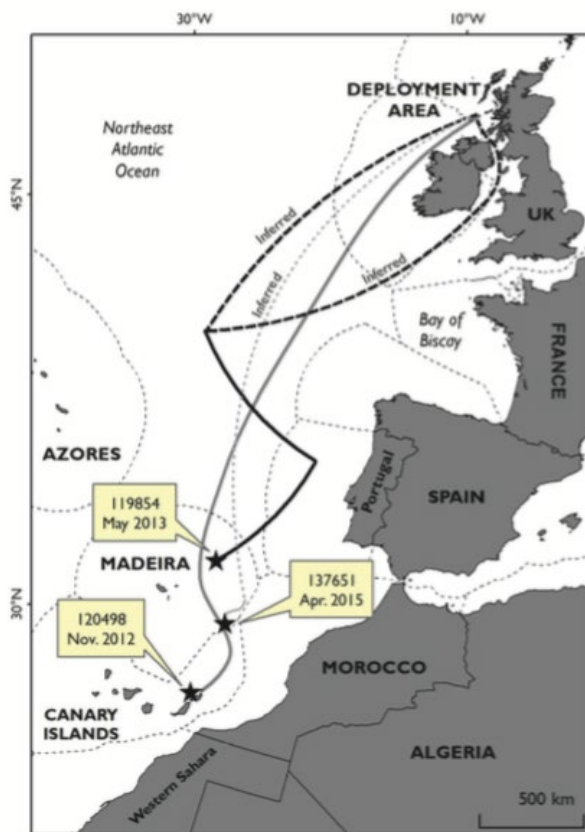


Figure 7.4. Basking shark in the Northeast Atlantic. Long-range movements of basking sharks from Scotland revealed by Argos satellite tracking. Two SPOT-tagged basking sharks in 2012 (119854, 120498) and one SPLASH-F tagged shark in 2014 (137651). Source: Witt *et al.* (2016).

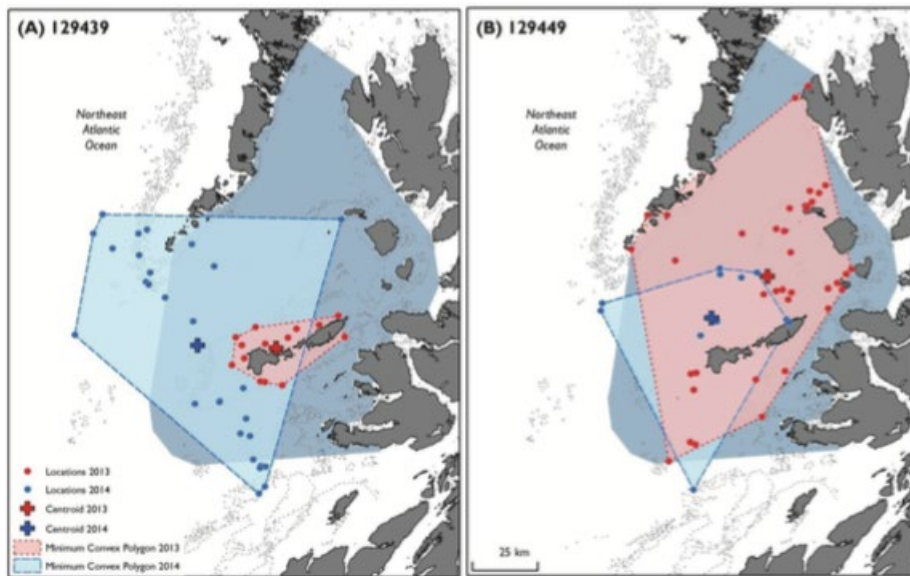


Figure 7.5. Basking shark in the Northeast Atlantic. Example distribution of two sharks showing inter-annual fidelity to the Hebridean Sea. Single highest quality Argos locations per day (red and blue circles for 2013 and 2014 respectively). Minimum convex polygons for data gathered in 2013 and 2014 (red and blue polygons respectively), geographic mean centroid of Argos locations for 2013 and 2014 (red and blue crosses respectively). Source: Witt *et al.* (2016).

## 8 Blue shark in the North Atlantic (North of 5°N)

### 8.1 Stock distribution

There is a discrete North Atlantic stock of blue shark *Prionace glauca* (Heessen, 2003; Fitzmaurice *et al.*, 2005; ICCAT, 2008), with 5°N latitude as the southern stock boundary, and a separate South Atlantic stock (ICCAT, 2008). This delineation is based on mark-recapture data (e.g. Kohler *et al.*, 2002), and oceanographic features. In addition, this division facilitates comparison with fisheries statistics for other North Atlantic stocks of tuna-like species that have the same southern stock boundary. Hence, the ICES area is only part of the stock area. The North Atlantic stock is currently considered separate to the Mediterranean Sea by ICCAT, which is also supported by a recent scientific study (Leone *et al.*, 2017).

Genetic studies on blue shark reveal genetic homogeneity across whole ocean basins in Atlantic (Verissimo *et al.*, 2017) and Pacific Oceans (Ovenden *et al.*, 2009; Taguchi *et al.*, 2015). These are at odds with the currently assumed distinction of northern and southern stocks within each ocean basin. Much of the available evidence indicates that blue shark exhibits dispersal with gene flow over very large spatial scales, and little to no philopatry to the sampled nursery areas or to distinct ocean basins. However, in cases such as blue shark, where effective population sizes are ~1000s, the levels of genetic divergence associated with migration rates which could lead to demographic connectivity (~10%; Hastings, 1993) may be difficult to detect using traditional molecular markers. In such cases, the precautionary approach in conservation and fisheries management would be to consider each nursery area as independent, with potentially different demographic parameters and vulnerability to fishing pressure. If each nursery area currently exchanges only a few migrant individuals per generation with other nurseries, the replenishment of each stock would be mostly dependent on recruit survival rather than on immigration from adjacent stocks.

### 8.2 The fishery

#### 8.2.1 History of the fishery

There are no large-scale target fisheries for blue shark, although it is a major bycatch species in tuna and billfish fisheries and can comprise up to 70% of the total catch, thus sometimes exceeding the catch of the target species (ICCAT, 2005). Longer-term catch data are incomplete, but more data have become available in recent years.

In the North Atlantic, EU fleets (primarily Spain and Portugal) are responsible for approximately 82% of the total landings (Anon., 2015). Observer data indicates that substantially more blue sharks are caught as bycatch than reported in catch statistics.

Since 1998, there has been a seasonal (June to November) Basque artisanal longline fishery targeting blue shark and other pelagic sharks in the Bay of Biscay (Díez *et al.*, 2007). Initially 3–5 vessels were involved but, as a consequence of changes in local fishing regulations, the number of vessels reduced to two after 2008.

Blue shark is also taken, in considerable numbers, in recreational fisheries, including from the Celtic Sea and western Channel (Vas, 1990; Mitchell *et al.*, 2014; Thomas *et al.*, 2023) and other parts of the ICES area (Campana *et al.*, 2005).

In the North Atlantic, thirteen fisheries (in descending order of volume: EU-Spain, EU-Portugal, Japan, Canada, USA\_LL, Chinese Taipei, EU-France, Belize, Panama, USA\_SP., China PR, Korea and, Venezuela) accounted for 99% of the total removals (1990–2014). The majority (except: USA sport fishery, EU-France unclassified gear) are longline fisheries (Anon., 2015).

### 8.2.2 The fishery in 2022

No new information.

No major changes noted in 2021/2022, although potential changes to fishing effort (and observer coverage) caused by the effects of COVID-19 have not yet been quantified.

### 8.2.3 Advice applicable

ICES does not provide advice for blue shark in the North Atlantic, and assessment of this stock is considered to be the responsibility of ICCAT.

The last assessment was conducted in 2015 (ICCAT, 2015), and ICCAT’s Standing Committee on Research and Statistics (SCRS) concluded that *“while all model formulations explored predicted that the stock was not overfished and that overfishing was not occurring, the level of uncertainty in the data inputs and model structural assumptions was high enough to prevent the Committee from reaching a consensus on a specific management recommendation”*.

ICCAT is re-assessing blue shark during 2023, with a Data Preparatory Meeting held in April 2023 (ICCAT, 2023) and the assessment scheduled for July 2023, and so new recommendations from the SCRS should be available later in 2023.

### 8.2.4 Management applicable

There are no measures fully regulating all the catches of blue shark in the North Atlantic.

The relevant, active ICCAT Recommendation (19/07) gives an annual TAC of 39 102 t for North Atlantic blue shark, under which certain CPCs are subject to catch limits (EU: 32 578 t; Japan: 4 010 t; Morocco: 1 644 t; summing to 38 232 t). Other CPCs were to endeavour to maintain their catches at recent levels.

ICCAT Recommendation 21/10 maintained the same broad allocation key, but also authorised the EU to transfer 0.01% (32.58 t) of its catch limit in 2022 to the UK.

European regulations setting annual fishing opportunities have set an overall TAC of 39 102 t for North Atlantic blue shark (i.e., north of 5°N) since 2017. An allocation key has been included since 2020, with the allocated quotas changed slightly in recent years.

Nation	2020	2021	2022	2023
Ireland	1	1	0.96	0.96
Spain	27 062	27 062	27 035.09	27 007.71
France	152	152	151.70	151.55
Portugal	5 363	5 363	5 357.67	5 352.24
EU	32 578	32 578	32,545.42	32 512.46
United Kingdom		(32.38)*	32.38	32.38

\*ICCAT Circular #4088/2021 of 10 June 2021 provided details of percentage shared between the EU and UK

EC Regulation No. 1185/2003 (updated by EU Regulation No 605/2013) prohibits the removal of shark fins and subsequent discarding of the body. This regulation is binding on EU vessels in all waters and non-EU vessels in EU waters. In June 2023, 'The Shark Fins Act 2023' was passed in the UK banning the import and export of detached shark fins, including all products containing shark fins.

## 8.3 Catch data

### 8.3.1 Landings

It is difficult to accurately quantify landings of blue shark in the North Atlantic, especially for the earlier parts of the time-series (Figure 8.1). ICCAT considers that reported landings of blue shark were underestimated in the early part of the time-series (prior to 1997), with official annual landings data of a more comparable magnitude since 1997 (*ca.* 20 000–44 000 t per year).

In 2015, alternative approaches to estimate catch series were discussed by ICCAT (Anon., 2015), including (i) ratios between blue shark catches and species-specific catches derived from ICCAT Task I data; (ii) catch/effort and standardised CPUE; and (iii) shark fin trade data. Figure 8.1 shows the catch series (1971–2013) for North Atlantic blue shark available for the 2008 and 2015 stock assessment meetings (SA2015), the 2008 stock assessment catches (SA2008), and the catch series obtained using shark-fin ratios (three different series, see for example Clarke *et al.*, 2006). Whilst both data series followed broadly similar trends, there were large differences in some years, and catches oscillated several times between 15 000 t and 55 000 t. The three shark-fin series showed completely different trends (continuous upward trends) with catches starting around 10 000 t in the 1980s and growing to nearly 60 000 t in 2011 (Anon., 2015).

Generally, the overall data for blue shark (and sharks in general) reported to ICCAT has improved over time, with more complete series by species and smaller quantities of unclassified sharks.

The most recently available ICCAT Task 1 data (version of 26/01/2023), including landings and dead discards, indicate that landings of the North Atlantic stock of blue shark (2000–2021) have averaged 30 232 t y<sup>-1</sup> (range: 20 066–44 070 t). Following a recent peak in 2016, the reported landings have declined, averaging 25 966 t in the most recent four-year period (2018–2021). Hence, the reported catches from 2018 onwards have been lower than the TAC (Figure 8.2).

During the period 2000–2021, the majority of the reported catches of blue shark in the North Atlantic have been from billfish areas BIL94B and BIL94C (which account for *ca.* 90% of the catches), followed by BIL94A (8%) and with lower quantities from BIL92 and BIL93 (Table 8.1).

During this period, the main nations reporting catches of blue shark (Table 8.2) have been Spain (on average, accounting for 71% of the annual reported catch), followed by Portugal (15.3%), Japan (6.9%), Morocco (1.6%) and Canada (1.3%). Belize, Panama, China (Taipei), France and the USA have each accounted for 0.4–0.8%, and much lower proportions are reported by a range of other nations. The current Task 1 data differ slightly from those collated during the recent data preparatory meeting (ICCAT, 2023; Figure 8.2; Table 8.2), with some estimates being derived to infill those data that are considered lacking. The catch series will be finalised at the 2023 stock assessment.

### 8.3.2 Discards

Historically, the relative low value of blue shark meant that it was not always retained for the market, with the fins the most valuable body part. In some fisheries the fins were retained and the carcasses discarded. In 2013, the EU prohibited this practice (see Section 8.2.4).

Recent Task 1 data collated by ICCAT indicate that the quantities discarded dead is only a small proportion of the reported catch (landings and dead discards), but increasing very slightly in recent years (Table 8.3). These data, however, do not include estimates of live discards. The reported quantities being landed or discarded dead for the main fishing nations vary in their completeness for several nations (Table 8.4).

Information on elasmobranchs discards in demersal otter trawl, deep-water set longlines, set gillnet and trammel net fisheries in Division 9.a (2004–2013) showed that blue shark was caught infrequently and discarded in the longline fishery but not in the other fisheries (Prista *et al.*, 2014).

### 8.3.3 Discard survival

Blue shark is one of the most frequent shark species captured in pelagic longline fisheries. Discard survival in such fisheries can be influenced by several factors, including hook type, hooking location, soak time and the size of shark. There are several estimates relating to capture mortality and discard survival (e.g., Boggs, 1992; Francis *et al.*, 2001; Campana *et al.*, 2005; Diez and Serafy, 2005). The at-vessel mortality of longline-caught blue shark ranges from about 5–35% (summarised in Ellis *et al.*, 2014). Discard survival rates are estimated to be about 60% in longline fisheries and 80% in rod and reel fisheries (Campana *et al.*, 2005).

One of the more comprehensive studies of the at-vessel and post-release mortality of blue shark is that of Campana *et al.* (2016). For the years 2010–2014, the at-vessel mortality was 14.7% (aggregated data; annual estimates ranged from 11.5–36.9%, averaging 19.2%). The proportion of blue shark rated as ‘injured’ was 25.1% (aggregated data; annual estimates ranged from 10.0–38.3%, averaging 21.8%), whilst the proportion rated as ‘healthy’ was 60.2% (aggregated data; annual estimates ranged from 43.1–78.5%, averaging 59.0%). Using pop-up satellite archival tags (PSATs), Campana *et al.* (2016) reported that all ‘healthy’ blue sharks ( $n = 10$ ) survived release, although 33% post-release mortality was observed for those individuals classed as ‘injured’ ( $n = 27$ ).

### 8.3.4 Quality of catch data

Catch data are incomplete, especially for those data reported before 1997. The historical use of generic shark categories is problematic, although European countries now report more species-specific data. The extent of finning (over time and by fleets) in high seas fisheries is unclear, although regulations to prohibit this practice have applied to several fleets over recent decades.

Whilst there has been improved species-specific reporting of blue shark landings, the quality and consistency for the reporting of dead (and live discards) appears to be somewhat variable, and more transparency and consistency for how such data are reported is required.

Blue shark is also taken in recreational fisheries, and more robust estimates for these fisheries are required, taking into account likely temporal changes in discard practices and post-release mortality.

## 8.4 Commercial catch composition

No new information.

### 8.4.1 Conversion factors

Information is available for length–weight relationships (Table 8.5) and various length measurements (Table 8.6a and 8.6b). Campana *et al.* (2005) calculated the conversion relationships between dressed weight ( $W_D$ ) and live weight or round weight ( $W_R$ ) for NW Atlantic blue shark ( $n = 17$ ) to be  $W_R = 0.4 + 1.22 W_D$  and  $W_D = 0.2 + 0.81 W_R$ .

For French fisheries, the proportion of gutted fish to round weight is 75.19%. There is also a factor for landed round weight to live weight (96.15%), meaning that there is a 4% reduction in weight because of lost moisture (Hareide *et al.*, 2007). Various estimates of fin weight to body weight are available (Mejuto and García-Cortés, 2004; Santos and Garcia, 2005; Hareide *et al.*, 2007; Santana-Garcon *et al.*, 2012; Biery and Pauly, 2012).

## 8.5 Commercial catch and effort data

The 2015 assessment for the North Atlantic stock conducted by ICCAT used eight time-series of standardised commercial catch and effort data (US observer data, US older time series, and long-line logbook data for Portugal, Spain, Venezuela, China (Taipei) and two Japanese fleets). These CPUE indices show a relatively flat trend throughout the time-series, but with high variance (Tables 8.7–8.8; Figure 8.3). The reader is referred to ICCAT (2015) for more details of these indices.

## 8.6 Fishery-independent surveys

No fishery-independent data are available for the NE Atlantic, although such data exist for parts of the NW Atlantic (Hueter and Simpfendorfer, 2008). A survey from 1977–1994 conducted by the US NMFS documented a decline among juvenile male blue sharks by 80%, but not among juvenile females, which also occur in fewer numbers in the study area, off the coast of Massachusetts (Hueter and Simpfendorfer, 2008). The authors concluded that vulnerability to overfishing in blue sharks is present despite their enhanced levels of fecundity relative to other carcharhinid sharks.

## 8.7 Life-history information

### 8.7.1 Life-history parameters

Various studies have compiled biological information for blue shark in the North Atlantic and other areas (see Nakano & Seki, 2003; Nakano & Stevens, 2008; da Silva *et al.*, 2021; ICCAT, 2023). Relevant data are summarized in Tables 8.5 (length–weight relationships), 8.6a-b (length–length relationships), Table 8.9 (growth parameters) and Table 8.10 (other life-history parameters). Based on life-history information, blue shark is considered to be among the most productive shark species (ICCAT, 2008).



New life history inputs were obtained from data assembled at the ICCAT 2014 Intersessional Meeting of the Shark Species Group (ICCAT, 2014) and additional information provided during the 2015 blue shark data preparatory meeting (SCRS/2015/142). These included maximum population growth rates ( $r_{max}$ ) and steepness ( $h$ ) values of the Beverton–Holt stock–recruitment relationship for the North Atlantic stock, based on the latest biological information. Estimated productivity was high ( $r_{max} = 0.31\text{--}0.44\text{ y}^{-1}$  for the North Atlantic stock), similar to other stocks of this species. Consequently, analytically derived values of steepness were also high ( $h = 0.73\text{--}0.93$  for the North Atlantic stock).

The influence of different biological parameters (e.g. growth coefficients, reproductive periodicity, first maturation age, natural mortality and longevity) on estimated blue shark productivity has been considered by ICCAT. Age at first maturity and growth coefficients substantially influenced the estimated productivity (e.g. a low age at first maturity and high growth coefficient results in high productivity). Reproductive periodicity also affected productivity (i.e. a longer breeding period decreased productivity). Biological parameters should be considered carefully when they are used in the stock analysis, especially when estimated productivity is inconsistent with trends in abundance indices. The level of depletion experienced by blue shark stocks may affect the productivity or population growth through density dependence, and differences in environmental water temperature may also affect growth rates (Anon., 2015).

### 8.7.2 Habitat

Blue shark has one of the widest ranges of all the shark species, being common in pelagic, oceanic waters in tropical and temperate oceans worldwide, as well as closer to shore (Coelho *et al.*, 2018).

### 8.7.3 Nursery grounds

Coelho *et al.* (2018) reported that young-of-the-year and small juvenile blue shark occurred off the Iberian Peninsula, in the Bay of Biscay, around the Azores Islands and in the central North Atlantic west of the Azores.

### 8.7.4 Diet

Blue shark feed primarily on small pelagic fish and squid (see Nakano & Stevens, 2008 and references therein).

### 8.7.5 Movements

The distribution and movements of blue shark are influenced strongly by seasonal variations in water temperature, reproductive condition and prey availability. Blue shark often occurs in large single-sex schools containing individuals of similar size.

The US National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) coordinates the Cooperative Shark Tagging Programme (CSTP; Kohler *et al.*, 1998; NMFS, 2006), including supplying tags to relevant bodies in the NE Atlantic. Tagging in the NE Atlantic is undertaken by various bodies, including Inshore Fisheries Ireland (formerly the Irish Central Fishing Board) Tagging Programme (Green, 2007 WD) and UK Shark Tagging Programme. There have also been other earlier European tagging studies (Stevens, 1976). The tag and release results presented by ICCAT (2012; Figure 8.4) highlights the large number of blue shark tagged to date, and the extensive horizontal movements undertaken by blue shark in the Atlantic.

In a satellite telemetry study, Queiroz *et al.* (2010) described complex and diverse types of behaviour depending on water stratification and/or depth. Females tagged in the Western Channel were able to spend up to 70 days in the shelf edge area in the Bay of Biscay; whereas tagged juveniles showed relatively extensive vertical movements away from the southern nursery areas. Results indicated that the species inhabited waters with a wide temperature range (10–20°C).

In Australian waters, blue shark exhibits oscillatory dive behaviour between the surface layers to as deep as 560–1000 m. Blue shark occupied waters of 17.5–20.0°C mainly, spending 35–58% of their time <50 m deep, and with 10–16% of their time spent at depths >300 m (Stevens *et al.*, 2010).

Adult blue sharks have no known predators, although sub-adults and juveniles are eaten by shortfin mako, white shark and sea lions. Fishing is likely to be a major contributor to adult mortality. An estimation of fishing mortality rate via satellite tagged sharks being recaptured by fishing vessels ranged from 9–33% (Queiroz *et al.*, 2010).

## 8.8 Exploratory assessment models

### 8.8.1 Previous assessments

In 2004, ICCAT completed a preliminary stock assessment (ICCAT, 2005). Although results suggested that the North Atlantic stock were above biomass in support of MSY, the assessment remained conditional on the assumptions made. These assumptions included (i) estimates of historical shark catch, (ii) the relationship between catch rates and abundance, (iii) the initial state of the stock in 1971, and (iv) various life-history parameters. It was pointed out that the data used for the assessment did not meet the requirements for proper assessment (ICCAT, 2006), and further research and better-resolved data collection was highly recommended.

In 2008, three models were used in stock assessment conducted by ICCAT (ICCAT, 2008 and references cited therein): a Bayesian surplus production model, an age-structured model that did not require catch data (catch-free model), and an age-structured production model. Results with the Bayesian surplus production model produced estimates of stock size well above MSY levels (1.5–2\*  $B_{MSY}$ ), and estimated  $F$  to be very low (at  $F_{MSY}$  or well below it). The carrying capacity of the stock was estimated so high that the increasing estimated catches (25–62 000 t over the time-series) generated very low  $F$  estimates. Sensitivity analyses showed that the stock size estimate was dependent on the weighting assigned to the Irish CPUE series. Equal weighting of this and the other series produced a stock size at around  $B_{MSY}$ . Other sensitivity analyses indicated similar results to the base case run, with the stock well above MSY levels.

The age-structured biomass model displayed different results with either a strong decrease in biomass throughout the series to about 30% of virgin levels, or a less pronounced decline. The prior for the virgin biomass assigned high values to a very small number of biomass values but also indicated that the range of plausible values of this parameter has a heavy tail. This is probably because there is not enough information in the data to update the model and thus provide a narrower range of plausible values and thus provide a more precise estimate of the biomass of the stock.

The age-structured model not requiring catch information estimated that  $F$  was higher than  $F_{MSY}$ , but still low and that the current SSB estimated at around 83% of virgin levels.

As a consequence of the results in 2008, ICCAT concluded that biomass was estimated to be above the level that would support MSY (ICCAT, 2008). These results agreed with earlier work (ICCAT, 2005). Stock status appeared to be close to unfished biomass levels and fishing mortality rates were well below those corresponding to the level at which MSY is reached. However,

ICCAT (2008) pointed out that the results were heavily dependent on the underlying assumptions. In particular, the choice of catch data to be used, the weighting of CPUE series and various life-history parameters used as input in the model. ICCAT was unable to conduct sensitivity analyses of the input data and assumptions (ICCAT, 2008).

Owing to those weaknesses, no firm conclusions were drawn from the preliminary assessments conducted by ICCAT. ICCAT, 2008 stated that most models used predicted that this stock was not overfished but did not use these results to infer stock status and to provide management advice.

## 8.9 Stock assessment

The assessment for the North Atlantic blue shark stock was updated by ICCAT in 2015 using two different approaches (see ICCAT, 2015 for more details): Bayesian Surplus Production Model (BSPM) and length-based age-structured models - Stock Synthesis (SS3).

The Bayesian Surplus Production Models adjusted consistently estimated a posterior distribution for  $r$  that was similar to the prior, and a posterior for  $K$  with a long right tail with high mean and CV (ICCAT, 2015). The estimated biomass trajectory stayed close to  $K$  for most runs, and the harvest rate estimate was low (Figure 8.5). The inclusion of a process error in the model did not improve the results. When each CPUE index was fitted separately, the posterior mean of  $K$  varied and the CVs were large, implying that none of the indices were particularly informative about the value of  $K$ .

Several SS3 runs were undertaken. Run 4 and 6 (see details below) which utilized multiplication factors to reduce the input sample size assigned to length composition data in the model likelihood resulted in reasonable convergence diagnostics (described below).

Model Run	Model Adjustments				
Preliminary Run 1	Natural weights used in model likelihood Length composition input sample size (n = observed) Abundance indices (inverse CV weighting: SCRS/2015/151 )				
Preliminary Run 2 CV adjustment	Same as Preliminary Run 1 + Adjust CV of S9 (ESP-LL-N) Constant CV of 20% applied to S9 (ESP-LL-N)				
Preliminary Run 3 Sample size adjustments	Same as Preliminary Run 2 + Adjust input sample size for length comp Maximum length composition input sample size (n=200)				
Preliminary Run 4 Fleet Variance adjustments	Same as Preliminary Run 2 + Apply variance adjustment to length comp.				
	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5
	0.01	0.01	0.1	0.1	0.1
Preliminary Run 5 Fleet Variance adjustments	Same as Preliminary Run 2 + Apply variance adjustment to length comp.				
	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5
	0.0184	0.0478	0.0261	0.1373	0.2236
Preliminary Run 6 Fleet Variance adjustments	Same as Preliminary Run 2 + Apply variance adjustment to length comp.				
	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5
	0.0019	0.0047	0.0046	0.0573	0.0403

Model fits to CPUE and length composition data were similar for both runs. The fitting to abundance tracked trends well and were within most annual 95% confidence intervals for many abundance indices, including S3 (JPLL-N-e), S4 (JPLL-N-l), S6 (US-Obs-cru), S7 (POR-LL), and S9 (ESP-LL-N) (Figures 8.6–8.7). Model fits tracked trends reasonably well for abundance index S2 (US-Obs), but were often outside annual 95% confidence intervals. Predicted abundance was flat for abundance indices S8 (VEN-LL) and S10 (CTP-LL-N), probably because of large 95%

confidence intervals for S8 and high inter-annual fluctuations in the early years for S10. Indices S1 (US-Log) and S5 (IRL-Rec) were only included in the model for exploratory purposes, were not fit in the model likelihood ( $\lambda = 0$ ), and had no influence on model results or predicted values. Model fits to length composition were reasonable for aggregate data (Figure 8.8).

Both run 4 and run 6 resulted in sustainable spawning stock size and fishing mortality rates relative to maximum sustainable yield (Figures 8.9–8.11). However, run 6 (the model run with relatively less weight applied to the length composition data in the model likelihood) resulted in a relatively more depleted stock size, compared to run 4.

Both models suggested sustainable spawning stock size and fishing mortality rates relative to maximum sustainable yield. The model with a relatively lower sample size assigned to the length composition data resulted in a relatively more depleted stock size. However, model fits to length composition were insufficient for annual length composition data, for which a bimodal pattern was evident. This is related to spatial segregation of the population. It was suggested that more work should be done to improve the fits to length composition data before using the model to provide management advice.

ICCAT will re-assess blue shark later in 2023.

## 8.10 Quality of assessments

At the 2015 ICCAT assessment meeting, considerable progress was made on the integration of new data sources (e.g., length data) and modelling approaches (including model structure). Uncertainty in data inputs and model configuration was explored through sensitivity analyses, which revealed that results were sensitive to structural assumptions of the models. The production models showed a poor fit to the flat or increasing trends in the CPUE series combined with increasing catches. Overall, assessment results are uncertain (e.g. level of absolute abundance varied by an order of magnitude between models with different structures) and should be interpreted with caution.

For the North Atlantic stock, scenarios with the BSPM estimated that the stock was not overfished ( $B_{2013}/B_{MSY} = 1.50\text{--}1.96$ ) and that overfishing was not occurring ( $F_{2013}/F_{MSY} = 0.04\text{--}0.50$ ). Estimates obtained with SS3 varied more widely, but still predicted that the stock was not overfished ( $SSF_{2013}/SSF_{MSY} = 1.35\text{--}3.45$ ) and that overfishing was not occurring ( $F_{2013}/F_{MSY} = 0.15\text{--}0.75$ ). Comparison of results obtained in the assessment conducted in 2008 and the current assessment revealed that, despite significant differences between inputs and models used, stock status results did not change drastically ( $B_{2007}/B_{MSY} = 1.87\text{--}2.74$  and  $F_{2007}/F_{MSY} = 0.13\text{--}0.17$  for the 2008 base runs using the BSP and a catch-free age-structured production model).

## 8.11 Reference points

ICCAT uses  $F/F_{MSY}$  and  $B/B_{MSY}$  as reference points for stock status of this stock. These reference points are relative metrics rather than absolute values. The absolute values of  $B_{MSY}$  and  $F_{MSY}$  depend on model assumptions and results and are not presented by ICCAT for advisory purposes.

## 8.12 Conservation considerations

The global IUCN listing for blue shark is Near Threatened (Rigby *et al.*, 2019), and it has the same listing in European waters, although is listed as Critically Endangered in the Mediterranean Sea (<https://www.iucnredlist.org>).

Blue shark was listed on Appendix II of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) in 2017. However, it was not subsequently listed on Annex 1 of the Sharks-MoU.

In 2022, sharks in the family Carcharhinidae, thus including blue shark, were added to Appendix II of CITES, with the listing coming into effect from 25 November 2023.

### 8.13 Management considerations

Catch data are considered incomplete, underestimated and unreliable especially in terms of the earlier data. There have been unaccounted discards and a substantial occurrence of finning over parts of the time series. Data reported to ICES, ICCAT and FAO can vary.

Commercial CPUE series exist, and these generally show relatively flat trends over the time-series, but with high variance. There are currently no fishery-independent data available for that part of the stock in the ICES area.

For the North Atlantic stock, smaller sized blue sharks have been observed to dominate north of 30°N, while larger sized blue sharks dominated south of 30°N. In order to be able to account for the differences in size composition of fish in different areas, future implementations of SS3 should consider this spatial structure in the fleets. This will require estimating fleet and area specific CPUE indices, catch and size distributions. Ideally the model could also be separated by sex.

Based on the scenarios and models explored, ICCAT considered that the North Atlantic stock of blue shark was unlikely to be overfished nor subject to overfishing in their 2015 assessment. However, due to the level of uncertainty, no specific management catch recommendations were formulated.

Blue shark is considered to be one of the most productive sharks in the North Atlantic. As such, it can be expected to be more resilient to fishing pressure than other pelagic sharks. However, the high degree of susceptibility to longline fishing and the poor quality of the information available to assess the stock is a cause for concern. Given the uncertainty of the results and that this species is a significant bycatch, especially in tuna and billfish fisheries, there is a need for continued monitoring of the fisheries by observer and port sampling programmes.

With sharks in the family Carcharhinidae being listed in Appendix II of CITES, there will be a need for a non-detriment finding (NDF) for import-export, and for when landing blue shark that were caught when vessels were operating outside their area of national jurisdiction.

### 8.14 References

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## 8.15 Tables and Figures

**Table 8.1. Blue shark in the North Atlantic. Reported catches (t) of North Atlantic blue shark by ICCAT Statistical Area (2000-2021). Data source: ICCAT Task 1 catch data (accessed 20 June 2022; version of 26/01/2023).**

Year	BIL91	BIL92	BIL93	BIL94A	BIL94B	BIL94C	Total
2000	0.8	406	43	624	12295	14776	28146
2001	9.3	106	47	581	10945	9440	21128
2002	0.5	22	35	836	10337	8835	20066
2003		10	40	349	11464	11143	23006
2004		54	12	966	8464	12245	21741
2005	0.5	26	28	1135	10044	11125	22359
2006		278	12	1098	9898	11931	23218
2007	0.1	902	20	843	12352	12810	26927
2008	0.2	639	11	145	15400	14530	30725
2009	0.1	1360	115	697	15971	17056	35200
2010	0.4	192	131	746	17143	19029	37241
2011	0.2	247	194	1885	12832	22939	38097
2012	0.7	98	209	1795	14017	20496	36616
2013	0.2	134	81	1824	13926	20850	36815
2014	0.7	91	154	961	14184	21193	36584
2015	0.7	98	158	220	18473	20680	39630
2016	0.3	213	133	9057	26301	8366	44070
2017	2.7	71	17	9806	22323	7445	39664
2018	4.1	81	6	8714	18582	6576	33964
2019	0.0	39	254	5432	16027	5445	27198
2020	0.0	193	350	3565	13038	4050	21196
2021	0.3	145	86	4006	13910	3360	21507

**Table 8.2. Blue shark in the North Atlantic. Reported catches (t) of North Atlantic blue shark by nation (2000-2021). Data source: ICCAT Task 1 catch data (accessed 20 June 2022; version of 26/01/2023). Total catches reported by ICCAT (2023) also shown.**

Nation	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Spain	24112	17362	15666	15975	17314	15006	15464	17038	20788	24465	26094
Portugal	2081	2110	2265	5643	2025	4027	4338	5283	6167	6252	8261
Japan	273	350	386	558	1035	1729	1434	1921	2531	2007	1763
Maroc											
Canada	624	581	836	346	965	1134	977	843	0.2	0.1	0.3
Belize										114	461
Panama							254	892	613	1575	
Chinese Taipei	165	59		171	206	240	588	292	110	73	99
France	395	207	221	57	106	120	99	167	119	84	122
USA	404	145	68	56	71	68	47	54	139	108	236
Korea Rep											
China PR		185	104	148				367	109	88	53
Venezuela	43	47	29	40	10	28	12	19	8	73	75
Senegal			456					43	134	255	56
United Kingdom	12	9.3	5.6	3.8	6.2	5.4	3.4	6.0	6.0	96	8.3
St Vincent and Grenadines											
Ireland	31	66	11	1.9	0.1	0.3		0.3	0.2	0.0	0.4
Mauritania											
Trinidad and Tobago			6.0	2.9	2.3	0.6	0.7	0.4	1.9	8.2	9.4
Costa Rica									0.4	1.1	2.6
Barbados											
Liberia											
Denmark	2.0	1.0	13	5.0	1.0						0.1
Mexico	0.1	6.1						0.1			0.3
Brazil	2.6										
Bermuda (UK)							0.2	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.2
St Pierre et Miquelon (FR)										1.0	
Netherlands									0.1	0.6	
Russian Federation											
Iceland											
Total (Task 1)	28146	21128	20066	23006	21741	22359	23218	26927	30725	35200	37241
Total (ICCAT, 2023)	28161	21151	20458	23184	22054	22660	23517	27070	30882	35354	38929

**Table 8.2 (continued). Blue shark in the North Atlantic. Reported catches (t) of North Atlantic blue shark by nation (2000-2021). Data source: ICCAT Task 1 catch data (accessed 20 June 2022; version of 26/01/2023).**

Nation	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Spain	27988	28666	28562	29041	30078	29019	27316	21685	16314	12325	13125
Portugal	6509	3768	3694	3060	3859	7819	5664	5195	4507	3836	4300
Japan	1227	2437	1808	3287	4011	4217	4444	4111	3855	2352	1665
Maroc					873	1623	1475	1644	1524	1498	1636
Canada	0.1	1.2	0.2	0.6	5.5	16	32	71	3.9	193	173
Belize	1039	903	1216	392	4.3	5.7	201	317	369	301	349
Panama			289	153		262	0	437	242	344	84
Chinese Taipei	148	107	123	83	238	287	76	153	38	74	53
France	115	31	216	132	259	352	124	94	80	57	43
USA	279	167	160	166	114	74	67	30	36	32	34
Korea Rep	537	299	327	113	18	11	132	92	138	48	17
China PR	109	98	327		1.2	27	2.4	5.7	18	65	2.2
Venezuela	117	98	52	113	129	116	105	111	55	59	11
Senegal		4.6	12	17	13	2.9	4.3	1.5			
United Kingdom	10	8.2	10	10	12	17	11	6.3	3.3	2.7	4.0
St Vincent and Grenadines						119				2.0	
Ireland	1.3	2.9	1.9	0.8		0.0	0.4				
Mauritania						93					
Trinidad and Tobago	11	11	8.3	10	3.5	1.6	1.8	0.3	0.3	0.1	0.2
Costa Rica	5.8	14	8.3	5.2	2.8	2.1	0.5		0.1		0.2
Barbados					8.5	5.7	6.8	4.1	2.2	2.4	2.4
Liberia								7.2	10	3.3	7.6
Denmark		0.1									
Mexico	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.7	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Brazil											
Bermuda (UK)	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.3
St Pierre et Miquelon (FR)				0.1				0.0			
Netherlands											
Russian Federation							0.1	0.2	0.4	0.0	0.0
Iceland				0.5							
Total (Task 1)	38097	36616	36815	36584	39630	44070	39664	33964	27198	21196	21507
Total (ICCAT, 2023)	40292	38912	37813	38133	40191	44085	40004	33979	27212	21147	21848

**Table 8.3. Blue shark in the North Atlantic. ICCAT Task I catch data (version of 26/01/2023) that has been allocated as 'catch', 'landings' and 'dead discards', with the latter also given as a percentage of total catch.**

Year	Catch (t)	DD		Landings (t)	Total (t)
		(t)	% of catch		
2000	26461	113		1572	28146
2001	19472	106		1551	21128
2002	17896	68		2102	20066
2003	19959	55		2993	23006
2004	20518	65		1158	21741
2005	21125	66		1168	22359
2006	19879	45		3293	23218
2007	21351	54		5522	26927
2008	23596	130		7000	30725
2009	29128	103		5969	35200
2010	27231	167		9843	37241
2011		207	0.5%	37891	38097
2012		120	0.3%	36496	36616
2013		109	0.3%	36706	36815
2014		128	0.4%	36456	36584
2015		124	0.3%	39506	39630
2016		88	0.2%	43982	44070
2017		138	0.3%	39526	39664
2018		113	0.3%	33851	33964
2019		193	0.7%	27004	27198
2020		413	1.9%	20783	21196
2021		361	1.7%	21147	21507

**Table 8.4. Blue shark in the North Atlantic. ICCAT Task I catch data (version of 26/01/2023) indicating the reported quantities landed (L) or discarded dead (DD) for the ten main nations exploiting the North Atlantic stock for the years 2010–2021.**

Nation	Category	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Spain	DD							0				
	L	27988	28666	28562	29041	30078	29019	27316	21685	16314	12325	13125
	Total	27988	28666	28562	29041	30078	29019	27316	21685	16314	12325	13125
Portugal	DD											0
	L	6509	3768	3694	3060	3859	7819	5664	5195	4507	3836	4300
	Total	6509	3768	3694	3060	3859	7819	5664	5195	4507	3836	4300
Japan	DD				0	0				115	159	158
	L	1227	2437	1808	3287	4011	4217	4444	4111	3740	2193	1506
	Total	1227	2437	1808	3287	4011	4217	4444	4111	3855	2352	1665
Maroc	DD							0	0		0	0
	L					873	1623	1475	1644	1524	1498	1636
	Total					873	1623	1475	1644	1524	1498	1636
Canada	DD			0	0	5	16	32	71	4	193	173
	L	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Total	0	1	0	1	6	16	32	71	4	193	173
Belize	DD											
	L	1039	903	1216	392	4	6	201	317	369	301	349
	Total	1039	903	1216	392	4	6	201	317	369	301	349
Panama	DD							0				
	L			289	153		262	0	437	242	344	84
	Total			289	153		262	0	437	242	344	84
China-Taipei	DD	0	14	10	6	19	27	34	31	30	36	4
	L	148	94	113	77	220	259	42	122	8	38	49
	Total	148	107	123	83	238	287	76	153	38	74	53
France	DD							0	0	0		
	L	115	31	216	132	259	352	124	94	80	57	43
	Total	115	31	216	132	259	352	124	94	80	57	43
USA	DD	206	106	99	122	82	43	42	11	20	24	24
	L	73	61	61	44	32	31	24	19	17	8	10
	Total	279	167	160	166	114	74	67	30	36	32	34
Other	DD	0	0	0	0	18	1	29	0	25	1	1
	L	791	537	746	271	170	394	236	228	202	182	44
	Total	791	537	746	271	170	394	236	228	202	182	44
All	Total	38097	36616	36815	36584	39630	44070	39664	33964	27198	21196	21507

**Table 8.5. Blue shark in the North Atlantic. Length–weight relationships for blue shark from different populations. Lengths in cm, and weights in kg unless specified in equation.  $W_R$  = round weight;  $W_D$  = dressed weight.**

L (cm) W (kg) relationship	Sex	n	Length range (cm)	Source
$W_D = (8.04021 \times 10^{-7}) L_F^{\wedge} 3.23189$	C	354	75–250 ( $L_F$ )	García-Cortés and Mejuto, 2002
$W_R = (3.1841 \times 10^{-6}) L_F^{\wedge} 3.1313$	C	4529		Castro, 1983
$W_R = (3.92 \times 10^{-6}) L_T^{\wedge} 3.41$	Male	17		Stevens, 1975
$W_R = (3.184 \times 10^{-7}) L_T^{\wedge} 3.20$	Female	450		Stevens, 1975
$W_R = (3.2 \times 10^{-6}) L_F^{\wedge} 3.128$	C	720		Campana <i>et al.</i> , 2005
$W_D = (1.7 \times 10^{-6}) L_F^{\wedge} 3.205$	C	382		Campana <i>et al.</i> , 2005

**Table 8.6(a). Blue shark in the North Atlantic. Length–length relationships for male, female blue shark and both sexes combined from the NE Atlantic and Straits of Gibraltar (Buencuerpo *et al.*, 1998).  $L_S$  = standard length;  $L_F$  = fork length;  $L_T$  = total length;  $L_{UC}$  = upper caudal lobe length.**

Females	Males	Combined
$L_F = 1.076 L_S + 1.862$ (n = 1043)	$L_F = 1.080 L_S + 1.552$ (n = 1276)	$L_F = 1.079 L_S + 1.668$ (n = 2319)
$L_T = 1.249 L_S + 7.476$ (n = 1043)	$L_T = 1.272 L_S + 4.466$ (n = 1272)	$L_T = 1.262 L_S + 5.746$ (n = 2315)
$L_{UC} = 0.219 L_S + 4.861$ (n = 1038)	$L_{UC} = 0.316 L_S + 2.191$ (n = 1264)	$L_{UC} = 0.306 L_S + 3.288$ (n = 2302)
$L_T = 1.158 L_F + 5.678$ (n = 1043)	$L_T = 1.117 L_F + 2.958$ (n = 1272)	$L_T = 1.167 L_F + 4.133$ (n = 2315)

**Table 8.6(b). Blue shark in the North Atlantic. Length–length relationships for both sexes combined of blue shark from various populations and sources.**

Stock	Relationship	n	Source
NW Atlantic	$L_F = (0.8313) L_T + 1.3908$	572	Kohler <i>et al.</i> , 1995
NE Atlantic	$L_F = 0.8203 L_T - 1.061$		Castro and Mejuto, 1995
NW Atlantic	$L_F = -1.2 + 0.842 L_T$	792	Campana <i>et al.</i> , 2005
NW Atlantic	$L_T = 3.8 + 1.17 L_F$	792	Campana <i>et al.</i> , 2005
NW Atlantic	$L_{CF} = 2.1 + 1.0 L_{SF}$	782	Campana <i>et al.</i> , 2005
NW Atlantic	$L_{SF} = -0.8 + 0.98 L_{CF}$	782	Campana <i>et al.</i> , 2005
NW Atlantic	$L_F = 23.4 + 3.50 L_{ID}$	894	Campana <i>et al.</i> , 2005
NW Atlantic	$L_{ID} = -4.3 + 0.273 L_F$	894	Campana <i>et al.</i> , 2005

**Table 8.7. Blue shark in the North Atlantic. Indices of abundance for North and South Atlantic blue shark stocks. Source: ICCAT (2015).**

Year	Usobs	North Atlantic				PORLL	VENLL	ESPLL	CHTPLL
		JPLLe	JPLLI	USOLD					
1957				0.98					
1958				0.48					
1959				1.11					
1960				1.18					
1961				1.13					
1962				1.5					
1963				0.7					
1964				0.87					
1965				1.55					
1966				1.27					
1967				1.43					
1968				1.31					
1969				1.96					
1970				0.97					
1971		0.87		1.08					
1972		1.46		1.93					
1973		1.12							
1974		2.62							
1975		1.85		0.88					
1976		1.07		0.75					
1977		1.89		1.82					
1978		1.58		1.06					
1979		1.3		0.860					
1980		2.21		0.830					
1981		2.19		1.050					
1982		2.08		0.780					
1983		1.81		1.010					
1984		1.22		0.680					
1985		1.51		0.740					
1986		1.52		0.480					
1987		2.13		0.500					
1988		1.21		0.440					
1989		1.51		0.800					
1990		1.34		0.940					
1991		1.26		1.220					
1992	7.455	1.9		0.63					
1993	11.076	2.43		0.95					
1994	9.717		2.33	0.98		0.047			
1995	10.17		2.1	0.73		0.073			
1996	8.208		2.05	0.47		0.017			
1997	14.439		2.05	1.25	158.14	0.154	156.83		
1998	18.408		1.72	1.16	169.02	0.216	154.45		
1999	6.663		1.89	0.76	149.83	0.117	179.91		
2000	9.541		1.58	0.78	201.44	0.151	213.05		
2001	2.306		1.71		222.14	0.133	215.63		
2002	2.277		1.37		200.86	0.074	183.94		
2003	1.876		1.97		238.77	0.044	222.88		
2004	9.503		1.79		266.16	0.034	177.27	0.749	
2005	3.193		1.9		218.55	0.006	166.82	2.195	
2006	4.674		2.16		212.63	0.013	177.11	1.308	
2007	9.645		2.18		241.32	0.060	187.06	0.561	
2008	8.512		2.48		225.68	0.088	215.80	0.495	
2009	8.322		2.46		228.30	0.045	196.08	0.570	
2010	13.545		2.45		276.76	0.040	209.03	0.877	
2011	21.806		2.37		233.29	0.044	221.13	0.765	
2012	8.128		2.6		305.53	0.107	238.00	0.668	
2013	7.374		2.09		304.08	0.044	203.49	1.045	



**Table 8.8. Blue shark in the North Atlantic. Coefficients of variation (CVs) for North and South Atlantic blue shark stocks. Source: ICCAT (2015).**

Year	North Atlantic							
	Usobs	JPLLe	JPLLI	USOLD	PORLL	VENLL	ESPLL	CHTPLL
1957				0.17				
1958				0.16				
1959				0.25				
1960				0.38				
1961				0.35				
1962				0.27				
1963				0.25				
1964				0.17				
1965				0.17				
1966				0.23				
1967				0.21				
1968				0.21				
1969				0.22				
1970				0.32				
1971		0.53		0.23				
1972		0.39		0.21				
1973		0.45						
1974		0.32						
1975		0.34		0.19				
1976		0.47		0.29				
1977		0.27		0.2				
1978		0.32		0.11				
1979		0.24		0.11				
1980		0.29		0.09				
1981		0.36		0.09				
1982		0.36		0.09				
1983		0.37		0.1				
1984		0.50		0.1				
1985		0.44		0.1				
1986		0.39		0.09				
1987		0.35		0.1				
1988		0.49		0.12				
1989		0.44		0.39				
1990		0.49		0.17				
1991		0.47		0.11				
1992	0.31	0.43		0.1				
1993	0.29	0.40		0.09				
1994	0.29		0.50	0.1		1.08		
1995	0.29		0.55	0.1		0.87		
1996	0.50		0.51	0.3		1.90		
1997	0.33		0.52	0.13	0.084		0.008	
1998	0.35		0.53	0.15	0.076	0.67	0.008	
1999	0.34		0.49	0.13	0.077	0.84	0.008	
2000	0.32		0.28	0.12	0.083	0.74	0.008	
2001	0.39		0.56		0.089	0.77	0.008	
2002	0.39		0.62		0.086	1.03	0.008	
2003	0.37		0.59		0.082	1.26	0.009	
2004	0.30		0.69		0.084	1.53	0.009	0.12
2005	0.35		0.71		0.087	3.88	0.010	0.19
2006	0.31		0.69		0.084	2.24	0.010	0.06
2007	0.32		0.61		0.085	1.35	0.011	0.22
2008	0.32		0.69		0.085	1.16	0.011	0.28
2009	0.31		0.64		0.086	1.56	0.012	0.17
2010	0.31		0.64		0.089	1.54	0.010	0.10
2011	0.29		0.51		0.079	1.51	0.010	0.12
2012	0.34		0.51		0.081	1.00	0.010	0.11
2013	0.31		0.21		0.085	1.84	0.011	0.14

**Table 8.9. Blue shark in the North Atlantic. Von Bertalanffy growth parameters ( $L_{\infty}$  in cm ( $L_T$ ),  $k$  in years<sup>-1</sup>,  $t_0$  in years) from published studies.**

Area	$L_{\infty}$	$k$	$t_0$	Sex	Study
North Atlantic	394	0.133	-0.801	Combined	Aasen, 1966
North Atlantic	423	0.11	-1.035	Combined	Stevens, 1975
NW Atlantic	343	0.16	-0.89	Males	Skomal, 1990
NW Atlantic	375	0.15	-0.87	Females	Skomal, 1990
NE Atlantic	377	0.12	-1.33	Combined	Henderson <i>et al.</i> , 2001
North Atlantic	282	0.18	-1.35	Males	Skomal and Natanson, 2002
North Atlantic	310	0.13	-1.77	Females	Skomal and Natanson, 2002
North Atlantic	287	0.17	-1.43	Combined	Skomal and Natanson, 2003
NW Atlantic	300	0.68	-0.25	Combined	MacNeil and Campana, 2002 (whole ages)
NW Atlantic	302	0.58	-0.24	Combined	MacNeil and Campana, 2002 (section ages)

**Table 8.10. Blue shark in the North Atlantic. Biological parameters for blue shark.**

Parameter	Values	Sample Size	Area	Reference
Reproduction	Placental viviparity			various
Litter size	25–50 (30 average)			various
Size-at-birth	30–50 cm LT			Various
Sex ratio (males: females)	1.5:1		NE Atlantic	García-Cortés and Mejuto, 2002
	1:1.44		NE Atlantic	Henderson <i>et al.</i> , 2001
	1.33:1		NW Atlantic	Kohler <i>et al.</i> , 2002
	1:2.13		NE Atlantic	Kohler <i>et al.</i> , 2002
	1:1.07	801	NE Atlantic (N. coast Spain)	Mejuto and García-Cortés, 2005
	1:0.9	158	NE Atlantic (S. coast Spain)	
	1:0.38	2187	N central Atlantic	
	1:0.53	4550	NW Atlantic	
Gestation period	9–12 months			Campana <i>et al.</i> , 2002
% of females revealing fecundation signs	0.74	415	NE Atlantic (N. coast Spain)	Mejuto and García-Cortés, 2005
	0	76	NE Atlantic (S. coast Spain)	
	36.27	601	N central Atlantic	
	18.15	1573	NW Atlantic	
% of pregnant females	0	415	NE Atlantic (N. coast Spain)	Mejuto and García-Cortés, 2005
	0	76	NE Atlantic (S. coast Spain)	
	14.6	601	N central Atlantic	
	9.8	1573	NW Atlantic	

Parameter	Values	Sample Size	Area	Reference
Male age-at-maturity (years)		4–6		various
Female age-at-maturity (years)		5–7		various
Male length-at-maturity	180–280 cm (LF)		NW Atlantic	Campana <i>et al.</i> , 2002
	190–195 cm (LF)			Francis and Duffy, 2005
	201 cm (LF; 50% maturity)		NW Atlantic	Campana <i>et al.</i> , 2005
Female length-at-maturity	220–320 cm (LF)			Campana <i>et al.</i> , 2002
	170–190 cm (LF)			Francis and Duffy, 2005
	> 185 cm (LF)			Pratt, 1979
Longevity (years)		16–20		Skomal and Natanson, 2003
Natural mortality (M)		0.23	Worldwide	Campana <i>et al.</i> , 2005 (mean of various studies)
Productivity (R2m) estimate: intrinsic rebound		0.061 (assuming no fecundity increase)	Pacific	Smith <i>et al.</i> , 1998
Potential rate of increase per year		43% (unfished)	NW Atlantic	Campana <i>et al.</i> , 2005
Population doubling time TD (years)		11.4 (assuming no fecundity increase)	Pacific	Smith <i>et al.</i> , 1998
Trophic level		4.1	14	Cortés, 1999

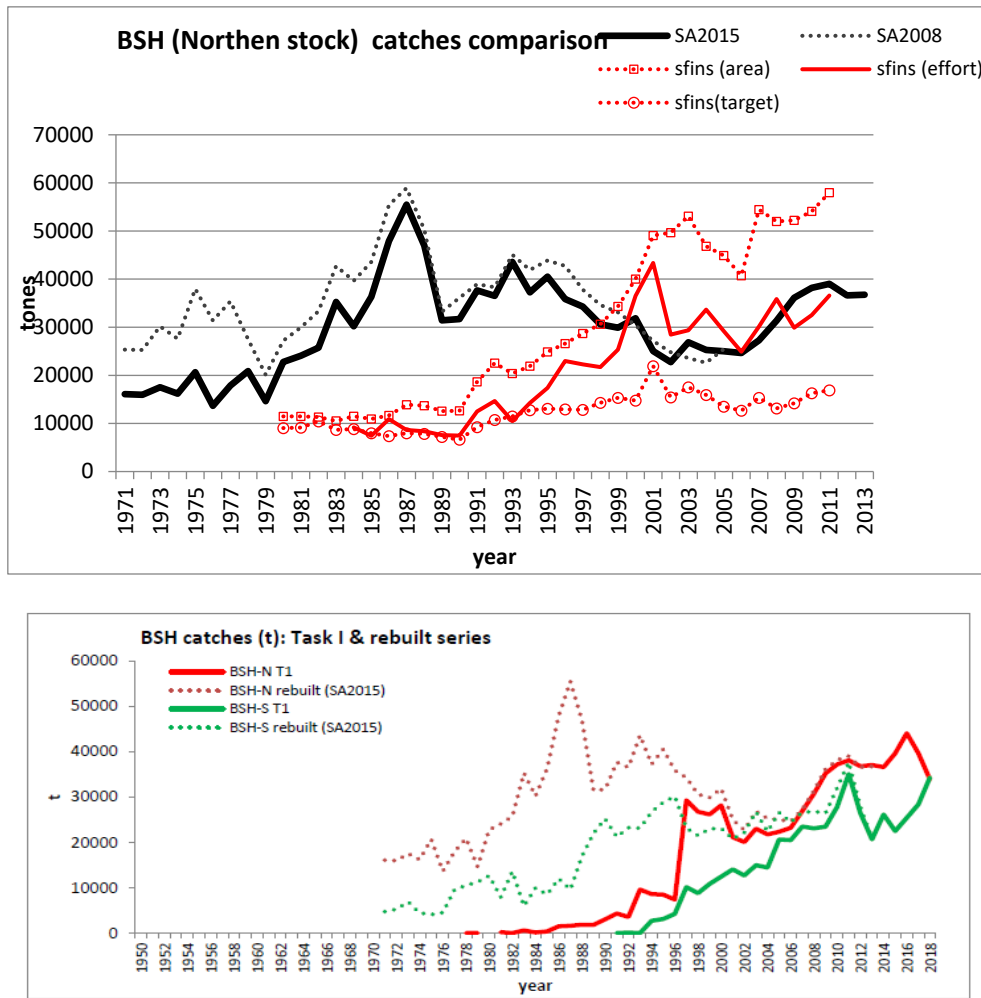


Figure 8.1. Blue shark in the North Atlantic. Top: Comparison of various catch series for the North Atlantic stock of blue shark (1971–2013). In black, the stock assessment catches from the 2008 stock assessment (dotted line) and 2015 estimations (solid line). In red, three catch series obtained using shark-fin ratios with three different approaches (area, effort, target level). Bottom: Update of catches reported to ICCAT (Task I) and estimated by SCRS (SCRS, 2019). Dotted lines are values from the 2008 assessment, solid line those of the 2015 estimates.

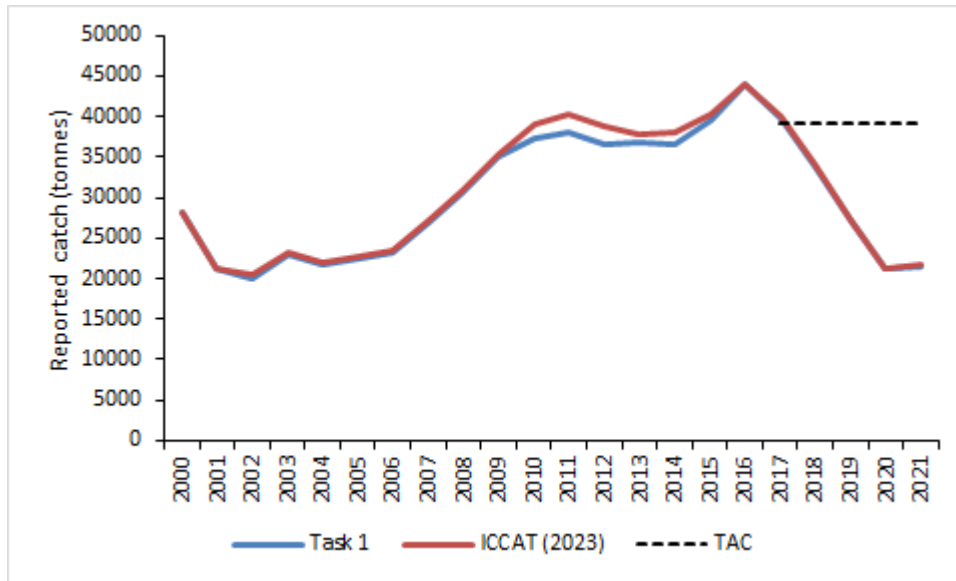


Figure 8.2. Blue shark in the North Atlantic. Reported catches of the North Atlantic stock of blue shark (2000–2021), based on the current Task 1 data (version of 26/01/2023) and the data being prepared for the 2023 stock assessment (ICCAT, 2023). The TAC is also indicated. For catch data prior to 2000, see ICCAT (2023).

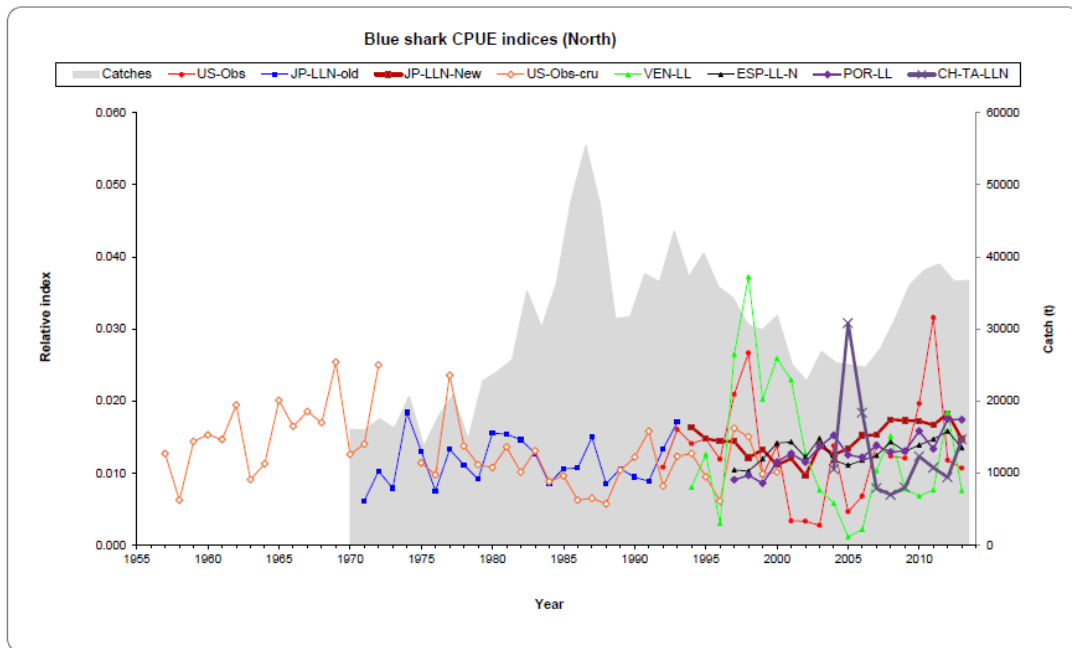


Figure 8.3. Blue shark in the North Atlantic. Indices of abundance and catches. Source: ICCAT (2019).

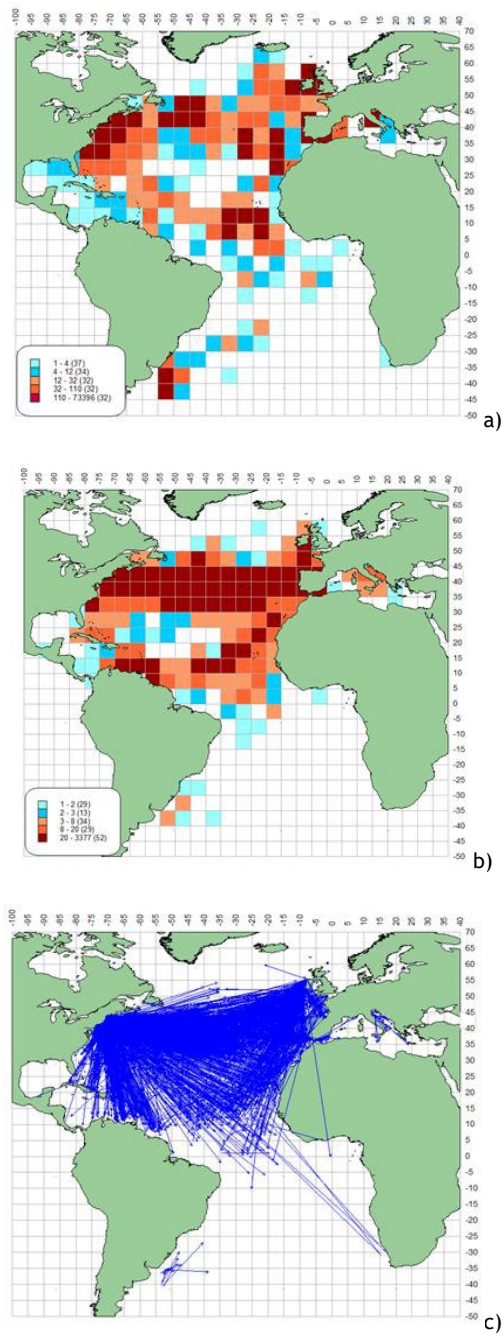


Figure 8.4. Blue shark in the North Atlantic. Blue shark tagging maps, presented by ICCAT (2012), showing (a) density of releases, (b) density of recoveries, and (c) straight line displacement between release and recovery locations.

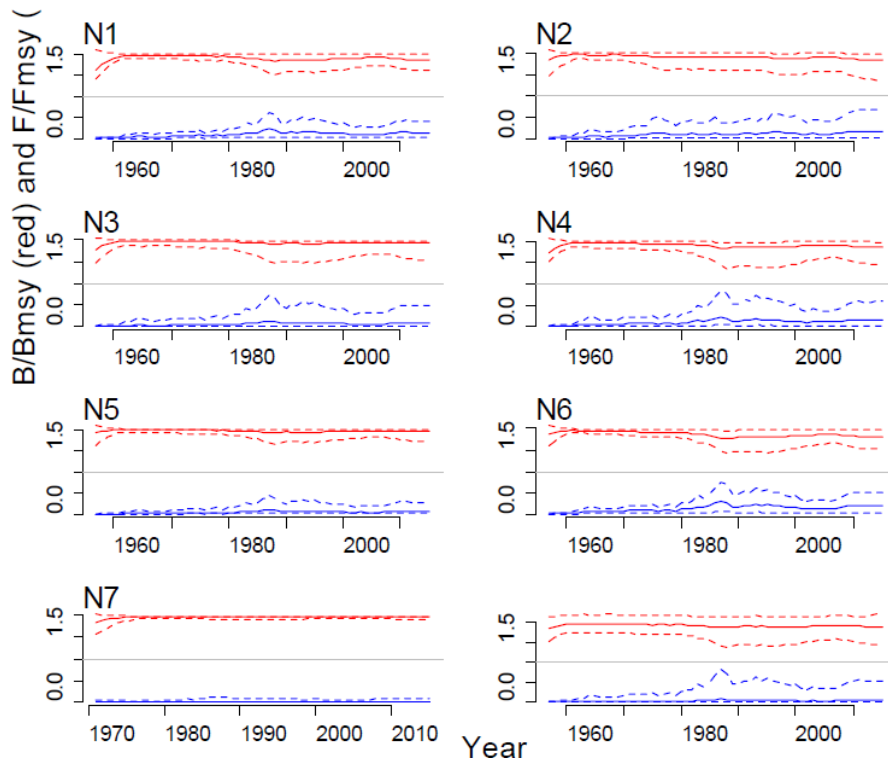


Figure 8.5. Blue shark in the North Atlantic. Estimated biomass relative to  $B_{MSY}$  (in red) and harvest rate relative to the  $MSY$  level (blue), for the BSP runs. Source: ICCAT (2015).

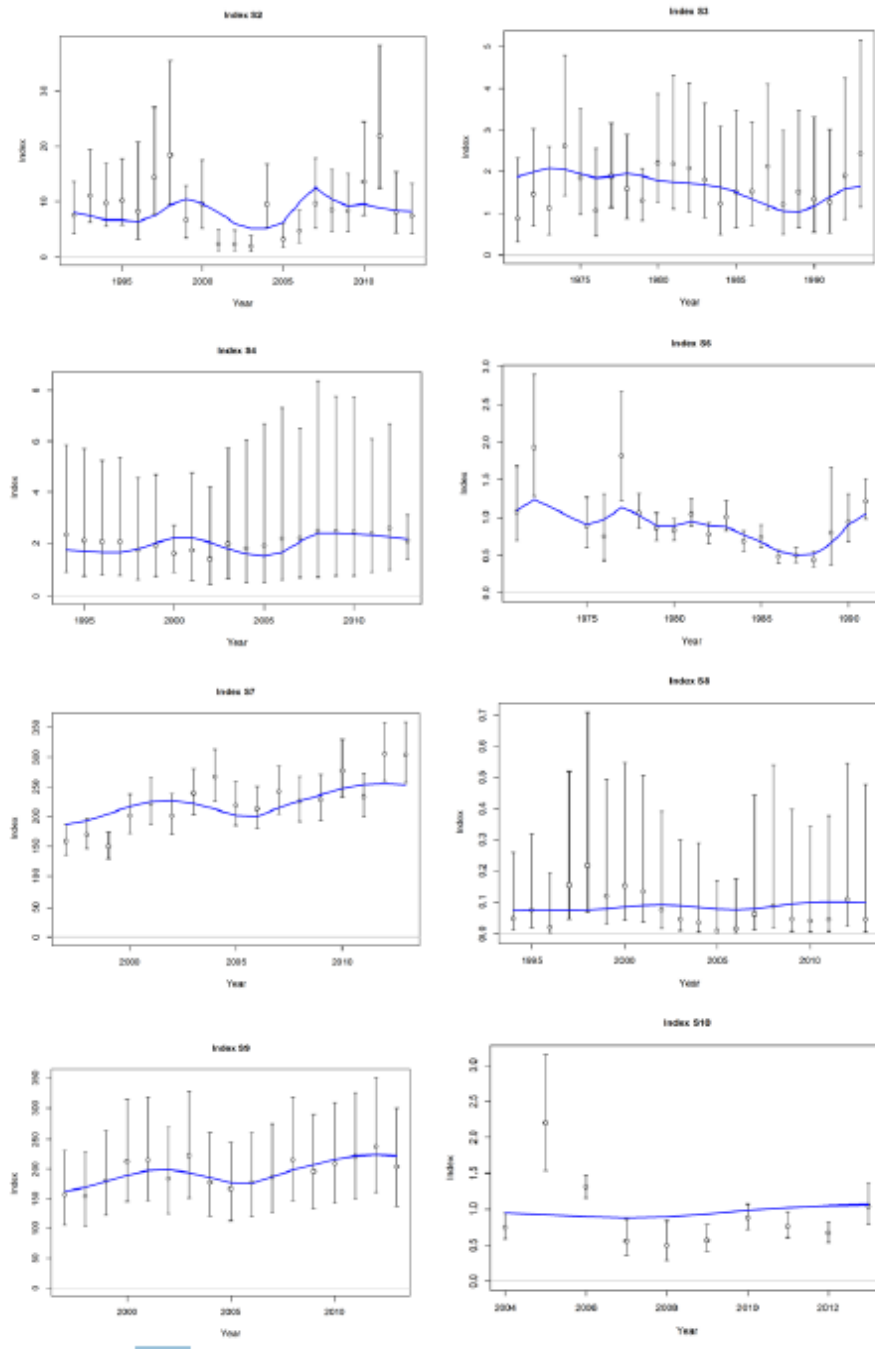
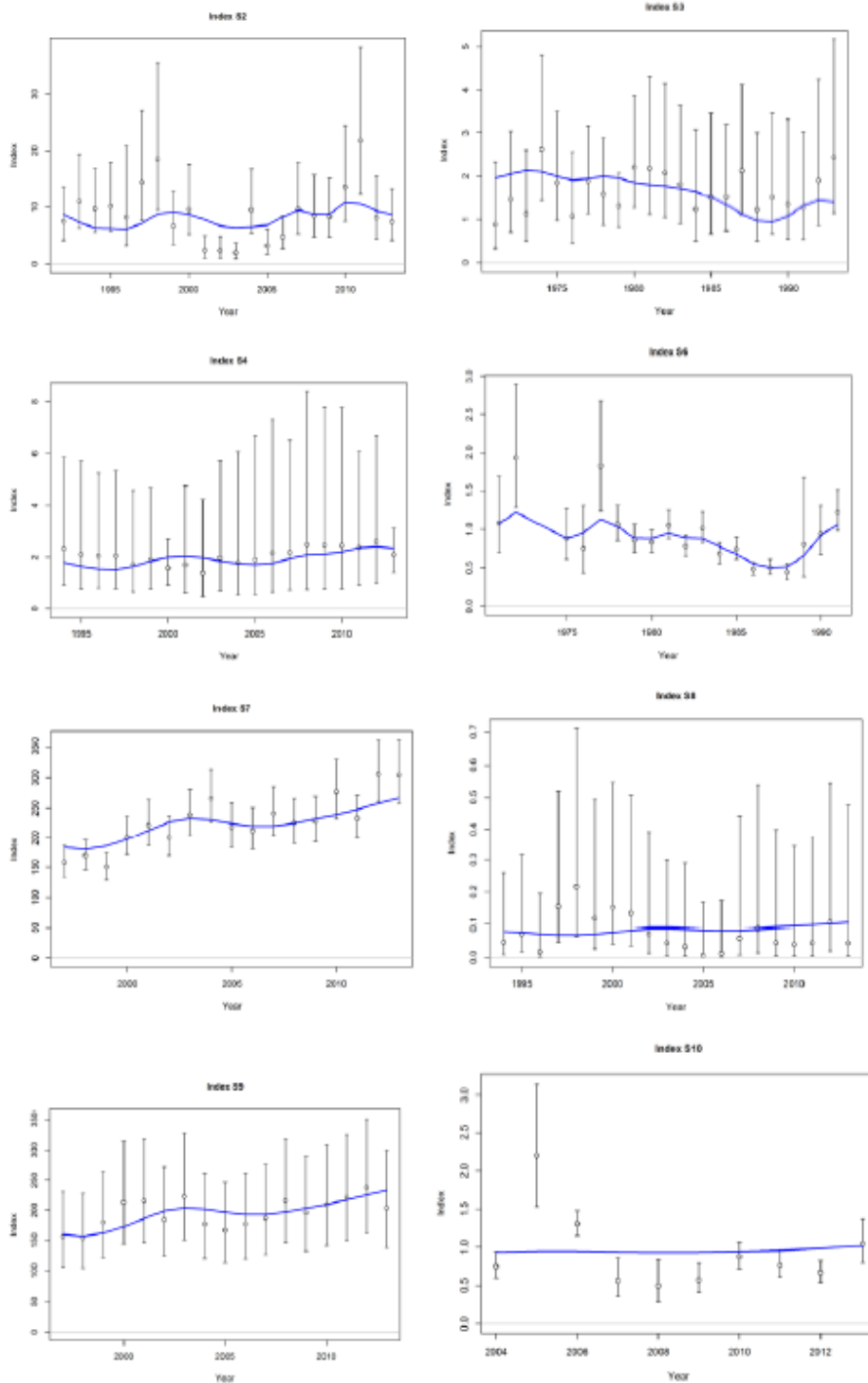


Figure 8.6. Blue shark in the North Atlantic. Preliminary Run 4 observed CPUE (open circles  $\pm$  95% confidence intervals assuming lognormal error) and model predicted CPUE (blue line) for abundance indices fit in the model likelihood: S2 (US-Obs, upper left), S3 (JPLL-N-e, upper right), S4 (JPLL-N-l, middle left), S6 (US-Obs-cru, middle right), S7 (POR-LL, middle left), S8 (VEN-LL, middle right), S9 (ESP-LL-N, lower left), and S10 (CTP-LL-N, lower right). Source: ICCAT (2015).





**Figure 8.7. Blue shark in the North Atlantic. Preliminary Run 6 observed CPUE (open circles  $\pm$  95% confidence intervals assuming lognormal error) and model predicted CPUE (blue line) for abundance indices fit in the model likelihood: S2 (US-Obs, upper left), S3 (JPLL-N-e, upper right), S4 (JPLL-N-l, middle left), S6 (US-Obs-cru, middle right), S7 (POR-LL, middle left), S8 (VEN-LL, middle right), S9 (ESP-LL-N, lower left), and S10 (CTP-LL-N, lower right). Source: ICCAT (2015).**

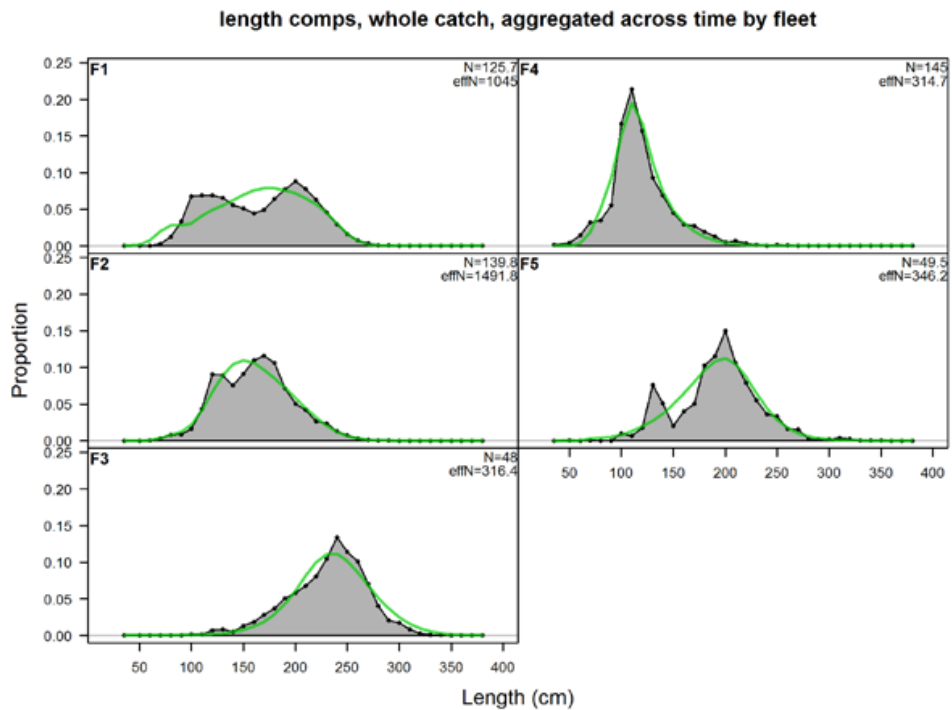
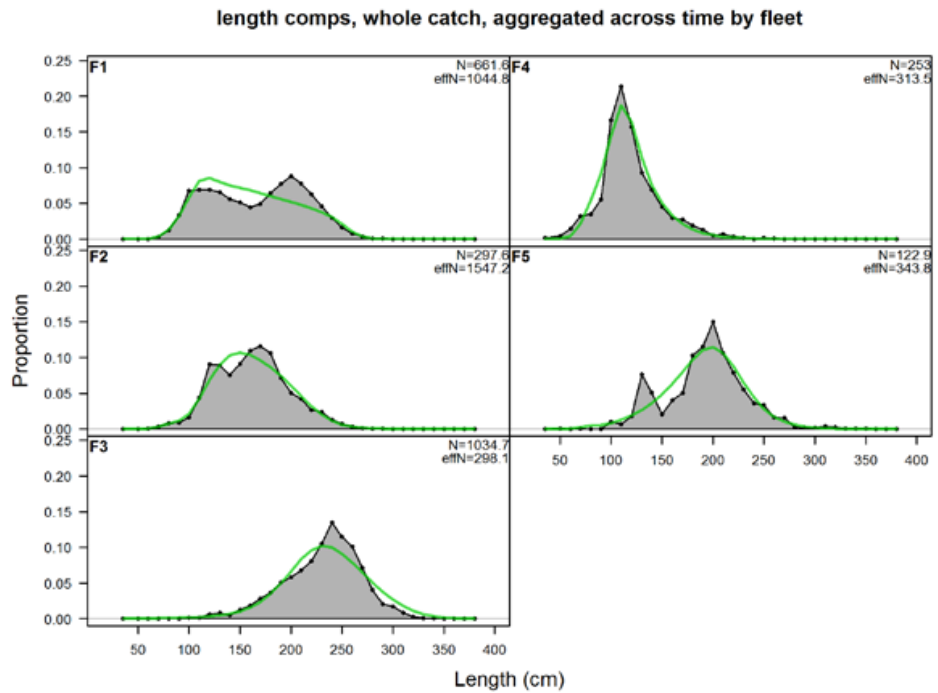


Figure 8.8. Blue shark in the North Atlantic. Model predicted (line) and observed (shaded) aggregated annual length compositions (female + male) for Preliminary Run 4 (upper panel) and Preliminary Run 6 (lower panel). Source: ICCAT (2015).

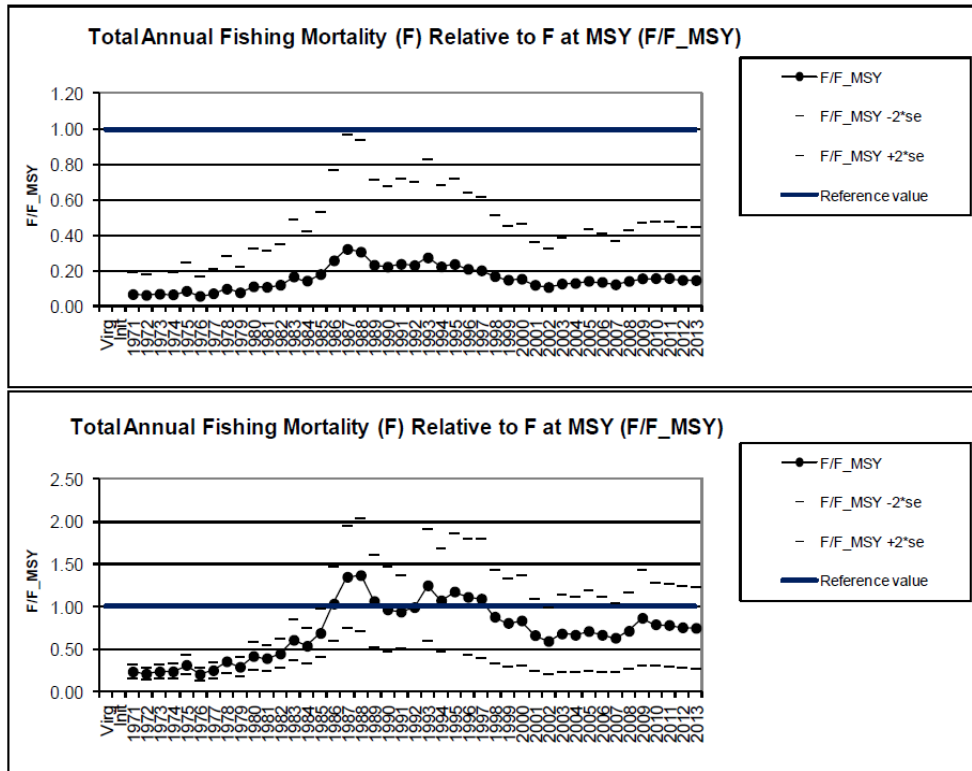


Figure 8.9. Blue shark in the North Atlantic. Estimated annual total exploitation rate in numbers (total fishing mortality for all fleets combined) relative to fishing mortality at MSY ( $F/F_{MSY}$ ), obtained from Stock Synthesis output for Preliminary Run 4 (upper panel) and Preliminary Run 6 (lower panel). Source: ICCAT (2015).

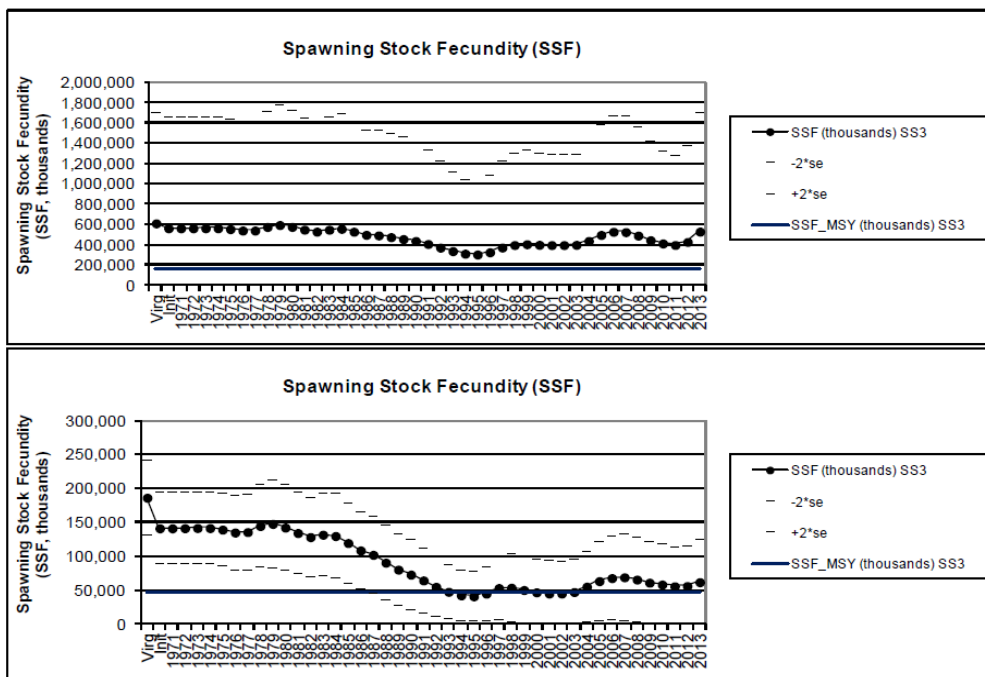


Figure 8.10. Blue shark in the North Atlantic. Estimated spawning stock size (spawning stock fecundity, SSF) along with approximate 95% asymptotic standard errors ( $\pm 2$  s.e.) relative to spawning stock size at MSY (SSF<sub>MSY</sub>) for Preliminary Run 4 (upper panel) and Preliminary Run 6 (lower panel). Source: ICCAT (2015).

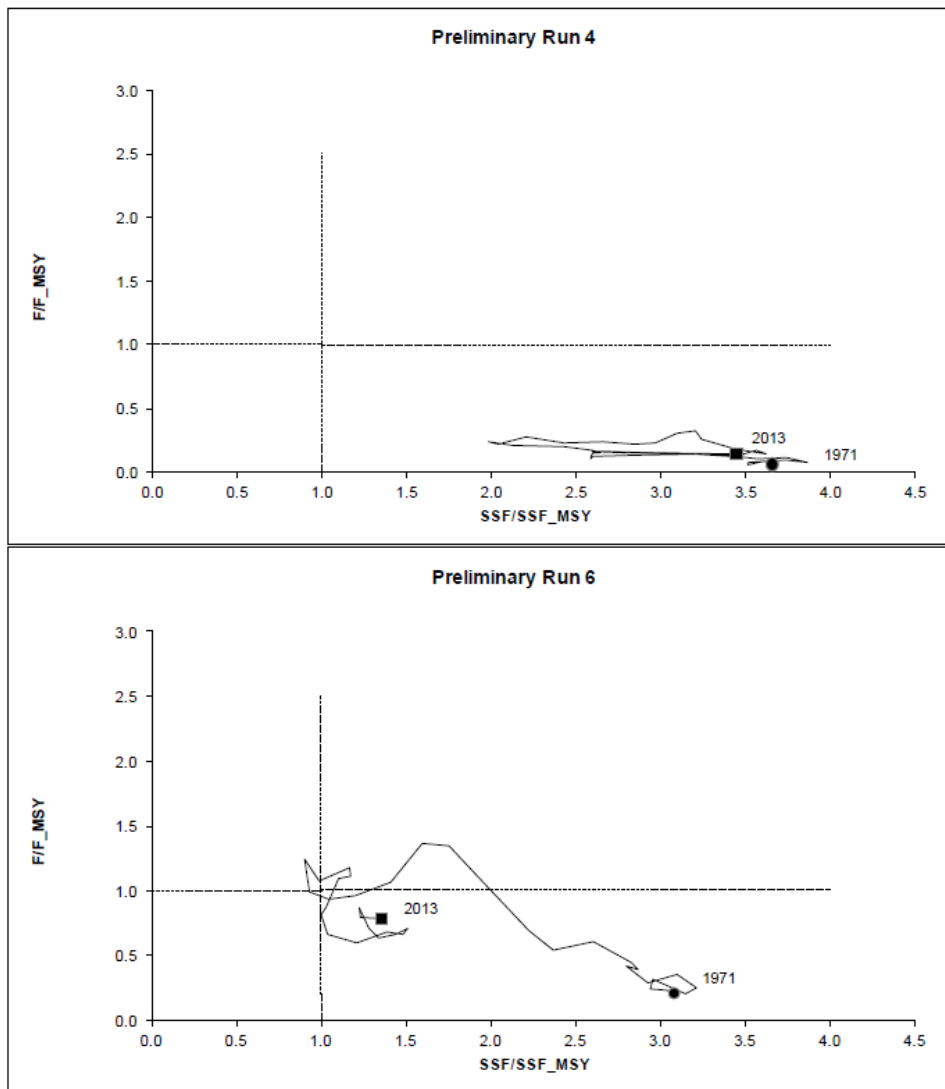


Figure 8.11. Blue shark in the North Atlantic. Kobe Phase plots for Preliminary Run 4 (upper panel) and Preliminary Run 6 (lower panel). The circle indicates the position of the start year of the model (1971) and the square represents the end year of the model (2013). The horizontal (dotted) line identifies the fishing mortality reference at maximum sustainable yield ( $F_{MSY}$ ). The vertical (dotted) line identifies the reference spawning stock fecundity at maximum sustainable yield ( $SSF_{MSY}$ ). Source: ICCAT (2015).

## 9 Shortfin mako in the North Atlantic (North of 5°N)

Shortfin mako shark *Isurus oxyrinchus* is a large, highly mobile, pelagic predator that inhabits tropical and temperate waters circumglobally, and is taken in both recreational and commercial fisheries (Campana *et al.*, 2005).

The North Atlantic shortfin mako stock is assessed by the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT). ICCAT conducted a stock assessment for shortfin mako in June 2017 (ICCAT, 2017b), with an update in 2019 (ICCAT, 2019). The available catch, effort and size data, and tagging data were reviewed at a prior Data Preparatory Meeting (ICCAT, 2017a), when the models to be used during the assessment and their assumptions were also discussed.

### 9.1 Stock distribution

Tagging data indicate that there is one stock of shortfin mako in the North Atlantic (Kohler *et al.*, 2002; Figure 9.1). Genetic studies have found no evidence to separate east and west populations in the Atlantic but indicate differences between the North Atlantic and the South Atlantic and other oceans (Heist *et al.*, 1996; Schrey and Heist, 2002). The relationship between shortfin mako in the North Atlantic and Mediterranean Sea is unclear, and the ICCAT assessment includes data from the North Atlantic only. Nevertheless, some potentially informative data are included here for the Mediterranean Sea.

Based on the oceanography of equatorial waters, and that other large pelagic species (e.g., swordfish) have a southern stock boundary of 5°N, this latitudinal extent is used as the southern boundary for the North Atlantic stock of shortfin mako. The stock area broadly equates with FAO Areas 27, 21, 31 and 34 (in part).

Preliminary results provided to ICCAT (2016) indicated that there is some stock mixing, with males moving more between regions, while the females seem to show more philopatric behaviour. Thus, further studies of the biology and population structure are required for the clarification of stock boundaries (ICCAT, 2016).

### 9.2 The fishery

#### 9.2.1 History of the fishery

Shortfin mako is a highly migratory species that is a frequent bycatch in pelagic longline fisheries targeting tuna and swordfish, and in other high seas tuna fisheries. Like porbeagle, it is a relatively high-value species (cf. blue shark, which is of lower commercial value) and normally retained when permissible (Campana *et al.*, 2005).

Recreational fisheries on both sides of the North Atlantic also catch this species, with relatively large quantities reported from sport (rod and reel) fisheries reported to ICCAT (178 t in 2011). Some specimens are released alive from these fisheries.

Shortfin mako is also taken in Mediterranean Sea fisheries (STECF, 2003). For example, Tudela *et al.* (2005) observed 542 shortfin mako taken as bycatch in 4140 km of driftnets set in the Alboran Sea between December 2002 and September 2003.

### 9.2.2 The fishery in 2022

Reported landings of North Atlantic shortfin mako have decreased in recent years, given the introduction of more conservative management Recommendations from ICCAT (see ICCAT Recommendations 19-06 and 21-09).

ICCAT agreed a “*prohibition on retaining on board, transshipping and landing, whole or in part, North Atlantic shortfin mako caught in association with ICCAT fisheries in 2022 and 2023*” (see below), and whilst this will reduce official landings, it is unclear whether it will have resulted in changes in fishing patterns and fleet behaviour, and so how it will have affected total catch.

### 9.2.3 Advice applicable

ICES does not provide advice for this stock. Assessment of this stock is considered to be the responsibility of ICCAT, who coordinate Recommendations to Contracting Parties, and Cooperating non-Contracting Parties, Entities or Fishing Entities (referred to as CPCs).

Following the 2017 assessment, ICCAT’s Standing Committee on Research and Statistics (SCRS) recommended that “*For the North Atlantic stock of shortfin mako, the probabilities in the Kobe matrices indicate that to stop overfishing and start rebuilding, the constant annual catch should be reduced to 500 t or less. This will achieve the goal of stopping overfishing in 2018 with a 75% probability, but it only has a 35% probability of rebuilding the stock by 2040. Only a 0 t annual catch will rebuild the stock by 2040 with a 54% probability*” (ICCAT, 2018).

The SCRS also noted that “*If the Commission wishes to stop overfishing immediately and achieve rebuilding by 2040 with over a 50% probability, the most effective immediate measure is a complete prohibition of retention. Additional recommended measures that can potentially further reduce incidental mortality include time/area closures, gear restrictions, and safe handling and best practices for the release of live specimens (since post release survival can reach 70%).*” (ICCAT, 2018).

Following the subsequent assessment in 2019, SCRS recommended that “*the Commission adopt a non-retention policy without exception in the North Atlantic as it has already done with other shark species caught as bycatch in ICCAT fisheries*” (ICCAT, 2020).

### 9.2.4 Management applicable

ICCAT Recommendation 21-09 on the conservation of the North Atlantic stock of shortfin mako caught in association with ICCAT fisheries. This requires that “*CPCs shall implement a prohibition on retaining on board, transshipping and landing, whole or in part, North Atlantic shortfin mako caught in association with ICCAT fisheries in 2022 and 2023 as a first step in rebuilding the stock*”. The Recommendation also provides an initial approach for potential levels of retention in 2023 onwards.

EC Regulation No. 1185/2003 (updated by EU Regulation No 605/2013) prohibits the removal of shark fins of these species, and subsequent discarding of the body. This regulation is binding on EC vessels in all waters and non-EC vessels in Community waters. In June 2023, ‘The Shark Fins Act 2023’ was passed in the UK banning the import and export of detached shark fins, including all products containing shark fins.

Shortfin mako is listed in Appendix II of CITES, and so international trade, including the retention of fish caught in international waters, now requires a Non-Detriment Finding (see Section 9.12).

## 9.3 Catch data

### 9.3.1 Landings

ICCAT's Task 1 catch data for shortfin mako in the North Atlantic are provided in Tables 9.1 and 9.2, with these data covering the period 2000–2021. The reader is referred to earlier reports of WGEF and relevant ICCAT reports (e.g., ICCAT, 2022) for earlier catch data, including ICCAT's assessment reports for discussions on changes in the reported catches over time. Whilst these data include landings, dead discards and live discards, the reporting of these has been inconsistent over time. The Task 1 data currently available for this period differ only slightly from those presented in ICCAT (2022).

During the period 2000–2021, the vast majority of the reported catches of shortfin mako in the North Atlantic have been from billfish areas BIL94B, BIL94A and BIL94C and BIL92 and with much lower quantities from BIL91 and BIL93 (Table 9.1).

Whilst several nations report catches of shortfin mako, the mean annual proportion of reported catches by nation over the period 2000–2021 indicate the main nations (Table 9.2) exploiting shortfin mako have been Spain (50.2%), Portugal (19.2%), Morocco (12.8%), USA (9.7%), Japan (3.2%) and Canada (1.9%).

Over the period 2000–2021, reported annual catches of North Atlantic shortfin mako have averaged 2249 t y<sup>-1</sup> (ranging from 1431–4783 t y<sup>-1</sup>), but have been lower in recent years, with the mean annual catches for 2019–2021 being 1682 t y<sup>-1</sup> (ranging from 1431–1886 t y<sup>-1</sup>).

Comparable data for the Mediterranean Sea (Table 9.3) indicate that mean annual catches of shortfin mako have been 2.5 t y<sup>-1</sup> (0–16.7 t y<sup>-1</sup>) for the years 2000–2021, declining to just 0.3 t y<sup>-1</sup> for 2019–2021. Whilst these data are a small fraction of the catches from the North Atlantic, these data may be under-estimated, as data for shortfin mako appear to be limited for Italy and are not reported by Greece, despite known interactions with the pelagic fleets of such nations (e.g., Megalofonou *et al.*, 2005).

### 9.3.2 Discards

Shortfin mako is a high value species and, over the longer time-series, many fleets would land shortfin mako gutted (usually with the head on). Although often landed for their meat in some fisheries, finning (the practice of removing the fins of a shark and returning the remainder of the carcass to the sea) may have occurred in some fleets, which may result in undocumented catches and mortality.

Discard data, as reported to ICCAT, are given in Table 9.4. The Task 1 data do not include any estimates of live discards for shortfin mako. Reported discards were low at the start of the time-series (<0.5% of the catch were discarded in the years 2010–2017), increasing slightly to ca. 1–4% (2018–2020) and then to >60% (2021). The quantities being reported as being landed or discarded dead for the six main fleets (Spain, Portugal, Morocco, USA, Japan and Canada; Table 9.5) indicate that some nations (e.g., Spain, Portugal and Morocco) are not reporting dead discards (or the reported quantities are negligible). Hence, available discards data are likely to be underestimated.

### 9.3.3 Quality of catch data

Historical catch data are considered underestimates for a range of reasons.

- The extent of finning in high seas fisheries is unclear, although this is expected to have declined for most fleets.
- The historical use of generic shark categories means that species-specific data are likely incomplete, although there has been improved species-specific reporting over time.
- The introduction of management measures to limit landings and associated uncertainty in the accuracy and consistency in the reporting of estimated discards means that recent catch data may be incomplete.

Despite some important recovery of historical catch series in recent years, ICCAT considers that the overall catch is underestimated, particularly before 2000. For example, earlier ICCAT assessments of shortfin mako used different approaches to estimate catches, the tuna ratio (logged observations of shark catches relative to tuna catches) and the fin trade index (shark fin trade observations from the Asian market used to calculate caught shark weights based on catch effort data; Clarke *et al.*, 2006; ICCAT 2005, 2008). These figures were much higher than reported landings. However, the methods to estimate historic catches of blue shark are not considered appropriate for shortfin mako, given its higher commercial value and lower discard rates (cf. blue shark). Hence, for shortfin mako, historical estimation of catches is based on observer data, as well as other potential techniques (e.g. catch ratios). The highest priorities for such an exercise would be for Morocco, before 2011; Spain, before 1997 and Canada, before 1995 (ICCAT, 2017a, b).

There have also been observed differences in those reported catch data submitted to ICCAT, FAO and EuroStat (see earlier reports by WGEF). Updated studies to review these data sets (by fishing area, nation and year), to identify inconsistencies and, where necessary, harmonise the data sets are required.

### 9.3.4 Discard survival

Several studies have reported the at-vessel mortality of shortfin mako to broadly range from about 30–50% in longline fisheries (summarised in Ellis *et al.*, 2017). Discard survival in such fisheries can be influenced by several factors, including hook type, soak time and size of shark.

One of the more comprehensive studies of the at-vessel and post-release mortality of shortfin mako shark is that of Campana *et al.* (2016), who reported data for the Canadian longline fishery. For the years 2010–2014, the at-vessel mortality was 26.2% (aggregated data; annual estimates ranged from 12.2–32.4%, averaging 21.0%). The proportion of shortfin mako rated as ‘injured’ was 22.5% (aggregated data; annual estimates ranged from 9.3–30.9%, averaging 16.6%), whilst the proportion rated as ‘healthy’ was 51.3% (aggregated data; annual estimates ranged from 36.7–71.9%, averaging 62.4%). Using pop-up satellite archival tags (PSATs), Campana *et al.* (2016) reported that 30.4% of ‘healthy’ shortfin mako (n = 23) suffered post-release mortality, and one of the three ‘injured’ individuals also died.



## 9.4 Commercial catch composition

### 9.4.1 Conversion factors

Shortfin mako are landed in various forms (e.g., gutted, dressed, with or without heads). It is therefore important that appropriate conversion factors for these landings are used. FAO (based on Norwegian data) use conversion factors for fresh, gutted, and gutted and headed sharks of 87% and 77%, respectively (Hareide *et al.*, 2007). Scientific estimates for various conversion factors for shortfin mako are summarised for length–weight relationships (Table 9.6) and different length measurements (Table 9.7).

## 9.5 Commercial catch and effort data

The ICCAT assessments use standardised indices of catch per unit effort based on commercial catch and effort data. Recent assessments have used five such series (US logbook data, and longline data from Japanese, Portuguese, Spanish and Chinese (Taipei) longline fleets in the North Atlantic).

The overall trends for the North Atlantic stock of shortfin mako is an initial decrease followed by an increase from 2000 and subsequent decline in the recent years (Figure 9.2).

Figure 9.3 presents the correlations between North Atlantic CPUE indices; the lower triangle shows the pairwise scatter plots between indices with a regression line, the upper triangle provides the correlation coefficients, and the diagonal provides the range of observations. The correlation between US observer and Chinese Taipei is high at 0.78; however, this is likely to be due to a single point, in 2009. Also, a strong correlation could be found by chance if two series only overlap for a few years.

## 9.6 Fishery-independent surveys

No fishery-independent data are available for shortfin mako in the northeastern Atlantic, although such data are available for the northwestern Atlantic (Simpfendorfer *et al.*, 2002; Hueter and Simpfendorfer, 2008). Babcock (2010) provided an index of abundance based on shortfin mako catch rates from the US East Coast from the National Marine Fisheries Service Marine Recreational Fishery Statistics Survey (MRFSS), in which a total of 711 shortfin mako were reported from 252 686 trips (1981–2010), of which about 0.2% caught at least one shortfin mako.

## 9.7 Life-history information

### 9.7.1 Life-history parameters

Various studies have provided biological information for shortfin mako (see Stevens, 2008). Relevant data are summarised in Table 9.6 (length–weight relationships), Table 9.8 (growth parameters), and Table 9.9 (other life-history parameters).

There are still uncertainties in relation to some biological parameters, and further studies are required. ICCAT Recommendation 14–06 on shortfin mako caught in association with ICCAT fisheries supports this in saying (Paragraph 3) that “CPCs are encouraged to undertake research that

would provide information on key biological/ecological parameters, life-history and behavioural traits, as well as on the identification of potential mating, pupping and nursery grounds of shortfin mako sharks. Such information shall be made available to the SCRS".

The ICCAT shark subgroup coordinate various data collection programmes for relevant biological investigations. Indeed, regular updates to life-history information are provided by ICCAT's shark subgroup (e.g., ICCAT, 2014, 2016; García-Cortés *et al.*, 2021). As part of an on-going cooperative program for biological data collection, information collected by fishery observers and scientific projects from several fishing nations in the Atlantic (EU-Portugal, Uruguay, Chinese Taipei, USA, Japan, Brazil and Venezuela) were analysed at the 2017 ICCAT shortfin mako Data Preparatory Meeting (ICCAT, 2017a).

### 9.7.2 Habitat

Shortfin mako is a common, extremely active epipelagic species found in tropical and warm-temperate seas from the surface down to at least 500 m (Compagno, 2001). It is seldom found in waters <16°C, and in the western North Atlantic they only move onto the continental shelf when surface temperatures exceed 17°C. Observations from South Africa indicate that the species prefers clear water (Compagno, 2001).

### 9.7.3 Nursery grounds

Published records of potential nursery grounds are limited. Buencuerpo *et al.* (1998) suggested that the western basin of the Mediterranean Sea was a nursery area, whilst Stevens (2008) suggested that nursery areas would likely be situated close to the coast in highly productive areas, potentially off West Africa in the North Atlantic. More recently, Natanson *et al.* (2020) investigated spatio-temporal patterns in the distribution of various life-history stages, and suggested that the Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic waters off Portugal served as parturition and nursery grounds.

### 9.7.4 Diet

Shortfin mako feed primarily on fish, both pelagic and demersal species, and cephalopods (Compagno, 2001). Shortfin mako sampled off southwest Portugal had teleosts as the principal component of their diet (occurring in 87% of the stomachs and accounting for >90% of the contents by weight), and crustaceans and cephalopods were also relatively important, whilst other elasmobranchs were only present occasionally (Maia *et al.*, 2006).

In the NW Atlantic, bluefish *Pomatomus saltatrix* is the most important prey species and comprises about 78% of the diet (Stillwell and Kohler, 1982). These authors estimated that a 68 kg shortfin mako consumes about 2 kg of prey per day, and could eat about 8–11 times its body weight per year. Stillwell (1990) subsequently suggested that shortfin mako may consume up to 15 times their weight per year.

The diet of shortfin mako in South African waters indicated that elasmobranchs could be important prey, and marine mammals can also make up a small proportion of the diet (Compagno, 2001).

### 9.7.5 Movements

Shortfin mako have a wide distribution and habitat use patterns (Casey and Kohler, 1992; Rogers *et al.* 2015; Vaudo *et al.* 2016). The species showed diel diving behaviour, with deeper dives occurring primarily during the daytime. A strong influence of thermal habitat on species movement behaviour suggests potentially strong impacts of rising ocean temperatures on the ecology of this highly migratory top predator. Integrating knowledge of fish movements into spatially explicit population dynamics models is being urged for improving stock assessments and management (Braccini *et al.*, 2016).

There is a large set of mark-recapture data available at ICCAT for shortfin mako. ICCAT (2016) reported that 9316 individuals had been tagged since 1962, of which 1255 specimens had been recaptured. These data, whilst supporting the stock identification, may also provide information for the estimation of growth curves (ICCAT, 2016).

Saraiva *et al.* (2023) provided information on swimming performance, after deploying tri-axial accelerometer tags on three shortfin makos caught off the Azores, with bursts in swimming speed recorded up to 3.6 m s<sup>-1</sup>.

## 9.8 Exploratory assessment models

No new exploratory assessment was undertaken.

## 9.9 Stock assessment

An ICCAT assessment for shortfin mako was carried out in 2017 (ICCAT, 2017b). The models agreed that the northern stock was overfished and was undergoing overfishing. The results obtained in 2017 were not comparable with those obtained in the earlier assessment in 2012, as the input data and model structures had changed significantly.

ICCAT updated the assessment for shortfin mako in 2019. New projections were made using two Stock Synthesis model scenarios that incorporated important aspects of shortfin mako biology, which had not been available previously (ICCAT, 2019). These projections were considered by the ICCAT Shark Group as a better representation of the stock dynamics. For the North Atlantic stock, the Group stated that “it is likely the current status (2018) had a lower  $B/B_{MSY}$  and higher  $F/F_{MSY}$  than the stock status in 2015 estimated in the 2017 assessment because the population continued to decline due to high catch levels”. A number of catch scenarios were given in the report, but the ICCAT Shark Group stated that “regardless of the TAC (including a TAC of 0 t), the stock will continue to decline until 2035 before any biomass increases can occur” and “although there is large uncertainty in the future productivity assumption for this stock, the Stock Synthesis projections show that there is a long lag time between when management measures are implemented and when stock size starts to rebuild” (ICCAT, 2019).

## 9.10 Quality of assessment

Assessments undertaken by ICCAT are conditional on several assumptions, including the estimates of historical shark catch, the relationship between catch rates and abundance, the initial state of the stock, as well as uncertainty in some life-history parameters.

## 9.11 Reference points

ICCAT uses  $F/F_{MSY}$  and  $B/B_{MSY}$  as reference points for stock status. These reference points are relative metrics. The absolute values of  $B_{MSY}$  and  $F_{MSY}$  depend on model assumptions and results and are not presented by ICCAT for advisory purposes.

## 9.12 Conservation considerations

The most recent IUCN Red List Assessment for shortfin mako is that it is Endangered (Rigby *et al.*, 2019).

In 2006, the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) designated the Atlantic population of the shortfin mako as threatened (DFO, 2006).

In 2008, shortfin mako was listed in Appendix II of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS).

In 2019 both shortfin mako and the related longfin mako *Isurus paucus*, were listed in Appendix II of CITES. In 2020 the CITES Scientific Review Group of the EU developed an EU-wide negative Non-Detriment Finding (NDF) for shortfin mako in the North Atlantic ([https://species-plus.net/species#/taxon\\_concepts/98243/legal](https://species-plus.net/species#/taxon_concepts/98243/legal)). This means that no permits will be given by any of the EU countries for international trade in wild caught individuals and those caught in waters outside national jurisdiction ('introduction from the sea').

## 9.13 Management considerations

Shortfin mako was one of the most common species in the global fin trade (Clarke *et al.* 2006) and is also a valued species for meat.

The life-history characteristics of shortfin mako confer a high risk of overexploitation (Cortés *et al.* 2010).

Longer-term catch data for pelagic sharks are considered unreliable, as many sharks are not reported on a species-specific basis, and some fisheries may have only landed fins. Data prior to 2000 should be considered as underestimates. Reporting procedures must be strengthened so that all landings are reported, and that landings are reported to species level, rather than more generic "nei" categories. The consolidation of three databases (ICCAT, FAO and EUROSTAT) by the ICCAT Secretariat should also strengthen the reliability of catch data in the future.

In 2021, ICCAT agreed a prohibition on landing shortfin mako in 2022 and 2023, and also agreed a process upon which future permissible retention shall be pursuant. Appropriate evaluation of this approach is required, including appraisal of the catch data (live and dead discards) on which the approach is predicated.

Levels of mercury (Hg) in the muscle of shortfin mako may exceed health guidelines ( $1.0 \text{ mg kg}^{-1}$  wet weight), with Biton-Porsmoguer *et al.* (2018) reporting concentrations of  $0.74 \pm 0.56 \text{ mg kg}^{-1}$  ww (range = 0.12–2.57) in the muscle of specimens from the northeastern Atlantic. Hg concentrations exceeding health guidelines were observed in 12 individuals over 150 cm total length and Biton-Porsmoguer *et al.* (2018) considered shortfin mako of 150–190 cm total length to be of 'potential risk for consumers', and 190 cm to be the size at risk.

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## 9.15 Tables and Figures

**Table 9.1. Shortfin mako in the North Atlantic. Catch data (t) of shortfin mako (2000–2021) in the North Atlantic by billfish area as reported in ICCAT Task I catch data (version of 26/01/2023). Data include landings and dead discards. Estimated total catches from ICCAT (2022) also given.**

Year	BIL91	BIL92	BIL93	BIL94A	BIL94B	BIL94C	Total	
							Task 1	ICCAT (2022)
2000	31	467	9	12	1290	785	2595	2587
2001	32	396	25	8	1580	637	2677	2677
2002	8	432	23	10	1887	1066	3426	3426
2003	19	158	28	14	2127	1642	3987	3987
2004	22	517	66	23	1928	1444	4000	4000
2005	26	767	30	29	1212	1631	3695	3695
2006	14	387	16	54	1714	1391	3574	3574
2007	20	399	20	35	2247	1436	4158	4158
2008	16	350	12	26	2099	1299	3802	3800
2009	21	405	47	67	2416	1586	4542	4541
2010	17	415	38	67	2762	1484	4783	4782
2011	26	424	28	49	1697	1498	3722	3720
2012	23	502	49	66	1908	1891	4440	4437
2013	17	369	14	150	2033	1021	3604	3603
2014	21	963	17	39	1336	1093	3469	3467
2015	8	622	12	44	1547	1049	3282	3281
2016	7	317	9	681	2041	303	3357	3356
2017	9	362	2	947	1593	206	3119	3119
2018	4	188	1	743	1175	282	2392	2373
2019	3	98	3	521	1058	203	1886	1882
2020	3	63	0	439	916	308	1729	1718
2021	4	58	0	440	688	242	1431	-

**Table 9.2. Shortfin mako in the North Atlantic. Catch data (t) of shortfin mako (2000–2021) in the North Atlantic by country as reported in ICCAT Task I catch data (version of 26/01/2023). Data include landings and dead discards. Estimated total catches from ICCAT (2022) also given.**

Nation	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Spain	1561	1684	2047	2068	2088	1751	1918	1814	1895	2216	2091
Portugal	318	378	415	1249	473	1109	951	1540	1033	1169	1432
Maroc				147	169	215	220	151	283	476	636
USA	422	350	372	106	477	422	353	325	306	334	352
Japan	138	105	438	267	572			82	131	98	116
Canada	78	69	78	73	80	91	71	72	43	53	41
Chinese Taipei	56	47	53	37	70	68	40	6	23	11	14
Venezuela	9	24	21	28	64	27	14	19	8.3	41	27
Belize										23	28
China PR	0.2							81	16	19	29
Senegal								7.6	17	21	
Panama	0.2						0.4	49	33	39	
Mexico	10	16		10	6.4	9.3	5.2	8.1	6.1	7.4	8.3
Korea Rep											
Trinidad and Tobago		0.8	2.0	3.0	1.5	2.1	1.0	1.1	1.3	1.2	1.1
France										15	1.7
United Kingdom	3.0	2.3	0.6	0.7	0.8	0.1	0.1	0.0	1.4	15	0.0
Costa Rica		0.1						0.2	1.4	1.3	1.0
St Pierre et Miquelon (FR)								1.4	2.0		3.8
Barbados											
Liberia											
St Vincent and Grenadines											
Bermuda (UK)							0.2	0.2	0.4	0.3	0.2
Mauritania											
Sta Lucia									0.3		0.3
Philippines									0.7		
Russia											
Curaçao											
El Salvador											
Guatemala											
Netherlands											
Total	2595	2677	3426	3987	4000	3695	3574	4158	3802	4542	4783
Total (ICCAT, 2022)	2587	2677	3426	3987	4000	3695	3574	4158	3800	4541	4782

**Table 9.2 (continued). Shortfin mako in the North Atlantic. Catch data (t) of shortfin mako in the North Atlantic (2000–2021) by country as reported in ICCAT Task I catch data (version of 26/01/2023). Data include landings and dead discards. Estimated total catches from ICCAT (2022) also given.**

Nation	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Spain	1667	2308	1509	1481	1362	1574	1784	1165	866	870	837
Portugal	1045	1023	820	219	222	264	276	272	289	342	202
Maroc	420	406	667	624	947	1050	450	594	501	382	299
USA	341	389	368	972	580	277	306	166	58	51	42
Japan	53	56	33	69	45	74	89	20	33	28	14
Canada	37	29	35	55	85	83	109	55	64	20	22
Chinese Taipei	13	15	8	4.0	15	7.5	1.4	22	5.0	12	4
Venezuela	20	33	9.0	13	7.5	6.6	8.9	7.5	8.3	7.7	3
Belize	69	114	99	1.2	0.6	0.5	9	12	2.3		3
China PR	18	24	11	5	2	4	2		20	2.0	1
Senegal		2	0	2	2	2	68	68	26		
Panama			19	7			0				
Mexico	7.5	8.1	3.9	3.7	3.7	3.6	5.0	2.5	2.1	2.2	2
Korea Rep	27	27	15	8	3	1	3	5	4		
Trinidad and Tobago	0.5	2.2	1.0	0.8	0.6	0.8	1.6	2.3	1.2	1.2	0.9
France	0.4	0.1	0.2	0.6	1.4	2.1	1.1	0.7	1.7	0.1	1.5
United Kingdom	0.3	0.2	0.0	0.0					0.0	0.0	0.0
Costa Rica	2.3	2.3	1.4	1.7	0.8	1.0	0.5	0.5	0.2	0.4	
St Pierre et Miquelon (FR)	0.2		4.0	0.4				0.0			
Barbados					4.3	2.9	3.5				
Liberia										9.9	
St Vincent and Grenadines					1.7				3.3		
Bermuda (UK)	0.2	0.3	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.1	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.3
Mauritania						2.1					
Sta Lucia	0.7		0.6	0.0							
Philippines											
Russia							0.1	0.0	0.2		0.0
Curaçao							0.1				
El Salvador							0.1				
Guatemala							0.0				
Netherlands							0.0				
<b>Total</b>	<b>3722</b>	<b>4440</b>	<b>3604</b>	<b>3469</b>	<b>3282</b>	<b>3357</b>	<b>3119</b>	<b>2392</b>	<b>1886</b>	<b>1729</b>	<b>1431</b>
<b>Total (ICCAT, 2022)</b>	<b>3720</b>	<b>4437</b>	<b>3603</b>	<b>3467</b>	<b>3281</b>	<b>3356</b>	<b>3119</b>	<b>2373</b>	<b>1882</b>	<b>1718</b>	<b>-</b>

**Table 9.3. Shortfin mako in the North Atlantic. Catch data (t) of shortfin mako from the adjacent Mediterranean Sea (2000–2021) by country as reported in ICCAT Task I catch data (version of 26/01/2023). Data include landings and dead discards. Estimated total catches from ICCAT (2022) also given.**

Year	Portugal	Spain	Cyprus	Italy	Japan	France	Maroc	Total	Total (ICCAT, 2022)
2000	1.2	2.9						4.1	4
2001	5.3	1.8						7.1	7
2002		1.7						1.7	2
2003	0.2	2.1						2.2	2
2004		1.8						1.8	2
2005	14.9	1.7						16.7	17
2006	5.0	3.7	1.3					9.9	10
2007		0.8	1.5					2.2	2
2008		0.2	0.5		0.2			0.9	1
2009		0.2	0.3		0.0	0.1		0.6	1
2010	0.3	0.9	0.5					1.7	2
2011		1.6	0.9				0.0	2.4	2
2012		1.5					0.1	1.6	2
2013		0.0			0.0		0.0	0.0	0
2014		0.2			0.0		0.0	0.2	0
2015		0.2			0.0			0.2	0
2016								0.0	0
2017					0.0			0.0	0
2018				0.9	0.0			0.9	1
2019				0.0	0.0	0.0		0.0	0
2020					0.0	0.0		0.0	0
2021		0.7				0.0		0.7	

**Table 9.4. Shortfin mako in the North Atlantic. ICCAT Task I catch data (version of 26/01/2023) that has been allocated as 'catch', 'landings' and 'dead discards', with the latter also given as a percentage of total catch.**

Year	Catch (t)	Dead discards		Landings (t)	Total catch (t)
		(t)	% total catch		
2000	1803	8		784	2595
2001	2131			547	2677
2002	2708			718	3426
2003	3260			727	3987
2004	3109	0		892	4000
2005	2872			822	3695
2006	2426			1148	3574
2007	2705	7		1446	4158
2008	2868	10		924	3802
2009	3247	20		1275	4542
2010		2	0.04%	4781	4783
2011		9	0.24%	3713	3722
2012		19	0.44%	4420	4440
2013		5	0.14%	3599	3604
2014		12	0.33%	3457	3469
2015		10	0.32%	3271	3282
2016		8	0.23%	3349	3357
2017		5	0.17%	3114	3119
2018		26	1.07%	2367	2392
2019		57	3.03%	1829	1886
2020		66	3.79%	1664	1729
2021		881	61.56%	550	1431

**Table 9.5. Shortfin mako in the North Atlantic. ICCAT Task I catch data (version of 26/01/2023) indicating the reported quantities landed (L) or discarded dead (DD) for the six main nations exploiting the North Atlantic stock for the years 2010–2021.**

Nation	Category	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Canada	DD				0		0	1	0	2	1	20	22
	L	41	37	29	35	55	85	82	109	53	63	1	0
	Total	41	37	29	35	55	85	83	109	55	64	20	22
Spain	DD								0				837
	L	2091	1667	2308	1509	1481	1362	1574	1784	1165	866	870	0
	Total	2091	1667	2308	1509	1481	1362	1574	1784	1165	866	870	837
Portugal	DD											1	
	L	1432	1045	1023	820	219	222	264	276	272	289	342	202
	Total	1432	1045	1023	820	219	222	264	276	272	289	342	202
Japan	DD					0	0				30	28	14
	L	116	53	56	33	69	45	74	89	20	4	0	0
	Total	116	53	56	33	69	45	74	89	20	33	28	14
Maroc	DD					0		0	0	0		0	0
	L	636	420	406	667	624	947	1050	450	594	501	382	299
	Total	636	420	406	667	624	947	1050	450	594	501	382	299
USA	DD	2	9	18	5	11	8	6	4	2	1	3	3
	L	350	332	371	363	961	572	271	302	165	57	48	39
	Total	352	341	389	368	972	580	277	306	166	58	51	42
Other	DD		0	1	0	0	2	1	1	22	26	14	5
	L	114	159	228	173	48	39	34	104	98	49	21	10
	Total	114	159	229	173	49	41	34	104	120	75	35	16
Total	Catch	4783	3722	4440	3604	3469	3282	3357	3119	2392	1886	1729	1431

**Table 9.6. Shortfin mako in the North Atlantic. Length–weight relationships for *Isurus oxyrinchus* (sexes combined) from different populations. Lengths in cm, and weights in kg unless specified in equation.  $W_R$  = round weight;  $W_D$  = dressed weight.**

Stock	L (cm) W (kg) relationship	n	Length range (cm)	Source
Central Pacific	$\log W \text{ (lb)} = -4.608 + 2.925 \times \log L_T$			Strasburg, 1958
Cuba	$W = 1.193 \times 10^{-6} \times L_T^{3.46}$	23	160–260 ( $L_T$ )	Manday, 1975
Australia	$W = 4.832 \times 10^{-6} \times L_T^{3.10}$	80	58–343 ( $L_T$ )	Stevens, 1983
South Africa	$W = 1.47 \times 10^{-5} \times L_{PC}^{2.98}$	143	84–260 ( $L_{PC}$ )	Cliff <i>et al.</i> , 1990
NW Atlantic	$W_R = (5.2432 \times 10^{-6}) L_F^{3.1407}$	2081	65–338 ( $L_F$ )	Kohler <i>et al.</i> , 1995.
NW Atlantic	$W = 7.2999 \times L_T \text{ (m)}^{3.224}$	63	2.0–3.7 m ( $L_T$ )	Mollet <i>et al.</i> , 2000
Southern hemisphere	$W = 6.824 \times L_T \text{ (m)}^{3.137}$	64	2.0–3.4 m ( $L_T$ )	Mollet <i>et al.</i> , 2000
NE Atlantic	$W_D = (2.80834 \times 10^{-6}) L_F^{3.20182}$	17	70–175 ( $L_F$ )	García-Cortés and Mejuto, 2002
Tropical east Atlantic	$W_D = (1.22182 \times 10^{-5}) L_F^{2.89535}$	166	95–250	García-Cortés and Mejuto, 2002
Tropical central Atlantic	$W_D = (2.52098 \times 10^{-5}) L_F^{2.76078}$	161	120–185	García-Cortés and Mejuto, 2002
Southwest Atlantic	$W_D = (3.1142 \times 10^{-5}) L_F^{2.7243}$	97	95–240	García-Cortés and Mejuto, 2002

**Table 9.7. Shortfin mako in the North Atlantic. Length–length relationships for male, female and sexes combined from the NE Atlantic and Straits of Gibraltar ( $L_S$  = standard length;  $L_F$  = fork length;  $L_T$  = total length;  $L_{UC}$  = upper caudal lobe length). Source: Buencuerpo *et al.* (1998).**

Females	Males	Combined
$L_F = 1.086 L_S + 1.630$ (n=852)	$L_F = 1.086 L_S + 1.409$ (n=911)	$L_F = 1.086 L_S + 1.515$ (n=1763)
$L_T = 0.817 L_S + 0.400$ (n=852)	$L_T = 1.209 L_S + 0.435$ (n=681)	$L_T = 1.207 L_S + 0.971$ (n=1533)
$L_{UC} = 3.693 L_S + 13.094$ (n=507)	$L_{UC} = 3.795 L_S + 10.452$ (n=477)	$L_{UC} = 3.758 L_S + 11.640$ (n=1054)
$L_T = 1.106 L_F + 0.052$ (n=853)	$L_T = 1.111 L_F - 0.870$ (n=911)	$L_T = 1.108 L_F - 0.480$ (n=1746)

**Table 9.8. Shortfin mako in the North Atlantic. Published growth parameters, assuming two vertebral bands formed annually. Data give von Bertalanffy growth parameters (\*\*Gompertz growth function) used,  $t_0$  in cm.  $L_\infty$  in cm (Fork Length),  $k$  in years<sup>-1</sup>.**

Area	$L_\infty$	$k$	$t_0$	$L_0^*$	Sex	Study
Northwest Atlantic	302	0.266	-1	-	Male	Pratt and Casey, 1983
Northwest Atlantic	345	0.203	-1	-	Female	Pratt and Casey, 1983
Atlantic	373.4	-0.203	1.0		Female	Cortés, 2000
Northwest Atlantic	253	0.125	-	71.6	Male	Natanson <i>et al.</i> , 2006**
Northwest Atlantic	366	0.087	-	88.4	Female	Natanson <i>et al.</i> , 2006**

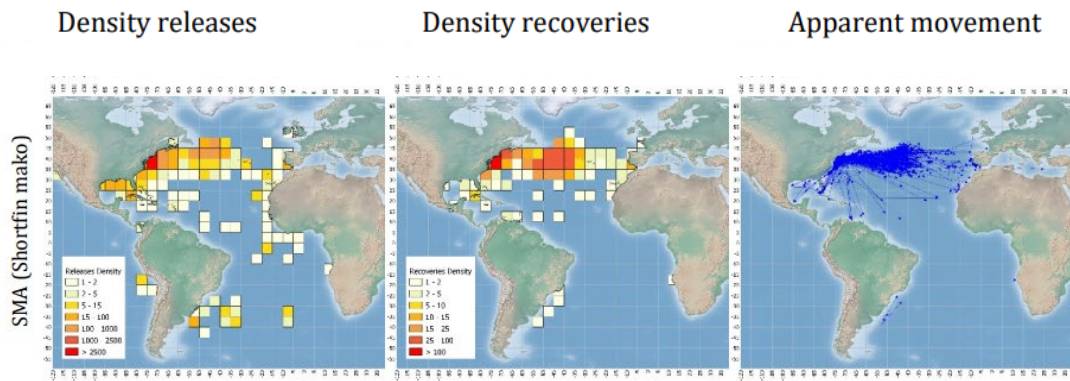
\*: size-at-birth

**Table 9.9. Shortfin mako in the North Atlantic. Life-history information available from the scientific literature.**

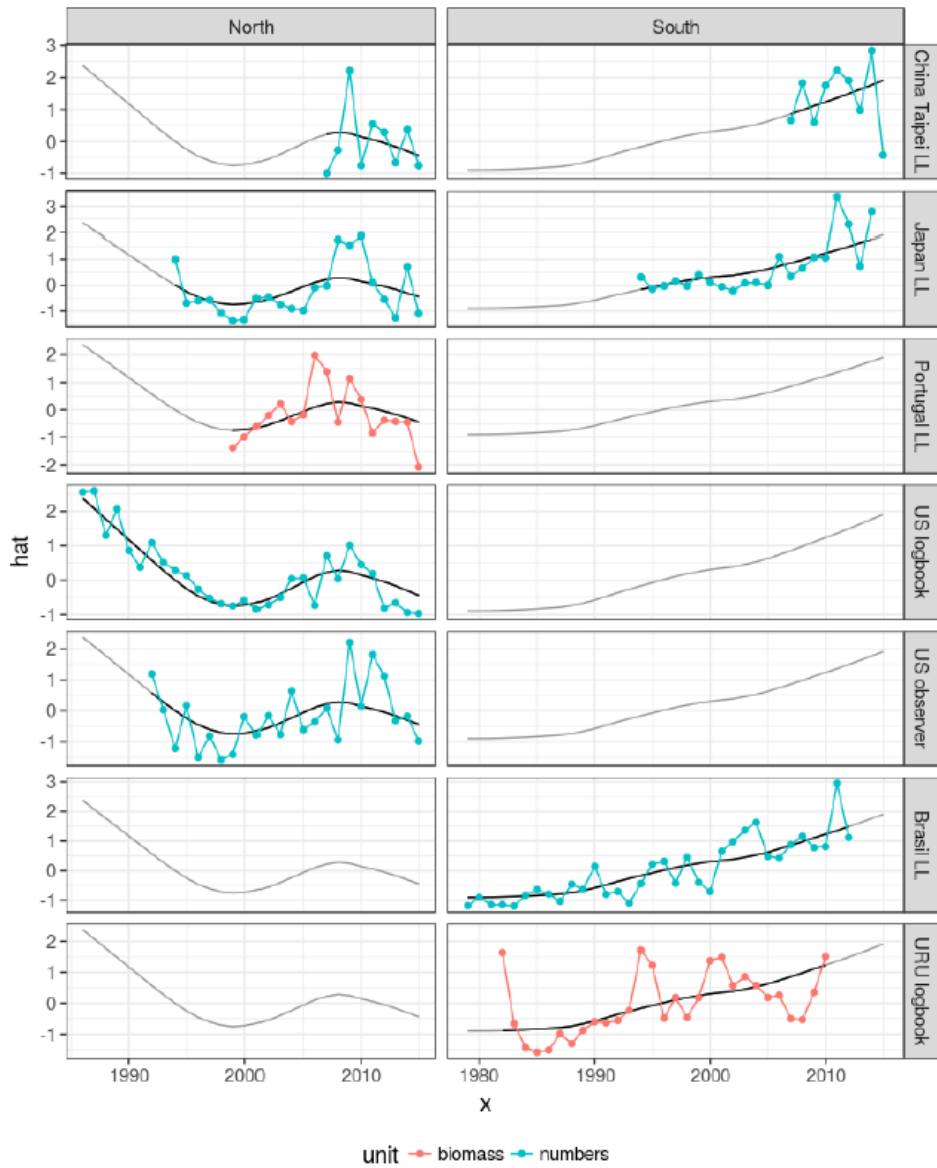
Parameter	Values	Sample Size	Area	Reference
Reproduction	Ovoviviparous with oophagy			Campana <i>et al.</i> , 2004
Litter size	4–25	35	Worldwide	Mollet <i>et al.</i> , 2000
	12–20			Castro <i>et al.</i> , 1999
Size at birth ( $L_T$ )	70 cm	188+	Worldwide	Mollet <i>et al.</i> , 2000
Sex ratio (males: females)	1:1	2188	NW Atlantic	Casey and Kohler, 1992
	1:0.4		NE Atlantic (Spain, Azores)	Mejuto and Garces, 1984
	1:0.9		NE, N central Atlantic and Med	Buencuerpo <i>et al.</i> , 1998
	1.0:1.4	17	NE Atlantic	García-Cortés and Mejuto, 2002
Gestation period	15–18	26	Worldwide	Mollet <i>et al.</i> , 2000
Male age-at-first maturity (years)*	2.5			Pratt and Casey, 1983
	9			Cailliet <i>et al.</i> , 1983
Male age-at-median maturity (years)	7	145	New Zealand	Bishop <i>et al.</i> , 2006
Female age-at-first maturity (years)*	5			Pratt and Casey, 1983
Female age maturity (years)	19	111	New Zealand	Bishop <i>et al.</i> , 2006
	7			Pratt and Casey, 1983
Male length-at-first maturity ( $T_L$ )	195 cm			Stevens, 1983
Male length-at-maturity ( $T_L$ )	197–202 cm (median)	215	New Zealand	Francis and Duffy, 2005
	180 cm ( $L_F$ )		NE Atlantic (Portugal)	Maia <i>et al.</i> , 2007
	200–220		Worldwide	Pratt and Casey, 1983; Mollet <i>et al.</i> , 2000
Female length-at-first maturity ( $T_L$ )	265–280 cm			Cliff <i>et al.</i> , 1990
Female length-at-maturity ( $T_L$ )	301–312 (median)	88	New Zealand	Francis and Duffy, 2005
	270–300 cm ( $L_T$ )		Worldwide	Pratt and Casey, 1983; Mollet <i>et al.</i> , 2000
Age-at-recruitment (year)	0–1			Stevens and Wayte, 1999
Male maximum length ( $L_T$ )	296 cm			Compagno, 2001
Female maximum length ( $L_T$ )	396 cm 408 cm (estimated)			Compagno, 2001
Lifespan (years)	11.5–17 (oldest aged)			Pratt and Casey, 1983



Parameter	Values	Sample Size	Area	Reference
	45 (estimated longevity)			Cailliet <i>et al.</i> , 1983
Natural mortality (M)	0.16		Pacific	Smith <i>et al.</i> , 1998
Annual survival estimate	0.79 (95% C.I. 0.71–0.87)			Wood <i>et al.</i> 2007
Growth parameters	61.1 cm year <sup>-1</sup> first year 40.6 cm year <sup>-1</sup> second year 5.0 cm month <sup>-1</sup> in summer 2.1 cm month <sup>-1</sup> in winter	262	NE Atlantic (Portugal)	Maia <i>et al.</i> , 2007
Maximum age (estimated from von Bertalanffy growth eqn.)	28			Smith <i>et al.</i> , 1998
Productivity (R2m) estimate: intrinsic rebound	0.051 (assuming no fecundity increase)		Pacific	Smith <i>et al.</i> , 1998
Potential rate of increase per year	8.5%		Atlantic	Cortés, 2000
Population doubling time T <sub>D</sub> (years)	13.6 (assuming no fecundity increase)		Pacific	Smith <i>et al.</i> , 1998
Generation time (years)	~ 9		Atlantic	Cortés, 2000
Trophic level	4.3	7		Cortés, 1999



**Figure 9.1. Shortfin mako in the North Atlantic. Tag and release distributions for shortfin mako in the Atlantic Ocean showing (a) density of releases in a 5x5 grid, (b) density of recoveries in a 5x5 grid, and (c) the apparent movement (straight line from the release to the recovery locations). Recaptures were 13.4%. Source: ICCAT (2022).**



**Figure 9.2. Shortfin mako in the North Atlantic. Time-series of agreed CPUE indices for the North Atlantic (left panel) and South Atlantic (right panel), points are the standardised values, continuous black lines are a loess smoother showing the average trend by area (i.e. fitted to year for each area with series as a factor). X-axis is time, Y-axis are the scaled indices. Source: ICCAT.**

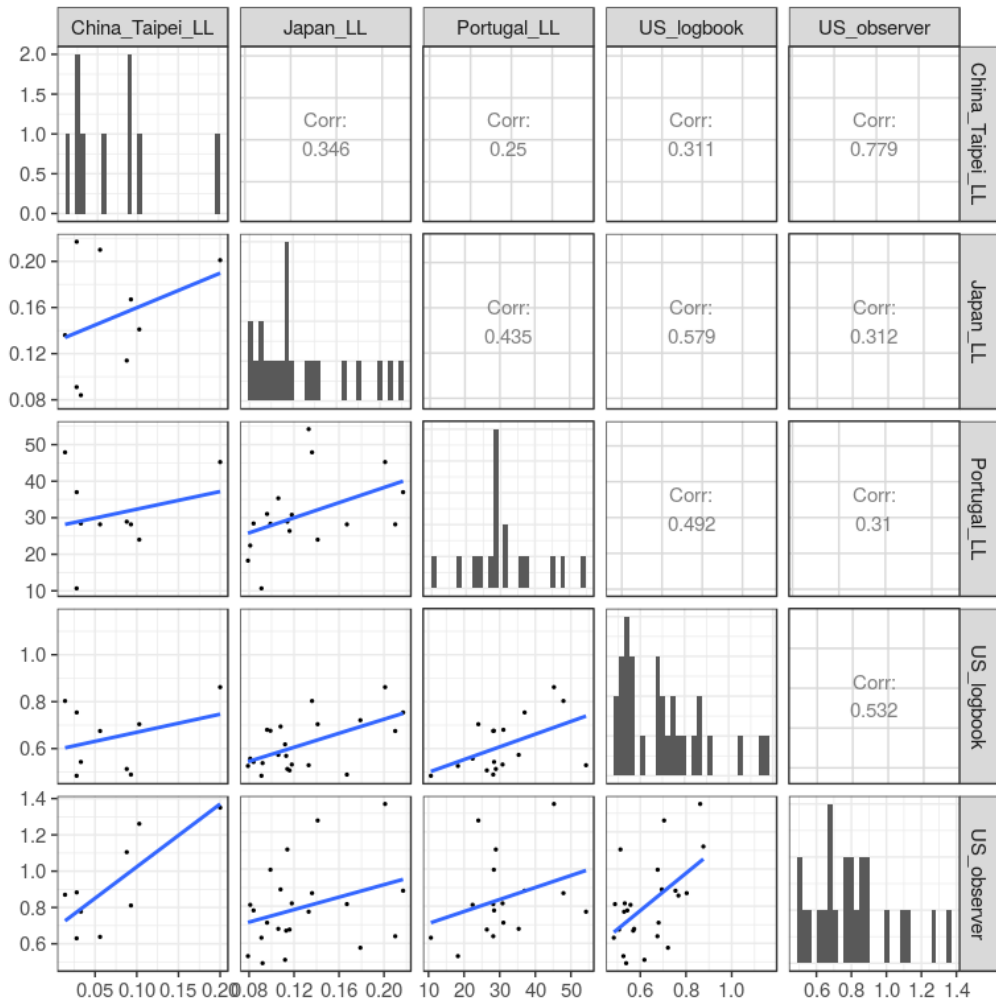


Figure 9.3. Shortfin mako in the North Atlantic. Pairwise scatter plots for agreed indices used for the North Atlantic stock of shortfin mako. X- and Y-axis are scaled indices. Source: ICCAT.

## 10 Tope in the Northeast Atlantic

### 10.1 Stock distribution

WGEF considers there to be a single stock of tope (or school shark) *Galeorhinus galeus* in the ICES area. This stock is distributed from Scotland and southern Norway southwards to the coast of Northwest Africa and the Mediterranean Sea. The stock area covers ICES subareas 2–10 (where subareas 4 and 6–10 are important parts of the stock range, and subareas 2, 3 and 5 areas where tope tend to be an occasional vagrant). The stock extends into the northern part of the CECAF area and the Mediterranean Sea (Subareas I–III). The information used to identify the stock unit is summarized in the stock annex (ICES, 2009).

### 10.2 The fishery

#### 10.2.1 History of the fishery

Currently there are no targeted commercial fisheries for tope in the NE Atlantic. Tope is discarded in some fisheries but landed as a bycatch in trawl, gillnet and longline fisheries, including demersal and pelagic static gears.

Tope is also an important target species for recreational sea angling in several areas, with anglers, angling clubs and charter boats often having catch and release protocols.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on fishing activity remains unquantified, however, it is assumed based on national and/or local restrictions to have resulted in reduced fishing effort in 2020 and 2021.

#### 10.2.2 The fishery in 2022

No changes to the fishery were observed in 2022.

#### 10.2.3 ICES Advice applicable

ICES provided advice for this stock for the first time in 2012, stating “Based on ICES approach to data-limited stocks, ICES advises that catches should be reduced by 20%. Because the data for catches of tope are not fully documented and considered unreliable (due to the historical use of generic landings categories), ICES is not in a position to quantify the result. Measures to identify pupping areas should be taken”.

In 2021, ICES advised that “when the precautionary approach is applied, landings should be no more than 301 tonnes in each of the years 2022 and 2023. ICES cannot quantify the corresponding catches”.

#### 10.2.4 Management applicable

In 2015, EC regulations for fishing opportunities first prohibited EU vessels from fishing for, retaining on board, transhipping or landing tope when captured on longlines in European Union waters of ICES Division 2.a and Subarea 4 and in Union and international waters of ICES subareas 1, 5–8, 12 and 14 (Council Regulation (EU) 2015/104). These prohibitions on longline-caught tope continue to apply in UK waters.

The UK's Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) introduced a Statutory Instrument in 2008 (SI Number 2008/691, "The Tope (Prohibition of Fishing) Order") that banned fishing for tope other than by rod and line (with anglers fishing using rod and line from boats not allowed to land their catch) and established a tope bycatch limit of 45 kg per day in commercial fisheries. In Scotland, vessels are prohibited from fishing for tope other than by rod and line or hand-line, trans-shipment of tope caught by rod and line or hand-line (wherever caught), and landing tope (wherever caught) as per Statutory Instrument in 2012 (SI Number 2012/63, "The Sharks, Skates and Rays (Prohibition of Fishing, Trans-shipment and Landing) (Scotland) Order 2012").

## 10.3 Catch data

### 10.3.1 Landings

No accurate estimates of historical catch are available, as many nations that land tope report an unknown proportion of landings in aggregated landings categories (e.g. dogfish and hounds). In other cases, misidentification/misreporting of other species as tope may have taken place.

Reported species-specific landings, which commenced in 1978 for French fisheries, are given in Table 10.1, based on data collated by WGEF up to and including 2004. Prior to, and at WGEF 2016, landings from 2005–2015 were reassessed, and where possible, erroneous or generic species categories or figures were reassigned following WKSHARK2 (ICES, 2016a).

Recent estimated landings data from 2005–2022 for tope are shown by fishing area (Table 10.2) and by nation (Table 10.3), following the procedure from WKSHARK2. Overall, landings data appear relatively stable in recent years, with a decrease observed in 2019 and 2020 (Figure 10.1; Table 10.2; Table 10.3). The 2020 estimated landings were the lowest observed in the last decade, however, these should be viewed with care as the COVID-19 pandemic may have contributed to a reduction on fishing activity and thus on reported landings. Since 2021, estimated landings are at similar levels as those observed in 2016–2018. Despite the current management restrictions applicable using hooks and lines in Subareas 7 and 8, landings of this fleet in these Subareas accounted for 53% in 2022, with the remaining 47% from Subareas 9 and 10 where no current restrictions are in place on this fleet.

France is one of the main nations landing tope, accounting for 78% during 2018–2021 and 74% in 2022, with the English Channel and Celtic Seas remaining important fishing grounds. UK fisheries also land tope, although species-specific data are lacking for the earlier years, and reported landings have declined since precautionary management measures (trip limits of no more than 45 kg per day) were introduced.

Since 2001, Ireland, Portugal and Spain have also declared species-specific landings. However, it is believed that some of the Portuguese landings recorded as tope may also include unknown proportions of other sharks, including smooth-hounds and deep-water sharks. Portuguese tope landings for 2017 were examined by IPMA scientists and have been corrected in 2019, which explains values for this year to be less than declared previously. The main Portuguese landings of tope are recorded from areas around the Azores. Landings for the Azores in 2021–2022 are estimates and not officially reported data.

The introduction of management restrictions in 2015 applicable to Subarea 7 and 8 (see Section 10.2.4) may have, alongside with unavailable data from FAO areas 34 and 37, contributed to the decrease in 2015–2022 landings reported by Spain (Table 10.3).

Limited species-specific catch data for the Mediterranean Sea and off northwest Africa are available. The degree of possible misreporting or underreporting is not known.

### 10.3.2 Discards

Though some discard information is available from various nations, data are limited for most nations and fisheries.

Data analysis from the UK (E&W) observer programme (Silva and Ellis, 2019) suggested that the introduction of the Tope (Prohibition of Fishing) Order 2008, may have influenced the discard-retention patterns (Figure 10.2). This change was more evident on tope caught in drift and static gillnet fisheries where the proportion of discards increased from 11% (2002–2007) to 67% (2008–2016). No apparent change was observed by otter trawlers, with similar levels for both time periods (ca. 77%).

The small number of tope recorded in some discard observer programmes may be an artefact of limited coverage on those vessels that may encounter them, and the occasional and seasonal occurrence of tope in some areas. Sporadic records of tope in observer data indicate that appropriate methods of raising such discard data to fleet need to be evaluated if catch advice is to be developed.

In 2017, ICES held a workshop (WKSHARK3) to compile and refine catch and landings of elasmobranchs (ICES, 2017). National data were examined for UK (England), Ireland, France and Spain (Basque country) for two main gear categories: otter trawl and gillnet.

Discard data were also provided as part of the 2017–2023 Data Call. However, data available were insufficient to draw a more comprehensive interpretation of any discard/retention patterns.

### 10.3.3 Quality of catch data

Catch data are of poor quality, and biological data are not collected under the Data Collection Regulations. Some generic biological data are available (see Section 10.7).

### 10.3.4 Discard Survival

Ellis *et al.* (2014 WD; 2017) provided references for discard survival of shark species worldwide. Discard survival of members of the Triakidae family appears to be quite variable. Whilst quantitative data are limited in European waters, Fennessy (1994) reported at-vessel mortality (AVM) of 29% for Arabian smooth-hound *Mustelus mosis* taken in a prawn trawl fishery. AVM ranged from 57–93% for three triakid sharks taken in an Australian gillnet fishery, despite the soak times being < 24 hours (Braccini *et al.*, 2012). Lower AVM of triakids has been reported in longline fisheries (Frick *et al.*, 2010; Coelho *et al.*, 2012). Investigations on post-release survival of mature and lively tope caught with automatic demersal longlines in the Great Australian Bight showed a high resilience to capture, precautionous handling and release (Rogers *et al.*, 2017).

## 10.4 Commercial catch composition

Tope is one of the main elasmobranch species caught by the Azorean bottom longline fleet (Morato *et al.*, 2003) and was reported in 29% of the trips, representing up to 2% of the total catch landed along the studied period (Figure 10.3) (Santos *et al.* 2018 WD).

## 10.5 Commercial catch and effort data

Standardized CPUE series for tope from the Azorean bottom longline fleet (1990–2017) are shown in Figure 10.4 (see Table.10.4 in ICES, 2020; Santos *et al.* 2020 WD), with data no longer

available from 2018 onwards. The trends from the nominal and standardized index differed substantially; indeed, the nominal CPUE oscillated over time, with peaks in 1999, 2000 and 2017; while the standardized index gave a more stable trend since 1994. According to Ortiz (2017), it is not necessary that the nominal and standardized trends follow the same trend.

## 10.6 Fishery-independent information

### 10.6.1 Availability of survey data

Although several fishery-independent surveys operate in the stock area, data are limited for most of these. Analyses of catch data need to be undertaken with care, as tope is a relatively large-bodied species (up to 200 cm  $L_T$  in the NE Atlantic), and adults are strong swimmers that forage both in pelagic and demersal waters. Tope are not sampled effectively in beam trawl surveys because of low gear selectivity. They are caught occasionally in GOV trawl and other (high-head-line) otter trawl surveys in the North Sea and westerly waters, though survey data generally include a large number of zero hauls.

The discontinued UK (England and Wales) Q4 IBTS survey in the Celtic Seas ecoregion recorded small numbers of tope, which were tagged and released where possible (ICES, 2008). UK surveys in this area generally caught larger tope at the southern entrance to St George's Channel, and in 2011 several juveniles were caught in the Irish Sea.

Southern and western IBTS surveys may cover a large part of the stock range, and more detailed and updated analyses of these data are required.

The western waters beam-trawl survey in the English Channel and Celtic Sea did not catch any tope (Silva *et al.*, 2020 WD) which is known to occur in the area. However, tope occurs higher up in the water column and is rarely captured by beam trawls.

Data from the Azorean demersal spring bottom longline survey (ARDAÇO<sup>1</sup>) were examined by Santos *et al.* (2020), where tope was frequently observed during 1995–2018.

### 10.6.2 Trends in survey abundance

Data for five trawl surveys were examined by WGEF, as summarised below.

**NS-IBTS-Q1:** Data for the IBTS-Q1 in the North Sea showed a low abundance (and biomass) across countries over the time-series examined (1992–2022), with this survey excluded from further analysis.

**NS-IBTS-Q3:** The mean CPUE (numbers and biomass) were calculated for the IBTS-Q3 in the North Sea IBTS for the years 1992–2022, with updated estimates provided in 2023 for the whole times series. During this period, there were large differences in abundance and biomass in earlier years compared to recent years (Figure 10.5). The frequency of occurrence for the years 1992–2016 has increased since 2002 (Figure 10.6 in ICES, 2022), but such investigations are needed for the more recent years.

More detailed investigations of NS-IBTS-Q3 data on DATRAS were undertaken by WGEF in 2023 in terms of the length and spatial distribution by nations (Figure 10.6 and 10.7). Length-frequency distributions indicate that data for *Galeorhinus galeus* and *Mustelus* spp. may have been confounded, with this most evident for Danish survey data (See Section 21.6). It is likely that some tope have been attributed to *Mustelus* in some years, and so until further analyses of these

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<sup>1</sup> This survey may also be referred to as 'ARQDAÇO(P)-Q1' in other ICES-related documents.



data are undertaken, the temporal trends in catch rates shown in Figure 10.5 exclude Danish data to be consistent with the approach applied for smooth-hounds (see Section 21.9). These values may also differ due to changes in the DATRAS product, which are mostly related to previously allocated data to Sweden now reallocated to Denmark. Further analyses on the quality of these data are required.

Furthermore, WGEF note that the apparent 'peak' in tope in 1992 is driven by a single large catch at one station (RV "Thalassa" in 35F1, haul number 15 with CPUE of 182 ind/hr). Further examination of these data are required.

**IE-IGFS-WIBTS-Q4:** Abundance and biomass estimates were calculated for all individuals for the time series 2005–2022 (Figure 10.8) and shows an increasing trend from 2012, with a slight decrease in 2017 and 2018, a sharp increase in 2020, followed by a decrease since 2021. This survey usually catches small numbers of tope, although one haul (40E2, Division 6.a) in 2006 yielded 59 specimens (Figure 10.8). The peak in 2020 relates to larger specimens (>80 cm total length) being caught in one single haul (33E3, 16 min tow, Division 7.a). Most tope caught are now tagged and released. Survey indices for the whole time series were updated in 2019 and, values may differ from the previous survey indices as values were scaled to the survey area rather than the ecoregion. No further updates have been conducted, with more recent estimates following the same methodology.

**EVHOE-WIBTS-Q4:** Swept area biomass estimates were calculated for total and exploitable biomass (individuals  $\geq 50$  cm total length) for the time series 1997–2022 (Figure 10.9) and fluctuate without trend. Abundance estimates were calculated for individuals <50 cm total length (Figure 10.9), which show that this GOV survey catches mostly larger specimens. Estimates were calculated using DATRAS data and were updated in 2023 for the whole time-series. This survey did not occur in 2017.

The spatial distribution across the time-series (1997–2014) (Figure 10.4 in ICES, 2016b), showed similar locations reported during UK surveys, with the majority of individuals found at the entrance to St George's Channel and outer Bristol Channel.

**ARDAÇO:** Additional information on the Azorean demersal spring bottom longline survey ARDAÇO on the relative abundance index for 1995–2018 is shown in Figure 10.10 (Santos *et al.*, 2020). Biomass estimates (kg per 1000 hooks) by area are shown in Figure 10.11, with additional estimates for 2019 and 2021. However, estimates for 2021 should be viewed with caution as there was a reduction in survey spatial coverage compared to previous years. A crew strike in 2022 resulted in the cancellation of the survey. Abundance (and biomass) are highly variable over time, with no consistent trend. This may relate to the gear used being of low catchability and to the survey sampling design.

**Summary:** WGEF consider that any trend analysis should be viewed with care, due to the low catchability in fishery-independent surveys. Given the low and variable catch rates, WGEF do not consider that catch rates are wholly appropriate for quantitative advice on stock status. The proportion of stations at which tope are captured may be an alternative metric for consideration and could be further investigated for more surveys covering the stock area.

### 10.6.3 Length distributions

In 2009, data were presented on length distributions found in the Celtic Seas ecoregion during fisheries-independent surveys conducted by England and Ireland in Q4 (Figure 10.7 in ICES, 2016b). Irish surveys recorded 145 tope (2003–2009), of which 110 (76%) were male. English surveys recorded 90 tope (56 (62%) males and 34 (38%) females). These specimens were 40–163 cm

$L_T$ . The length–frequency distributions found between the surveys were noticeably different, with more large males found in the Irish survey; 75% of the males were greater than 130 cm. The English surveys had a more evenly distributed length range.

Length distributions of tope caught in various UK surveys in 2004–2009 were analysed in 2016 (see Figure 10.8 in ICES 2016b). In the beam trawl survey (Figure 10.8a in ICES, 2016b), two peaks were observed, at 30–54 cm  $L_T$  and 70–84 cm  $L_T$  respectively. In the North Sea survey (Figure 10.8b in ICES, 2016b) a wide range (30–164 cm  $L_T$ ) was observed, with a main peak at 30–44 cm  $L_T$ . Wide ranges were also observed in the Celtic Sea survey (44–164 cm  $L_T$ ; Figure 10.8c in ICES, 2016b) and in the western IBTS survey (70–120 cm  $L_T$ ; Figure 10.8d in ICES, 2016b).

In the Azorean demersal spring bottom longline survey ARDAÇO, records also show a wide length range of 25–185 cm  $L_T$ , with fish caught at depths up to 650 m during 1995–2018. Smaller fish were caught in higher numbers in shallow waters, with an increase in length range observed in deeper waters while decreasing in abundance (Figure 10.12, Santos *et al.*, 2020).

### 10.6.3.1 Recreational length distributions

During 2009–2013, a Scottish recreational fishery in the Mull of Galloway recorded sex, length and weight of captured tope. While the number of tope tagged has declined, the number of mature fish of both sexes appears to have disproportionately declined (see Figure 10.11 in ICES, 2020). This area is thought to be a breeding ground for tope (James Thorburn, pers. Comm., 2014), so the lack of mature animals is a cause for concern.

## 10.6.4 Tagging information

A total of 159 tope were tagged and released by CEFAS over the period 1961–2013, predominately in the Irish Sea and Celtic Sea (Figure 10.10 in ICES 2016b; Burt *et al.*, 2013). Fish were also tagged in the western English Channel and North Sea but in lower numbers ( $n = 9$ ). Tope were tagged over a wide length range (41–162 cm  $L_T$ ), the majority being males, with a male to female sex ratio of 1.5:1. A total of four tope were recaptured, and were, on average, at liberty for 1195 days, with a maximum recorded time at liberty of 2403 days. Over the period individual fish had travelled relatively large distances (112–368 km), and all had moved from one ICES division to another. For example, the fish that was at liberty the longest was released in Cardigan Bay (Division 7.a) in November 2003, was later captured in June 2010 just to the east of the Isle of Wight. It is also noted that a tag from a tope was returned to CEFAS from southern Spain, and although release information could not be located, it is thought it may have been tagged in the 1970s.

Mark and recapture data from 3 tagging programmes around the UK (Scottish Shark Tagging Program, the Glasgow Museum Tagging Program, the UK Shark Tagging Program) are available. From 2,043 tagged tope, 138 recapture records were analysed. Connectivity between UK waters and the Azores, the Canary Islands and the Mediterranean were shown (Thorburn *et al.*, 2019). Site fidelity and annual migrations were also suggested due to the closeness of tope recaptures to tagging sites throughout the year; however, seasonal patterns of movement are thought to be confounded by partial migration behaviour in the species (Thorburn *et al.*, 2019). Only mature individuals were found off the shelf and there is a relationship between maximum distance of recapture and body size in females with larger individuals undertaking the biggest movements into southerly regions, these are assumed to be in relation to parturition. There was no relationship between maximum distance and body size in males (Thorburn *et al.*, 2019). Electronic tag data from 4 tope from Scotland showed extensive summer use of shelf waters, but a movement into oceanic waters over winter months with tope diving to 826 m. PSAT tag track reconstruction showed a male tope moving from Scottish waters, around the North and west of Ireland to Porcupine Seabight. (Thorburn *et al.*, 2019).

The Irish Marine Sportfish Tagging Programme has tagged tope off the Irish coast since 1970. Four fish have been recaptured in the Mediterranean Sea (Inland Fisheries Ireland, pers comm. 2013; Fitzmaurice, 1994; cf. nicematin.com, 29 May 2013, “Le long périple d’un requin hâ, de l’Irlande à la Corse). A tope tagged on 30 July 2001 off Greystones (Ireland) as part of this programme, was caught on 9 May 2013 off Bastia, Corsica (Mediterranean Sea), showing a movement of 3900 km in twelve years. One tope tagged off Ireland was recaptured in May 2018, again off the west of Ireland, after 9046 days.

An ongoing tagging project of the German Thünen-Institute of Sea Fisheries (HTTP – Helgoland Tope Tagging Project) has been tagging tope in the southern North Sea (German Bight) around Helgoland Island during annual aggregations of mostly adult sharks in the summer months. As of June 2022, 20 tope (16 females, 4 males, length range 103–164 cm  $L_T$ ) have been tagged with Wildlife Computers MiniPAT pop-up satellite archival tags and conventional tags. Preliminary results showed overwintering of the tope in the western English Channel and partial migration of both female and male specimens into oceanic habitats of the Northeast Atlantic, including long-distance, southward migrations of the female sharks towards the western part of the Strait of Gibraltar and as far south as Madeira. Tope that migrated into oceanic areas exhibited extensive diel vertical migratory behaviour, with a clear association with mesopelagic habitat features (deep scattering layers). The sharks followed the diel vertical migration of mesopelagic organisms staying at depths of around 500 m during daytime and ascending to surface layers during night time, while remaining in layers with highest densities of cephalopod prey (Schaber *et al.*, 2022).

Long-distance migrations of tope from the Northeast Atlantic to the Mediterranean Sea have also been reported by Colloca *et al.* (2019), with two females tagged and released in the Irish Sea being recaptured by Sicilian artisanal fishers using trammel nets. One tope tagged off Luce Bay (West Scotland) in June 2009 was recaptured at a depth of 35 m off Talbot Bank (south-west coast of Sicily) in November 2014, after 1967 days. The second female tope at 153 cm total length tagged off Carlingford Bay (East Ireland) in June 2015, was recaptured at ca. 30 cm depth off Selinunte harbour (South Sicily) in April 2017, after 648 days.

## 10.7 Life-history information

Much biological information is available for tope in European seas and elsewhere in the world, which are summarized in the stock annex (ICES, 2009).

Genetic studies on five geographically isolated populations (Africa, Australia, North America, South America, Western Europe) showed that there is little to no gene flow between these populations, indicating a lack of population connectivity and mixing (Chabot and Allen, 2009; Chabot, 2015). A Northeast Atlantic and Mediterranean genetic study showed gene flow throughout the region but did observe unique haplotypes in some areas, with outlying genotypes observed in the Mediterranean (Thorburn, in prep). Further genetic assessment is recommended to explore connectivity with the Mediterranean.

The following relationships and ratios were calculated by Séret and Blaison (2010):

$L_T = 0.0119 W^{2.7745}$  ( $n = 10$ ; length range of 60–140 cm  $L_T$ ; weight in g);

Live weight / eviscerated weight = 1.28 (s.d. 0.05);

Live weight / dressed weight (eviscerated, headed, skinned) = 2.81 (s.d. 0.13);

Smallest mature male = 110 cm  $L_T$ , smallest mature female 130 cm  $L_T$ , fitting with the ranges 120–135 and 134–140 cm  $L_T$  observed for other populations.

Additional data from French surveys were presented by Ramonet *et al.* (2012 WD).

The length-weight relationship from tope sampled on UK (E&W) surveys (Silva *et al.*, 2013) was used to convert individual numbers at length to biomass when assessing the North Sea IBTS survey index (Q1 and Q3).

$$L_T = 0.0038 W^{3.0331} \text{ (n = 43; length range of 39–155 cm } L_T\text{; weight in g)}$$

### 10.7.1 Parturition and nursery grounds

Pups (24–45 cm  $L_T$ ) are caught occasionally in groundfish surveys, and such data might be able to assist in the preliminary identification of general pupping and/or nursery areas (see Figure 10.5 of ICES, 2007). Most of the pup records in UK surveys are from the southern North Sea (Division 4.c), though they have also been recorded in the northern Bristol Channel (Division 7.f). The updated locations of pups caught in fisheries-independent surveys across the ICES region could usefully be collated in the near future.

A recent study suggests the maximum depth associated with tope may be related to their body size, with specimens under 50 cm  $L_T$  being found in waters less than 50 m deep, suggesting small juvenile tope will be restricted to specific areas (Thorburn *et al.*, 2019). A combination of angler data and survey data showed areas where small tope (26–46 cm  $L_T$ ) were found in the Southern North Sea, the Severn estuary, Cardigan Bay and Liverpool Bay (Figure 10.13; Thorburn *et al.*, 2019).

The lack of more precise data on the location of pupping and nursery grounds, and their importance to the stock, precludes spatial management for the Northeast Atlantic population of this species at the present time.

## 10.8 Exploratory assessment models

Various assessment methods have been developed and applied to the South Australian tope stock (e.g. Punt and Walker, 1998; Punt *et al.*, 2000; Xiao and Walker, 2000).

A preliminary capture-recapture model was developed in 2015 using data from the Irish Marine Sportfish Tagging Programme (Bal *et al.*, 2015 WD). This approach was re-applied as an exploratory assessment by WGEF in 2016 including additional Irish tagging records from 2014 and 2015. The approach, results and a discussion of the current state of the model are summarized in the WGEF 2020 report (Figures 10.12–10.17 in ICES, 2020).

## 10.9 Stock assessment

Catch data (see Section 10.3) and survey data (see Section 10.6) are currently too limited to allow for a quantitative stock assessment of NE Atlantic tope. In the latest advice 2023, tope was treated as a Category 5 stock, with advice based on recent estimated landings.

Whilst not used in quantitative advice, WGEF note that available survey trends indicate that catch numbers have been relatively stable or variable in recent years depending on the survey considered.

## 10.10 Quality of the assessment

The low catchability of tope in current surveys can lead to variability in catch rates. Trawl surveys are not designed to capture larger pelagic species like tope, and therefore survey catches may not accurately represent population size.

Current surveys do cover a large part of the stock area in northern European waters, but data for other areas are unavailable. The spatial and bathymetric distribution of tope may be influenced by the availability of pelagic prey as well as by far ranging migrations that could be conceivably related to reproduction, which may lead to further variability in catch rates in surveys.

In the absence of any other data sources, surveys with high headline trawls may be the most appropriate species-specific data currently available.

### **10.11 Reference points**

No reference points have been proposed for this stock.

### **10.12 Conservation considerations**

According to the latest IUCN Red List Assessments, tope is listed as Vulnerable in Europe (McCully *et al.*, 2015) and in the Mediterranean (McCully *et al.*, 2016), though listed globally as Critically Endangered (Walker *et al.*, 2020).

Tope have been added to Appendix II of the Convention of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) during the 13<sup>th</sup> Conference of Parties in February 2020 (CMS, 2020).

### **10.13 Management considerations**

Tope is considered highly vulnerable to overexploitation, as this species has low population productivity, relatively low fecundity and a protracted reproductive cycle. Unmanaged targeted fisheries elsewhere in the world have resulted in stock collapse (e.g. off California and South America).

Tope is an important target species in recreational fisheries; though there are insufficient data to examine the relative economic importance of tope in the recreational angling sector, this may be high in some regions.

Tope is, or has been, a targeted species elsewhere in the world, including Australia/New Zealand, South America and California. Evidence from these fisheries (see stock annex and references cited therein) suggests that any targeted fisheries would need to be managed conservatively, exerting a low level of exploitation.

Australian fisheries managers have used a combination of legal minimum and maximum lengths, legal minimum and maximum gillnet mesh sizes, closed seasons and closed nursery areas. These technical measures may have less utility in the ICES area as tope is taken here mainly in mixed fisheries. Spatio-temporal measures would require further information on e.g. pupping and nursery grounds prior to assessing their suitability across the ICES area.

Following the publication of the GFCM (General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean) Report of the Workshop on Stock Assessment of selected species of Elasmobranchs in the GFCM area in 2011, WGEF believes that collaboration should continue between ICES and the GFCM. This will encourage the sharing of information and aid the better understanding of elasmobranch fisheries in the Mediterranean, where WGEF data for this region are often lacking.

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## 10.15 Tables and Figures





ICES Area and Nation	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
Subtotal				0	237	0	0	0	63	119	52	104	97	66	39	34	38	34	40	54	44
<b>ICES Subarea 9</b>																					
Spain	na	na	na	na	na	na	Na	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	na
Subtotal																					
<b>ICES Subarea 10</b>																					
Portugal	18	na	na	24	15	51	77	42	24	29	24	24	24	34	23	56	81	80	115	116	124
Subtotal	18			24	15	51	77	42	24	29	24	24	24	34	23	56	81	80	115	116	124
<b>Other/Unknown</b>																					
France	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
UK (E&W)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	+
CECAF area																					
Portugal	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>TOTAL LANDINGS</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>578</b>	<b>2350</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>1127</b>	<b>1754</b>	<b>567</b>	<b>505</b>	<b>1397</b>	<b>675</b>	<b>782</b>	<b>554</b>	<b>523</b>	<b>593</b>	<b>427</b>	<b>469</b>	<b>485</b>	<b>504</b>

**Table 10.2. Tope in the Northeast Atlantic. ICES estimates of tope landings (tonnes) by area 2005–2022 following WKSHARK2 (ICES, 2016a). Blank = no data reported; 0.0 < 0.1 tonnes.**

Fishing Area	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
27.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0		0.0	0.0		0.0		0.0			0.0	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.3
27.3	1.1	1.3	0.0	0.1		1.0	1.0			1.0	0.4	0.1	0.8	0.2	0.7	0.9	0.4	0.3
27.4	24.2	26.8	15.6	13.2	9.5	9.2	15.5	6.8	6.4	5.6	6.3	9.2	16.2	6.5	3.3	3.2	3.7	3.8
27.5b	0.0	0.0	0.5	0.1	0.0	0.0			0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0			0.0		
27.6	3.4	4.0	6.7	5.6	8.0	1.3	0.6	0.7	1.2	1.1	6.2	0.5	0.7	0.2	0.2	0.4	0.1	0.5
27.7	417.8	445.8	366.7	359.9	348.6	311.1	262.6	277.8	279.5	245.5	301.2	233.8	267.5	302.3	253.4	207.0	288.4	298.8
27.8	113.1	110.9	102.9	123.4	145.8	80.0	85.1	54.6	60.9	52.8	64.5	90.8	67.1	79.6	82.5	68.7	95.8	84.7
27.9	37.9	54.0	47.3	48.2	72.6	59.7	53.9	45.0	48.8	54.4	51.1	34.2	37.2	23.4	29.8	37.6	49.8	57.3
27.10	44.7	45.2	42.5	46.6	33.9	41.3	43.6	47.4	45.7	65.4	71.0	84.9	69.8	41.4	27.0	21.4	26.9	22.7
27.12			0.0				0.0			0.0	0.0							
27.14							0.0	0.0										
27/(unspecified, incl. BIL94B)	0.2	0.2	0.0	0.0		0.1	0.1	0.0		0.0								
34*	5.0	10.7	3.2	11.1	5.5	28.4	8.0	5.3	2.4	3.6	0.0	0.3	0.8	2.9	2.9	1.0		
37*/BIL95	20.3	16.3	15.6	12.8	25.9	32.4	41.2	28.4	38.4	33.0								
<b>Total</b>	<b>667.7</b>	<b>715.2</b>	<b>601.3</b>	<b>621.1</b>	<b>649.9</b>	<b>564.4</b>	<b>511.5</b>	<b>466.1</b>	<b>483.3</b>	<b>462.4</b>	<b>500.8</b>	<b>453.7</b>	<b>460.2</b>	<b>456.7</b>	<b>399.9</b>	<b>340.2</b>	<b>465.2</b>	<b>468.4</b>

\* Landings data from areas 34 and 37 are incomplete and not based on all nations fishing in those areas.

**Table 10.3. Tope in the Northeast Atlantic. ICES species-specific estimates of tope landings (tonnes) 2005–2022 following WKSHARK2 (ICES, 2016a). Blank = no data reported; 0.0 < 0.1 tonnes.**

Nation	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Belgium												0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.6	0.8
Denmark	7.0	6.0	2.0	3.0	2.0	2.0	3.0	1.0		3.0	1.4	0.9	2.2	1.8	1.2	1.6	0.6	1.3
France	347.8	383.2	301.9	365.1	353.8	319.7	291.4	282.5	308.9	261.1	349.8	302.7	312.9	355.8	319.6	257.6	359.7	346.5
Germany													0.4		0.0	0.1	0.1	0.3
Ireland	5.5	6.8	2.6	2.1	2.9	3.1	0.6	0.3										
Netherlands						2.1	17.7	24.8	11.2	11.4	5.8	8.2	18.7	11.6	0.5	0.4	0.6	1.3
Norway						0.1	0.2		0.0		0.0			0.0	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.3
Portugal	44.7	45.2	42.5	46.6	33.9	41.3	43.5	47.4	45.7	65.4	71.0	85.2	70.8	44.3	30.0	22.5	27.4	22.7
Spain	181.7	181.8	202.9	163.1	234.0	179.4	138.1	94.0	100.3	101.1	55.7	36.8	41.3	30.5	32.9	44.3	56.9	79.1
Sweden	0.1	0.3	0.0	0.1														
UK	80.8	91.9	49.4	41.1	23.3	16.8	17.0	16.1	17.1	20.4	17.0	19.8	13.8	12.6	15.6	13.6	14.1	16.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>667.7</b>	<b>715.2</b>	<b>601.3</b>	<b>621.1</b>	<b>649.9</b>	<b>564.4</b>	<b>511.5</b>	<b>466.1</b>	<b>483.3</b>	<b>462.4</b>	<b>500.8</b>	<b>453.7</b>	<b>460.2</b>	<b>456.7</b>	<b>399.9</b>	<b>340.2</b>	<b>465.2</b>	<b>468.4</b>

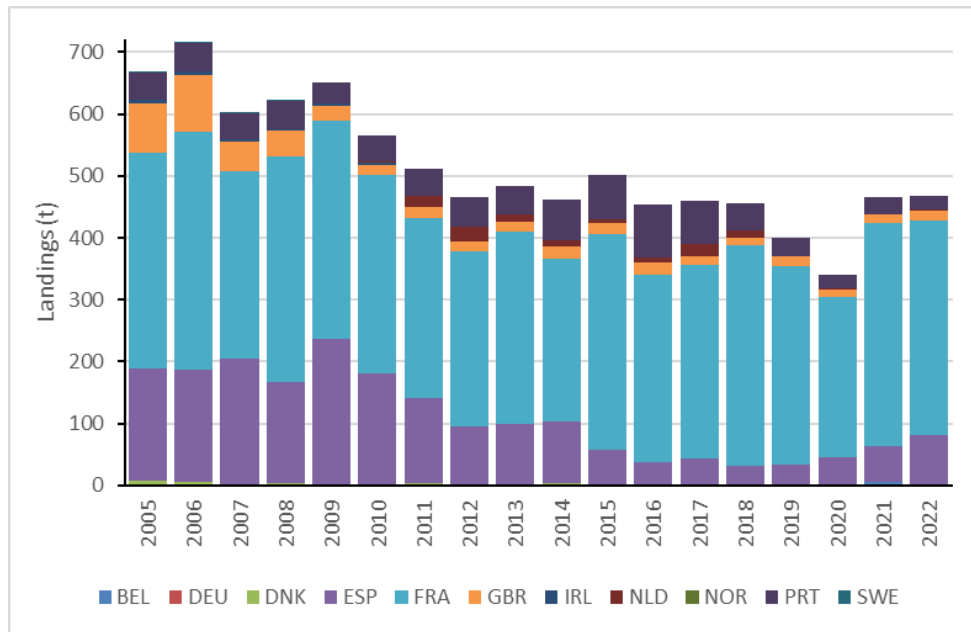


Figure 10.1. Topo in the Northeast Atlantic. ICES species-specific estimated landings by country for 2005–2022.

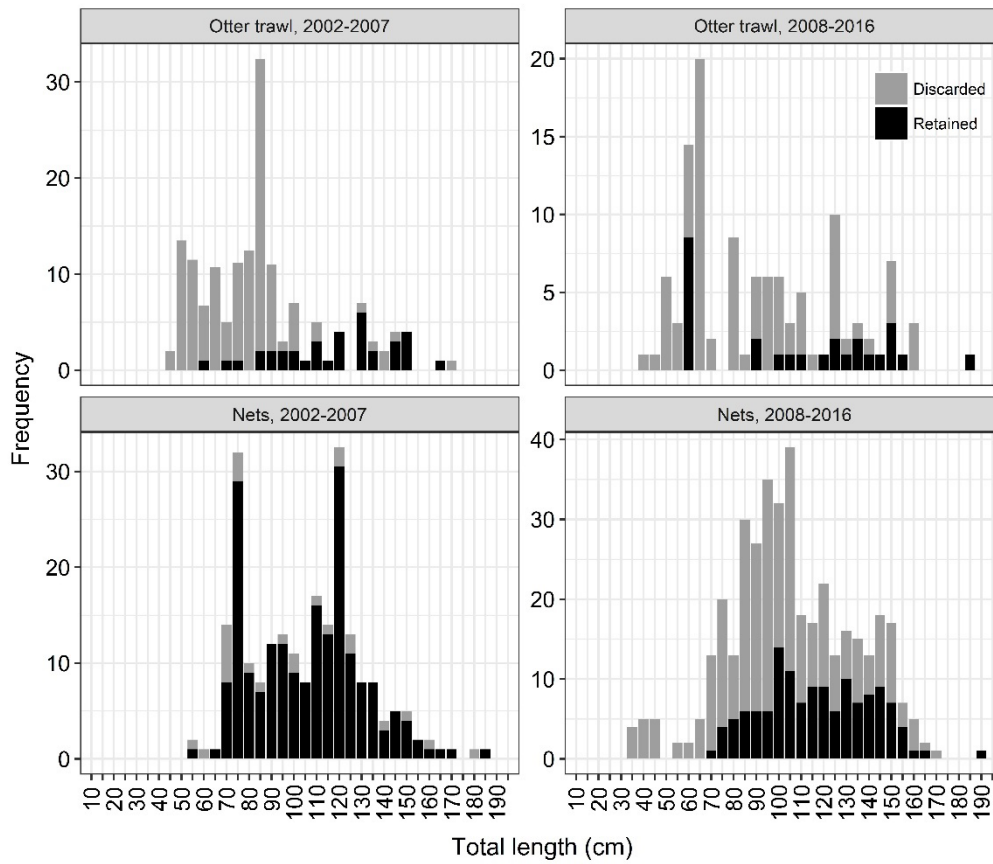


Figure 10.2. Tope in the Northeast Atlantic. Length–frequency of discarded and retained tope *Galeorhinus galeus* (5 cm length classes) caught by otter trawl and gill nets during the periods 2002–2007 and 2008–2016, as recorded in the Cefas observer programme. Source: Silva and Ellis (2019).

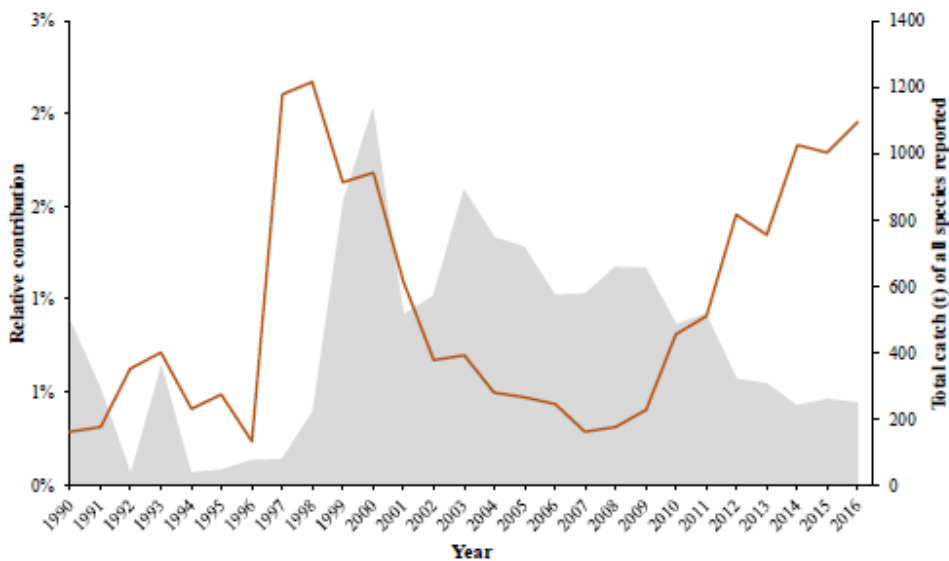


Figure 10.3. Tope in the Northeast Atlantic. Total catch of all species (■) and relative contribution of tope *Galeorhinus galeus* to all species (—) landed by the Azorean bottom longline fleet and sampled by the DCF inquiries. Source: Santos et al. 2018 WD.

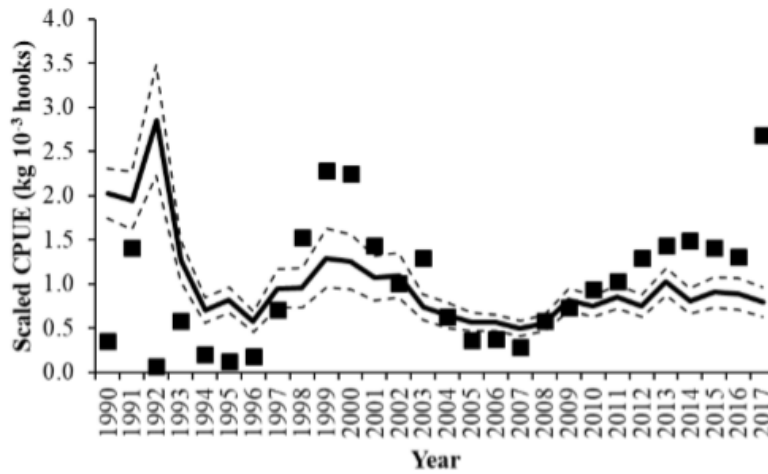


Figure 10.4. Tope in the Northeast Atlantic. Nominal (■) and standardized (—) CPUE ( $\text{kg } 10^{-3}$  hooks) for tope *Galeorhinus galeus* from the Azorean bottom longline fishery, 1990–2017. Dotted lines represent 95% confidence intervals for the standardized CPUE. Source: Santos *et al.* 2020 WD.

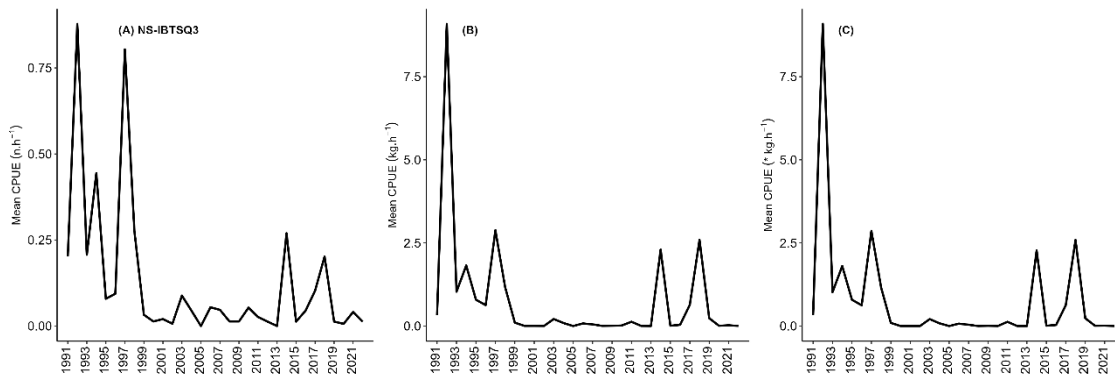
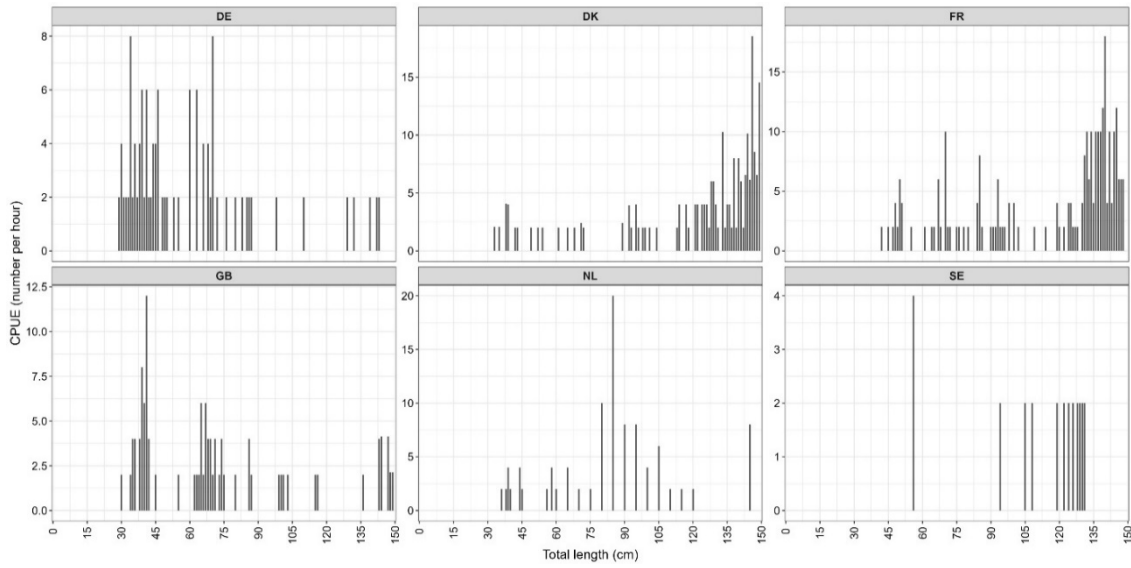
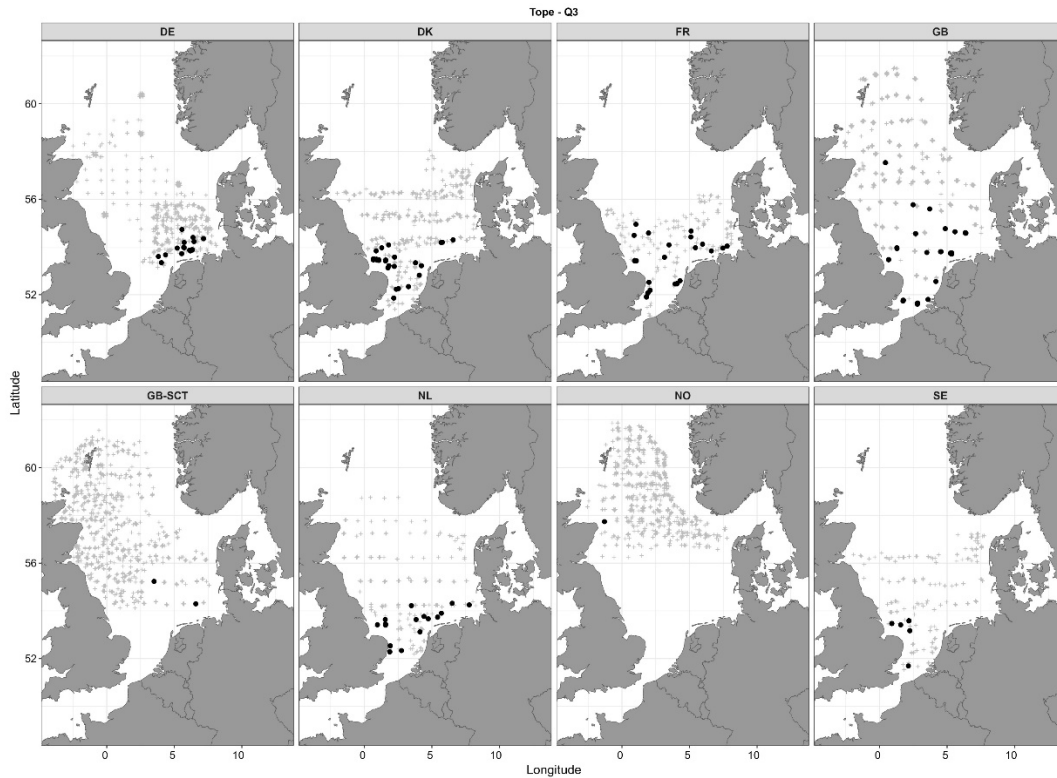


Figure 10.5. Tope in the Northeast Atlantic. Mean catch rates in terms of (A) total abundance ( $\text{n.h}^{-1}$ ), (B) total biomass ( $\text{kg.h}^{-1}$ ) and (C) exploitable biomass for individuals  $\geq 50$  cm total length ( $*\text{kg.h}^{-1}$ ) during the NS-IBTS-Q3 (1992–2022). Note: The large catch in 1992 is largely due to a large catch reported in one haul, and these data should be verified. Some catches of tope are considered to have been reported as *Mustelus* on DATRAS, consequently this time-series does not provide a robust abundance trend. Danish data have been excluded from NS-IBTS-Q3 (see further details in Section 21.6). Updated results in 2023 for whole time series.

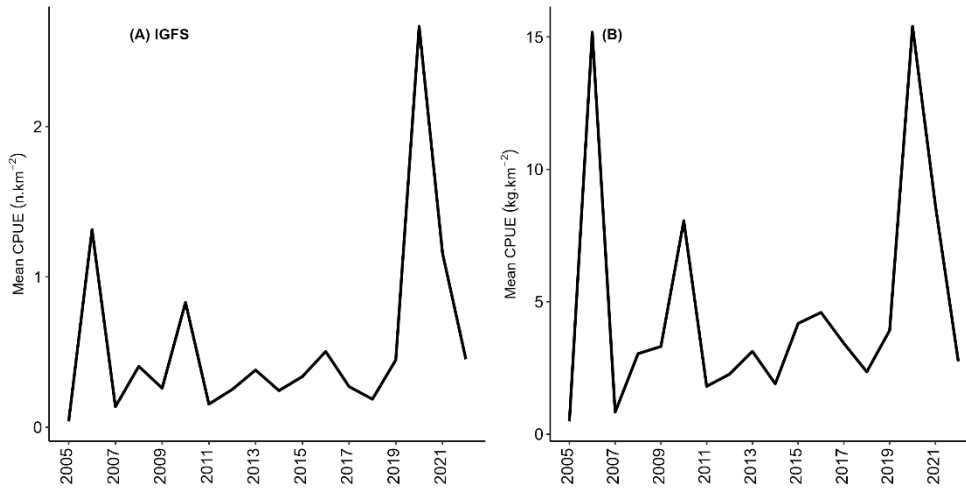


**Figure 10.6. Tope in the Northeast Atlantic. Length-frequency distribution of tope by country in the NS-IBTS-Q3 (1992–2022). Note: DE - Germany, DK - Denmark, FR - France, GB - England, NL - The Netherlands and SE - Sweden. Scottish records not shown as data are limited.**

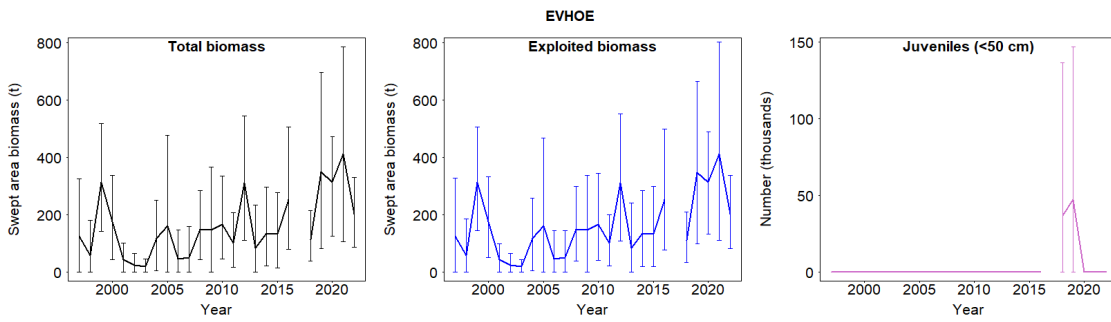


**Figure 10.7. Tope in the Northeast Atlantic. Spatial distribution of tope by country in the NS-IBTS-Q3 (1992–2022) (black dots = positive hauls; grey dots = negative hauls). Note: DE - Germany, DK - Denmark, FR - France, GB - England, GB-SCT - Scotland, NL - The Netherlands, NO - Norway and SE - Sweden.**





**Figure 10.8. Topo in the Northeast Atlantic. Mean catch rates in terms of (A) total abundance (n.km<sup>-2</sup>) and (B) total biomass (kg.km<sup>-2</sup>) for all individuals during the IE-IGFS-WIBTS-Q4 (2005–2022). Note: All fish recorded are above 50 cm L<sub>T</sub>.**



**Figure 10.9. Topo in the Northeast Atlantic. Swept area biomass for total (t, all individuals) and exploitable biomass (t, individuals ≥50 cm total length) and, abundance in terms of numbers of juvenile fish (thousands, individuals <50 cm total length) during the EHVOE-WIBTS-Q4 (1997–2022). Associated confidence intervals (95% CI) calculated using bootstrap. Updated results in 2023 for whole time series.**

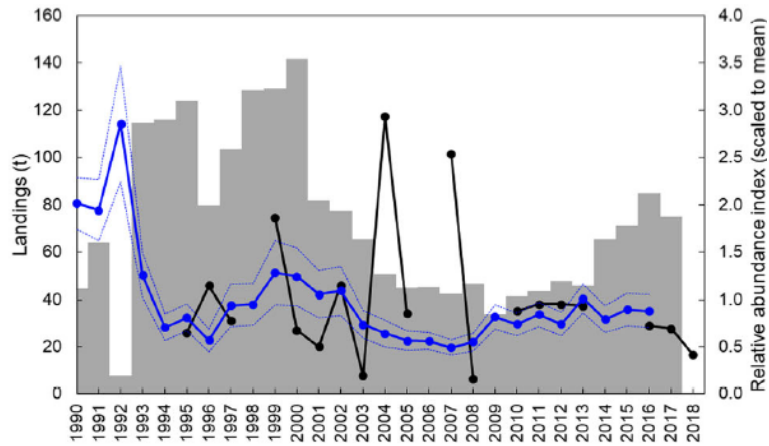


Figure 10.10. Tope in the Northeast Atlantic. Landings (bars) and relative abundance index from the Azorean demersal spring bottom longline survey (black colour) and derived from commercial catch and effort (standardized CPUE) data (blue colour) in the Azores archipelago. Dotted lines represent 95% confidence intervals for the standardized CPUE. Note: Historical landings may differ from data in Table 10.1–10.3 so for ICES landings estimates used in advice please refer to Table 10.2 and 10.3. Source: Adapted from Santos *et al.* (2020).

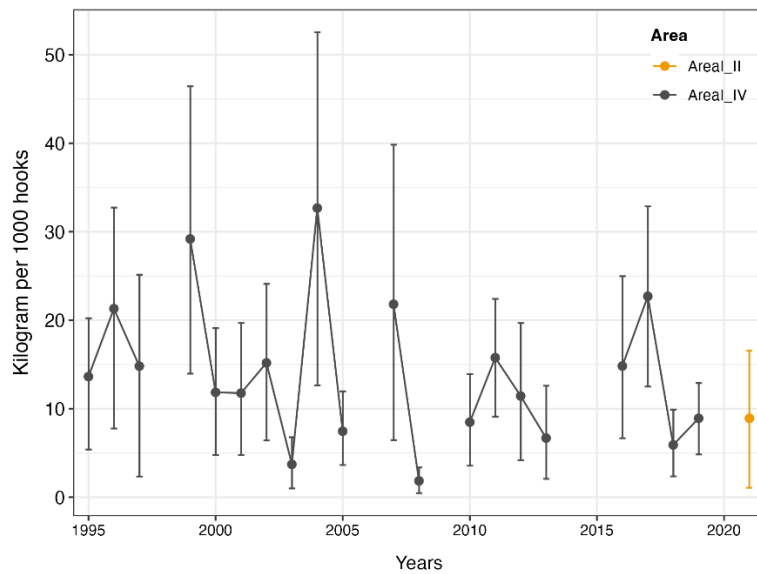


Figure 10.11. Tope in the Northeast Atlantic. Biomass estimates (kg per 1000 hooks) by area from the Azorean demersal spring bottom longline survey (1995–2021). Note: Estimates for 2021 should be viewed with caution as survey spatial coverage was reduced comparatively to previous years. Survey did not occur in 2022.

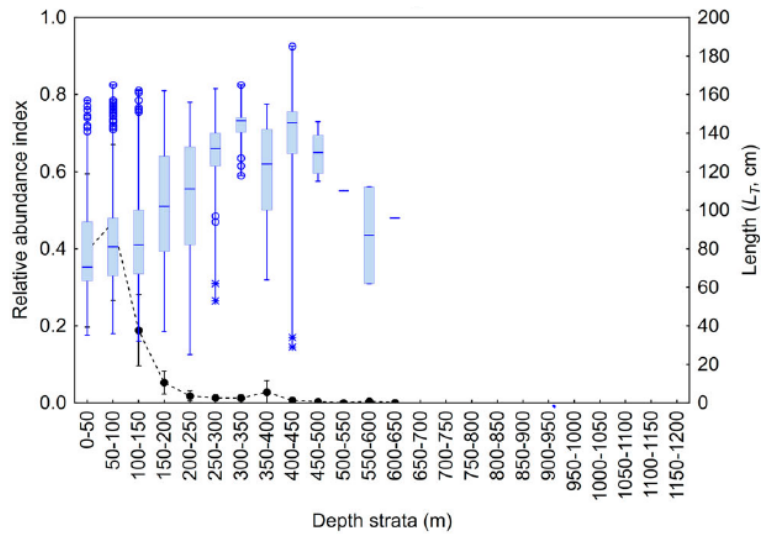


Figure 10.12. Tope in the Northeast Atlantic. Relative abundance index (mean  $\pm$  0.95 confidence interval) and boxplot of length ( $L_T$ , cm) by stratum from the Azorean demersal spring bottom longline survey (1995–2018). Boxes show the quartiles (25–75%), horizontal lines inside each box show the median, and the limits are shown with whiskers. Empty-circle symbols identify outliers and asterisks are extreme outliers. Source: Adapted from Santos *et al.* (2020).

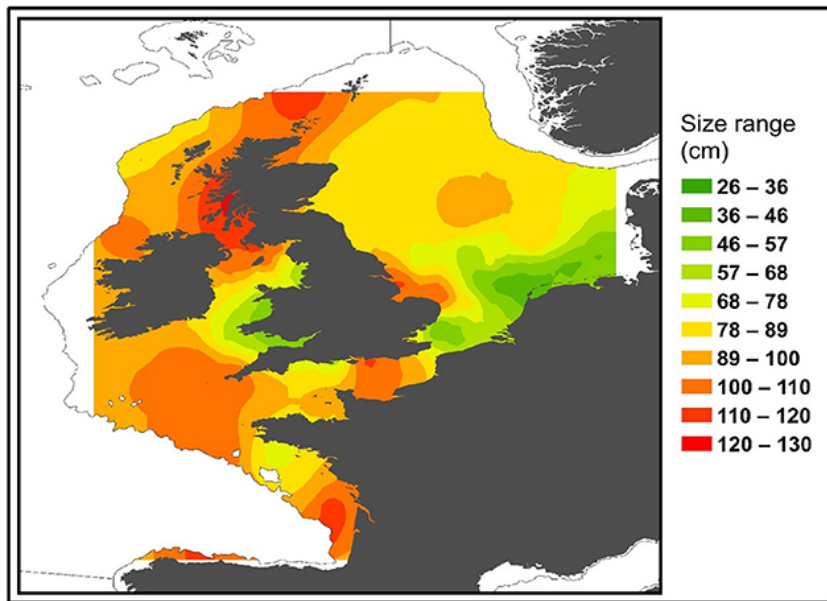


Figure 10.13. Tope in the Northeast Atlantic. Distribution of all immature tope (max length = 130 cm  $L_T$ ) based on mark and recapture and International Bottom Trawl Survey (IBTS) data sets. Colour represents smallest sized (based on  $L_T$ ) animal predicted to occur in that area. Source: Adapted from Thorburn *et al.* (2019).

# 11 Thresher sharks in the Northeast Atlantic and Mediterranean Sea

## 11.1 Stock distribution

Two species of thresher occur in the ICES area: common thresher, *Alopias vulpinus* and bigeye thresher, *A. superciliosus*. Of these species, *A. vulpinus* is the main species encountered on the continental shelf of the ICES area.

There is little information on the stock identity of these species, which have a near circumglobal distribution in tropical and temperate waters. WGEF assumes there to be a single stock of *A. vulpinus* in the NE Atlantic and Mediterranean Sea, with this stock extending into the CECAF area. The presence of a nursery ground in the Alboran Sea provides the rationale for including the Mediterranean Sea within the stock area. Further information on stock identity is given in the Stock Annex drafted in 2009 (ICES, 2009). This stock annex requires future revision in particular as a consequence of landings data revision carried out in recent years by WGEF.

The results from the analysis of sequences of mitochondrial DNA showed no significant differences between populations of *A. superciliosus* from southern Atlantic and the Indian Ocean further suggesting the existence of a high dispersal of this species (Morales *et al.*, 2018).

## 11.2 The fishery

### 11.2.1 History of the fishery

There are no target fisheries for thresher sharks in the NE Atlantic. Both species are a bycatch in longline fisheries for tuna, swordfish and blue shark (Parra *et al.*, 2023), and would have been taken in earlier pelagic drift net fisheries. Common thresher is an occasional bycatch in gillnet fisheries. Fisheries data for the ICES area are limited and unreliable. It is likely that some commercial data for the two species are confounded.

In the Mediterranean Sea, where the two thresher sharks species occur, there are no fisheries targeting either of these species. In this area the two species are bycatches in various fisheries, including the Moroccan driftnet fishery in the southwest Mediterranean. Both species are also caught in industrial and semi-industrial longline fisheries and artisanal gillnet fisheries operating in the area.

### 11.2.2 The fishery in 2022

No new information.

### 11.2.3 ICES Advice applicable

ICES advice for thresher sharks is given in every 4 years, and the first to be provided was in 2015, stating that “ICES advises that when the precautionary approach is applied for common thresher shark *Alopias vulpinus* and bigeye thresher shark *Alopias superciliosus* in the Northeast Atlantic, fishing mortality should be minimized and no targeted fisheries should be permitted. This advice is valid for 2016 to 2019”. The latest advice provided by ICES for this stock was in 2019 stating that “ICES advises

*that when the precautionary approach is applied, there should be zero catch in each of the years 2020–2023.”*

### **11.2.4 Management applicable**

Since 2009, the EU regulations regarding thresher sharks are in the annual TAC regulations in the section on the ICCAT convention area and stipulates that thresher sharks of the *Alopias* genus should not be the objects of directed fishing and that bigeye thresher sharks should not be retained on board or transhipped (see Council regulation 2023/194 of 30 January 2023).

Council Regulation No. 1185/2003 prohibits the removal of shark fins of these species, and subsequent discarding of the body. This regulation is binding on EC vessels in all waters and non-EC vessels in Community waters. In June 2023, ‘The Shark Fins Act 2023’ was passed in the UK banning the import and export of detached shark fins, including all products containing shark fins.

## **11.3 Catch data**

### **11.3.1 Landings**

Landings of thresher sharks are reported irregularly and are variable; from 4–266 t in the North and Eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean Sea from 1997 to 2021 (ICCAT and national data; tables 11.1–11.2). There can be large inter-annual variation in reported landings, as well as differences in values reported to ICCAT (tables 11.1–11.2) and ICES (Table 11.3). For example, in 2021 there was a steep increase in reported landings by Algeria in the Mediterranean (Table 11.2). Further studies to review landings data for thresher sharks are required and should be included in the proposed joint meetings with the ICCAT shark subgroup.

Historically, an unknown proportion of landings was reported as generic ‘sharks’. In recent years, overall quantities reported to ICES as generic sharks reduced from an average of 85 tonnes between 2005 and 2010 to 51 tonnes in 2020–2022. Based on the fishing area and reporting countries of these landings, WGEF considered they mostly included Scyliorhinidae, Triakidae and Squalidae. Catches of thresher sharks are expected to represent a small proportion (if any) of these landings.

Historically, the main European countries reporting landings of thresher sharks were Portugal, Spain and France, although the large quantities reported by Portugal to ICCAT in 2006 and 2007 require a further verification. In 2021, only France and the United Kingdom have maintained their historical levels of landings of thresher sharks (accounting for >99% of EU+UK landings).

As well as being caught and landed from fisheries for tuna and tuna-like species, thresher sharks are also a bycatch in continental shelf fisheries in the ICES area, including subareas 4, 6–9.

### **11.3.2 Discards**

Limited data are available.

### **11.3.3 Quality of catch data**

Thresher sharks have not been reported consistently, either at species-specific or generic level. There are also some discrepancies between some data sources. Landings of thresher shark in

coastal waters are most likely to represent *A. vulpinus*, but some of these landings may also be reported as ‘sharks nei’. This issue seems to be minor in recent years. For year 2015-2022, the bulk of landings attributed to thresher sharks by WGEF was reported as *Alopias vulpinus*.

### 11.3.4 Discard survival

There is limited information on discard survival from European fisheries, but there have been several studies elsewhere in the world. Braccini *et al.* (2012) found that about two thirds of thresher shark captured in gillnets were dead, even with a short soak time, although this was based on a small sample size. Moderate to high levels of mortality have been reported in pelagic longline fisheries, with most studies indicating that about half of the thresher sharks captured are in poor condition or dead (see Ellis *et al.*, 2017 and references therein). Immediate mortality of bigeye thresher shark (*A. superciliosus*) caught in swordfish longline fisheries in the Pacific has been estimated between 7% (Aalbers *et al.*, 2021) and 25% (Musyl *et al.*, 2011). In a Hawaiian deep-set fishery targeting bigeye tuna, the projected survival of bigeye thresher shark has been estimated after one month at 34% (Hutchinson *et al.*, 2021).

## 11.4 Commercial catch composition

Length–frequency distributions for *A. vulpinus* were collected under the Data Collection Regulation (DCR) programme by observers on board French vessels (see ICES, 2015). Given the potential problems of how thresher sharks are measured (standard length, fork length, total length), improved standardisation of length-based information is required.

## 11.5 Commercial catch and effort data

Limited data on landing and effort are available for the ICES area. ICES and ICCAT should cooperate to collate and interpret commercial catch data from high seas and shelf fisheries.

## 11.6 Fishery-independent surveys

No fishery-independent data are available for the NE Atlantic.

## 11.7 Life-history information

Various aspects of the life history, including conversion factors, for these species are included in the drafted Stock Annex (ICES, 2009).

The common thresher and bigeye thresher are distributed circumglobally in the Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian Oceans and in the Mediterranean (Smith *et al.*, 2008; Clo *et al.*, 2008; Corsini-Foka and Sioulas, 2008). Threshers are active, strong-swimming sharks occurring in oceans and shelf seas in tropical and temperate seas. They are found from the surface to 500 m depth (deepest record 723 m). Threshers are mostly epipelagic, but may stay at 200–500 m depth over the continental slope during the day and in open waters at 80–130 at night.

### *Alopias vulpinus*

In the NE Atlantic, *A. vulpinus* has been recorded from Norway to the Mediterranean Sea and the Black Sea, and off Madeira and the Azores. Quigley *et al.*, 2008 and Ellis, 2004 have provided information on the occurrence of *A. vulpinus* in Irish and North Sea waters, respectively.

There have been a few recent published studies on *A. vulpinus*. Cartamil *et al.* (2016) and Kinney *et al.* (2020) examined the movements of *A. vulpinus* along the western coast of the USA and Mexico; Natanson *et al.* (2016) provided revised growth curves for *A. vulpinus*, in the NW Atlantic; and Finotto *et al.* (2016) commented on the occurrence of *A. vulpinus* in the northern Adriatic Sea.

Relevant information from these studies should be reviewed for future work by WGEF.

### 11.7.1 Movements and migrations

The “Alop” Project tagged two specimens in the Gulf of Lions. The behaviour of one female (135 cm L<sub>T</sub>) was recorded for 200 days. Horizontal movements within a restricted area of the Gulf of Lions were observed; the female stayed in coastal shelf areas from July to September, moving to deeper waters afterwards, probably as a response to the seasonal drop in sea surface temperature. Another specimen (120 cm L<sub>T</sub>) stayed mostly at depths of 10–20 m with occasional dives to 800 m.

Cao *et al.* (2012) provided data for *A. superciliosus* and *A. vulpinus* around the Marshall Islands (Pacific, West Central), where they occurred at depths of 240–360 m and 160–240 m, temperatures of 10–16°C and 18–20°C and salinities of 34.5–34.7 and 34.5–34.8, respectively.

#### *A. superciliosus*

Nakano *et al.* (2003) conducted an acoustic telemetry study to identify the short-term horizontal and vertical movement patterns of two immature female *A. superciliosus* in the eastern tropical Pacific Ocean (summer 1996). Distinct crepuscular vertical migrations were observed; specimens often occurring at 200–500 m depth during the day and at 80–130 m depth at night, with slow ascents and relatively rapid descents during the night, the deepest dive being 723 m. The estimate of the mean swimming speed over the ground ranged from 1.32–2.02 km h<sup>-1</sup>.

Weng and Block (2004) studied diel vertical migration patterns of two *A. superciliosus* that were caught and tagged with pop-up satellite archival tags in the Gulf of Mexico and near Hawaii. Both showed strong diel movement patterns, spending most of the day below the thermocline (waters of 10°C at 300–500 m and 400–500 m) and occurring in warmer (> 20°C) surface mixed layers above the thermocline (10–50 m) at night.

Carlson and Gulak (2012) provided results from a tagging programme with archival tags deployed on *A. superciliosus*. One specimen exhibited a diurnal vertical diving behaviour, spending most of their time between 25 and 50 m depth in waters between 20 and 22°C while the other dove down to 528 m. Deeper dives occurred more often during the day, and by night they tended to stay above the thermocline.

In the tropical northeast Atlantic fifteen bigeye threshers were tagged with pop-up satellite archival tags (PSATs) in 2012 and 2014, with successful transmissions received from 12 tags for a total of 907 tracking days. Marked diel vertical movements were recorded on all specimens, with most of the daytime spent in deeper colder water and nighttime spent in warmer water closer to the surface. The operating depth of the pelagic longline gear was measured and it was concluded that there is spatial overlap between the fishery and the habitat particularly during the night and overlap is higher for juveniles (Coelho *et al.*, 2015).

A recent study on the movement and post-capture survival of the big-eye thresher off the west coast of the USA, showed that individuals tagged near San Francisco exhibited long-range (1235 ± 235 km) south/south-westward movements (Aalbers *et al.*, 2021). The authors suggest a potentially relevant migratory corridor for large pelagic sharks. Post-release survival rate was around 93% (Aalbers *et al.*, 2021)

### *A. vulpinus*

Kinney *et al.* (2020) studied the seasonal movements of 25 tagged common thresher sharks off the west coast of North America. They provided evidence for movements driven by the biological state (body size, sex) and environmental drivers, with younger individuals mostly remaining in an identified nursery area: the Southern California Bight, while larger individuals frequently moved out of the bay in spring and winter.

Based on catch data and data collected by onboard observers along the eastern coast of the US, Kneebone *et al.* (2020) found evidence for seasonal changes in distribution, with individuals found at more northern latitudes in the summer. Young of the year were almost exclusively found in continental shelf waters north of 33.5°N, mostly in shallow waters, and seemed to display reduced migrations compared to older individuals. No evidence for differences in movements of males and females was found.

## 11.7.2 Nursery grounds

### *A. superciliosus*

Nursery areas for *A. superciliosus* occur off the southwestern Iberian Peninsula and Strait of Gibraltar (Moreno and Moron, 1992).

### *A. vulpinus*

Juvenile *A. vulpinus* are known to occur in the English Channel and southern North Sea (Ellis, 2004). The capture of newborn individuals in northern Adriatic Sea supports the presence of a nursery in this area (Finotto *et al.* 2016). Moreno and Moron (1992) also observed aggregations of gravid females of *A. vulpinus* in the Strait of Gibraltar.

## 11.7.3 Diet

Both *A. vulpinus* and *A. superciliosus* feed mostly on small pelagic fish, including mackerel and clupeids, as well as squid and octopus (e.g. Preti *et al.*, 2012).

### *A. superciliosus*

This species is found to eat a wider range of prey items, with pelagic and demersal fish and squid, making up the largest proportion (Fitch and Craig, 1964; Bass *et al.*, 1975; Stillwell and Casey, 1976; Gruber and Compagno, 1981; Castro, 1983). Bowman *et al.*, 2000 found from analysis of 24 stomachs from Northwest Atlantic animals, that six were empty, and the remaining contained 83.5% pelagic and demersal fish (scorpionfish, Scorpaenidae being most abundant at 53.8%) and 15% squid (Northern shortfin squid, *Illex illecebrosus* was most abundant making up 11.9%).

### *A. vulpinus*

This species is found to feed on small schooling species such as anchovy, hake, mackerel, sardine and squid (Gubanov, 1972; Stick and Hreha, 1989; Bedford, 1992; Preti *et al.*, 2001, 2004). Bowman *et al.*, 2000 found that in 19 stomachs analysed from the Northwest Atlantic, seven were empty, and the remaining contained 97% fish (66.3% Northern sand lance, *Ammodytes dubius*) and 3% squid (2.2% Northern shortfin squid, *Illex illecebrosus*).

## 11.8 Exploratory assessments

Both *A. vulpinus* and *A. superciliosus* were included in a Productivity-Susceptibility Analysis (PSA) for the pelagic fish assemblage (ICCAT, 2009a). However, the lack of reliable landing data,



and absence of fishery-independent data hampered the assessment of the two thresher stocks. A bycatch per unit effort (BPUE) was derived for bigeye thresher shark caught by the Portuguese longline fleet between 2008 and 2016 (ICCAT, 2020).

Along the west coast of North America, *A. vulpinus* is assumed to be a single, well-mixed stock. This assumption is supported by genetics, tagging data, and seasonal movements. This stock was assessed with Stock Synthesis modelling platform (v3.24U). The results obtained included the estimation of management quantities for eight fishing fleets operating in USA and Mexico waters (Teo *et al.*, 2018).

A Bayesian population modelling tool integrating separable virtual population analysis, per-recruit models and age-structured demographic analysis was developed for the *A. superciliosus* population in an area subset of the western North Pacific. The results from the risk analysis revealed that only low levels of fishing pressure (10% of the current fishing pressure) over a wide range of ages could maintain a relatively low risk of population decline for bigeye threshers. Sensitivity testing indicated that the model is robust to prior specification (Tsai *et al.*, 2019).

## 11.9 Stock assessment

In 2019, ICES advice for *A. vulpinus* and *A. superciliosus* was given according to the ICES framework for category 6 (ICES, 2012). ICES considered that for stocks without information on abundance or exploitation, as is the case of these two stocks, a precautionary reduction of catches should be implemented unless there is ancillary information clearly indicating that the current level of exploitation is appropriate for the stock.

### 11.10 Quality of assessments

At the Northeast Atlantic level, there is no stock assessment for common thresher or bigeye thresher. However, in 2012, ICCAT conducted an Ecological Risk Assessments for elasmobranchs to evaluate the biological productivity of these stocks and a susceptibility analysis to assess their propensity to capture and mortality in pelagic longline fisheries (McCully *et al.*, 2013).

Historically, landing data for the entire stock area is uncertain for both common thresher and bigeye thresher. Some historical commercial catch-per-unit-effort data are available for parts of the stock area, but data for the two species may be confounded. It is unclear as to how representative CPUE data would be for informing on trends in the two stocks' abundance.

Species-specific landings are required, and future quantitative assessments should be undertaken in collaboration with ICCAT.

### 11.11 Reference points

No reference points have been proposed for these species.

### 11.12 Conservation considerations

In 2015, a revision of the Red List for European Marine Fishes classified both *Alopias vulpinus* and *A. superciliosus* as Endangered (Nieto *et al.*, 2015).

At global level, all three species of thresher sharks were listed in Appendix II of CITES on 02/01/2017 (Entry into effect delayed by 12 months, i.e. until 04 October 2017). The species covered are the bigeye thresher *A. superciliosus*, and the look-alike species common thresher *A.*

*vulpinus* and pelagic thresher *A. pelagicus*, which occurrence in the Atlantic Ocean is unconfirmed. The three *Alopias* species have also been listed in Appendix II of CMS since 2014.

### 11.13 Management considerations

There is limited knowledge of the stock structure or the exploitation status of these two species of thresher shark occurring in the NE Atlantic.

Liu *et al.* (1998) considered *Alopias* spp. to be particularly vulnerable to overexploitation; requiring a close monitoring because of their high vulnerability resulting from low fecundity and relatively high age of sexual maturity.

The 2008 Ecological risk assessments (ERA) undertaken by ICCAT for eleven pelagic sharks indicated that the bigeye thresher has the lowest productivity and highest vulnerability with a productivity rate of 0.010. In this study common thresher was ranked 10<sup>th</sup>, with a productivity rate of 0.141 (ICCAT, 2009a). The ERA was then updated and expanded notably with the addition of five species and the consideration of interactions between stocks and fisheries in 2012. This new ERA led to similar conclusions to the previous one, with bigeye thresher appearing as the most vulnerable species whereas common thresher gets an intermediate rank within the 20 stocks considered (Cortés *et al.*, 2015).

In 2009, the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tuna (ICCAT, 2009b) recommended the following:

1. “CPCs (The Contracting Parties, Cooperating non-Contracting Parties, Entities or Fishing Entities) shall prohibit, retaining on board, transshipping, landing, storing, selling, or offering for sale any part or whole carcass of bigeye thresher sharks (*Alopias superciliosus*) in any fishery with exception of a Mexican small-scale coastal fishery with a catch of less than 110 fish;
2. CPCs shall require vessels flying their flag to promptly release unharmed, to the extent practicable, bigeye thresher sharks when brought along side for taking on board the vessel;
3. CPCs should strongly endeavour to ensure that vessels flying their flag do not undertake a directed fishery for species of thresher sharks of the genus *Alopias* spp.;
4. CPCs shall require the collection and submission of Task I and Task II data for *Alopias* spp. other than *A. superciliosus* in accordance with ICCAT data reporting requirements. The number of discards and releases of *A. superciliosus* must be recorded with indication of status (dead or alive) and reported to ICCAT in accordance with ICCAT data reporting requirements;
5. CPCs shall, where possible, implement research on thresher sharks of the species *Alopias* spp. in the Convention area in order to identify potential nursery areas. Based on this research, CPCs shall consider time and area closures and other measures, as appropriate.”

Some of these recommendations appear to have been acted on by the EU (see Section 11.2.4). In 2010, the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) adopted ICCAT’s thresher shark Recommendation (banning retention of bigeye threshers *A. superciliosus*).

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## **11.15 Tables and Figures**

**Table 11.1. Thresher sharks in the Northeast Atlantic and Mediterranean Sea. Reported catches of thresher sharks (1997 to 2021; ICCAT data, accessed May 2023). An unknown proportion of thresher sharks are reported in combined sharks. Areas are ADRI: Adriatic Sea; AZOR: Azores; IONIA: Ionian Sea; MDRA: Madeira; MEDI: Mediterranean Sea; NE: Northeast Atlantic; and S.SIC: Strait of Sicily. Note: 0 = values < 0.1. Considered reported catch type data as C (Catches), L (Landings) and DD (Discards – dead).**

Flag	Area	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Algeria	MEDI																		
China (Taipei)	NE															0.2	2	1.2	0.1
Curaçao	NE																		
El Salvador	NE																		
Denmark	NE																		
Spain	MEDI	3.5	7.2	6.7	9.2	9	25.3	0.4	1.1			2.5	2.7	0.2					
	NE	190.3	167.4	49.6	42.1	109	48.6	26.1	63.2			43.9	70.4	77.7					
France	MEDI											5.7	9.6	5.7	1.6	1	0.5	1.4	
	NE								23.3	18.5		31.2		26	25.3	40.6	6.7	30.9	
Ireland	NE				0.1			0	0.1		0.3								
Italy	MEDI											7.4	5.5	13.9	4.1			21.3	
	ADRI																		2
	IONIA																		0
	S.SIC																		0.7
Malta	MEDI	0.1	0.7	0.2	1.4							0.2	0.1	0.3	0.1	0.1			
Portugal	AZOR									8.1	11.9	16.4	7.5	21.3	0.6				
	MDRA									0.1	1	3.1		0.1					
	MEDI						0.5				0.1								
	NE		0	1.3	1.8	1.6	21.2	17.5	20.9		94.5	81.3	45.8	43.1	15		0.6	1.4	
UK	NE										0	1.1	0.8	0.7	1.6	1.3	0.8	1.1	2
Guatemala	NE																		
Korea	NE																	0.3	
Liberia	NE																		
Mauritania	NE																		
Panama	NE																		
Russian Fed.																			
Senegal	NE												2.5	9					

Flag	Area	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
TOTAL		193.8	175.3	57.8	54.6	119.6	95.7	44.1	108.6	26.7	107.8	192.8	144.9	198	48.5	43.3	10.6	57.6	4.9

Table 11.1 cont'. Thresher sharks in the Northeast Atlantic and Mediterranean Sea. Reported landings of thresher sharks (1997 to 2021; ICCAT data, accessed May 2023). An unknown proportion of thresher sharks are reported in combined sharks. Areas are ADRI: Adriatic Sea; AZOR: Azores; IONIA: Ionian Sea; MDRA: Madeira; MEDI: Mediterranean Sea; NE: Northeast Atlantic; and S.SIC: Strait of Sicily. Note: 0 = values < 0.1. Considered reported catch type data as C (Catches), L (Landings) and DD (Discards – dead)

Flag	Area	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Algeria	MEDI	0.4			0.9	18.7	24.2	195.1
China (Taipei)	NE	0.8	1	0.2	0.4	0.2	0.1	
Curaçao	NE			0				
El Salvador	NE			0				
Denmark	NE					0.4	0.2	0.2
Spain	MEDI							
	NE			0.1				
France	MEDI	2.5				0.6	1.7	1.0
	NE	38.8	35.2	55.9	44.6	47.2	62.4	66.2
Ireland	NE							
Italy	MEDI		0.5	2.5	1.2	1.5	0.7	3.6
	ADRI							
	IONIA							
	S.SIC							
Malta	MEDI							0.2
Portugal	AZOR							
	MDRA							
	MEDI							
	NE						0.6	0.2
UK	NE	2.5	3		0.6	0.6	0.7	



Flag	Area	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Guatemala	NE			0				
Korea	NE	0.5						
Liberia	NE				0.5			
Mauritania	NE		13.2					
Panama	NE			0				
Russian Fed.	NE					0		
Senegal	NE							
TOTAL		45.6	52.9	58.8	48.3	69.1	90.6	266.4

**Table 11.2. Thresher sharks in the Northeast Atlantic and Mediterranean Sea. Reported catches of thresher shark by species and nation for EU and UK (ICCAT data, accessed May 2023). An unknown proportion of thresher sharks are reported in combined sharks. ALV = *Alopias vulpinus*, BTH = *Alopias superciliosus*, THR = *Alopias* spp. Note: 0 = values < 0.1. Considered reported catch type data as C (Catches), L (Landings) and DD (Discards – dead).**

Year	Denmark		Spain		France			Ire-land	Italy	Malta	Portugal			United Kingdom	
	ALV	THR	BTH	ALV	THR	BTH	ALV	ALV	ALV	ALV	THR	BTH	ALV	THR	
1997		25.2	138.4	30.1						0.1					
1998		26.9	103.8	43.9						0.7		0.0			
1999		56.3								0.2			1.3		
2000		22.6	21.0	7.7				0.1		1.4	1.8				
2001		61.6	35.4	21.0							1.6				
2002		24.5	38.0	11.4										21.7	
2003		1.3	17.5	7.7				0.0						17.5	
2004		10.8	37.4	16.1			23.3	0.1						20.9	
2005							18.5							8.1	
2006								0.3						107.5	0.0
2007			32.1	14.3			36.9		7.4	0.2	2.8	0.3		97.7	1.1
2008		73.1					9.6		5.5	0.1		0.6		52.7	0.8
2009			50.1	27.7			31.7		13.9	0.3				64.4	0.7
2010							27.0		4.1	0.1		0.7		15.0	1.6
2011					0.2	0.1	41.3			0.1					1.3

Year	Denmark		Spain			France			Ire-land	Italy	Malta	Portugal			United Kingdom	
	ALV	THR	BTH	ALV	THR	BTH	ALV	ALV	ALV	ALV	THR	BTH	ALV	THR	THR	
2012							7.2						0.6		0.8	
2013							32.3		21.3			0.1	1.3		1.1	
2014									2.7						2.0	
2015							41.3								2.5	
2016							35.2		0.5						3.0	
2017			0.1				55.9		2.5							
2018							44.6		1.2						0.6	
2019	0.4						47.8		1.5						0.6	
2020	0.2						64.2		0.7				0.6		0.7	
2021	0.2						67.2		3.6	0.2			0.2			
TOTAL	0.7	302.4	473.7	180.0	0.2	0.1	584.1	0.5	64.8	3.4	6.2	1.7	409.5		16.9	

**Table 11.3. Thresher sharks in the Northeast Atlantic and Mediterranean Sea (FAO areas 27 and 37). Reported landings of thresher shark (*Alopias* spp.) for the period 2005–2022 (Data following the 2016–2023 data calls). Data are considered preliminary and more dedicated studies to refine a time series of thresher shark landings is required.**

Country	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Denmark													<0.1		0.3	0.2	0.2	0.4
France	33.1	36.2	42.1	26.5	38.7	28.0	51.3	34.0	33.6	42.9	38.8	70.3	55.9	44.6	47.2	62.4	66.2	38.7
Ireland		0.3																
Netherlands			0.1									<0.1						
Portugal	49.4	78.9	54.8	22.9	27.2	12.7	3.3	0.6	1.3	0.2	0.9	0.6	1.0	0.3	0.2	0.5	0.2	0.2
Slovenia																		0.1
Spain	4.1	2.9	4.8	3.3	2.5	0.2	<0.1	0.1										
UK	0.4	<0.1	1.1	0.8	0.7	1.6	1.3	0.8	1.1	2.0	2.5	3.0		0.6	0.6	0.7	9.3	0.3
Total	87.0	118.3	102.9	53.4	69.1	42.6	56.0	35.5	36.0	45.1	42.3	73.9	56.8	45.6	48.2	63.8	75.8	39.7

## 12 Other pelagic sharks in the Northeast Atlantic

### 12.1 Ecosystem description and stock boundaries

In addition to the pelagic species discussed previously (Sections 6–11), several other pelagic sharks and rays occur in the ICES area (Table 12.1).

Many of these taxa, including hammerhead sharks (*Sphyrna* spp.) and requiem sharks (*Carcharhinus* spp.), are tropical to warm temperate species, and often coastal pelagic species. There are limited data with which to examine the stock structure of these species, and the ICES area would only be the northern extremes of their Northeast Atlantic distribution range.

Other species, including long-fin mako, silky shark and oceanic white-tip are truly oceanic and likely to have either North Atlantic or Atlantic stocks, although data to confirm the exact stocks boundaries are limited. These species are found mostly in the southern and southwestern parts of the ICES areas (subareas 9–10), though some may occasionally range further north into the Bay of Biscay (Subarea 8). Some of these species also occur in the Mediterranean Sea.

In October 2011, a whale shark *Rhincodon typus* was reported from southern Portugal (Rodrigues *et al.*, 2012), and the northern limits of this species also extend to the Azores (Afonso *et al.*, 2014).

#### 12.1.1 Taxonomic changes

A recent treatise on batoids (Last *et al.*, 2016) considers all eight species of manta ray and devil ray to be in a single genus *Mobula*, with two of these species (giant manta ray *Mobula birostris* and giant devil ray *Mobula mobular* shown as occurring in the southernmost part of the ICES area (Subarea 9). Both these species also occur around the Azores (Subarea 10; Santos *et al.*, 1997), with Sobral and Afonso (2014) also indicating that Chilean devil ray *Mobula tarapacana* also occurred as far north as the Azores.

## 12.2 The fishery

### 12.2.1 History of the fishery

Pelagic sharks and rays are an incidental catch in tuna and billfish fisheries (mainly longline, but also purse seines) and a very occasional bycatch in other pelagic fisheries. Some, like hammerhead and requiem sharks, may constitute a noticeable component of the bycatch and were traditionally landed, whilst others are only recorded sporadically (e.g., white shark, tiger shark and *Mobula* spp.). Some of these pelagic species (e.g., silky shark and oceanic whitetip) are a regular bycatch in high seas fisheries, whilst others (e.g. various requiem sharks and hammerhead sharks) may be caught in continental shelf seas in the southern parts of the ICES area.

### 12.2.2 The fishery in 2022

No new information is available.

### 12.2.3 ICES advice applicable

ICES does not provide advice on these stocks.

### 12.2.4 Management applicable

EC Regulation No. 1185/2003 (updated by EU Regulation No 605/2013) prohibits the removal of fins of these shark species, and subsequent discarding of the body. This regulation is binding on EC vessels in all waters and non-EC vessels in Community waters. In June 2023, 'The Shark Fins Act 2023' was passed in the UK banning the import and export of detached shark fins, including all products containing shark fins.

Article 10 of Council Regulation (EU) 2019/1241 states the prohibition of for Union vessels to fish for, retain on board, tranship, land, store, sell, display or offer for sale the species listed in Annex I or species for which fishing is prohibited under other Union legal acts, and includes the following pelagic elasmobranchs relevant here:

- White shark *Carcharodon carcharias* in all waters;
- Mobulid rays (*Mobula* spp.) in all waters

Article 18 of Council Regulation (EU) 2023/194 lists prohibited species which, if caught accidentally, should not be harmed and should be released promptly. It is prohibited for EU vessels to fish for, to retain on board, to tranship or to land species listed in this Article, which include the following pelagic elasmobranch:

- Whale shark *Rhincodon typus* in all waters.

Article 25 of Council Regulation (EU) 2023/194 also lists prohibited species in relation to fisheries operating in the ICCAT Convention area. The species prohibited include hammerhead sharks (Family Sphyrnidae, except for *Sphyrna tiburo*), oceanic whitetip *Carcharhinus longimanus*, silky shark *Carcharhinus falciformis*, North Atlantic shortfin mako *Isurus oxyrinchus*, and bigeye thresher *Alopias superciliosus*.

The listings on Article 25 of Council Regulation (EU) 2023/194 are in support of ICCAT recommendations that Contracting Parties “prohibit, retaining on board, transhipping, landing, storing, selling, or offering for sale any part or whole carcass” of silky shark *Carcharhinus falciformis* (Recommendation 2011–08), oceanic whitetip shark *Carcharhinus longimanus* (Recommendation 2010–07), bigeye thresher *Alopias superciliosus* and all hammerhead sharks (Family Sphyrnidae, except bonnethead shark *Sphyrna tiburo*; Recommendation 2010–08). In addition, “It shall be prohibited to engage in directed fishery for species of thresher sharks of the *Alopias* genus”.

## 12.3 Catch data

### 12.3.1 Landings

No reliable estimates of landings or catches are available for these species, as many nations that land various species of pelagic sharks have often recorded them under generic landings categories. There can also be differences in the data reported to ICES, ICCAT and FAO, and so the most accurate data sources need to be verified. Historical species-specific landings reported to ICES were summarised in earlier WGEF reports.

Data (landings and dead discards) reported to ICCAT are given in Table 12.2, with the data presented here restricted to the years 2000–2021 and from ICCAT Sampling Areas (SAs) BIL94B and BIL94C in the North-east Atlantic (i.e., including the ICES area and extending southwards into the central eastern Atlantic (to 5°N), but excluding the Mediterranean Sea). Spain and Portugal are the main European nations reporting ‘other pelagic shark species’ from the Northeast Atlantic.

The data that have been presented in the present report are shown by nation and year, and are shown for the various carcharhinid sharks (Tables 12.2a-b), hammerhead sharks (Tables 12.2c-d), lamniform sharks, other pelagic sharks and pelagic stingray (Table 12.2e), and mobulid rays (Table 12.2f).

### 12.3.2 Discards

No data are available. Some species were usually retained, but other species, such as the pelagic stingray, were usually discarded. There are now EU regulations to prohibit the retention of some of the species considered here, but discard data for these species are likely incomplete.

### 12.3.3 Quality of catch data

Landings/catch data have been reported inconsistently. For example, data for mobulid rays only appeared in the ICCAT time-series in 2017 (Table 12.2f), largely relating to reporting of dead discards. Some of the catch data that have been reported are known to be associated with coding errors (e.g. some of the reported landings of 'tiger shark' by the Netherlands, Table 12.2b), or suspected coding errors (e.g. the reported landings of white shark by Morocco, which were 92 t for 2011).

More dedicated effort to compile an appropriate time-series of landings is required, especially in relation to longfin mako (given that data for this species could usefully be appraised in relation to shortfin mako) and smooth hammerhead (given this species is one of the more frequent of the 'other pelagic sharks' in the ICES area).

Overall, catch data are of poor quality (see above), except for some occasional studies of the Spanish Atlantic swordfish longline fishery (e.g. Castro *et al.*, 2000; Mejuto *et al.*, 2002) and of Portuguese pelagic longline fishery in the Atlantic Ocean (e.g. Santos *et al.*, 2014).

Biological data are not collected under the Data Collection Regulations, although some generic biological data are available (see Section 12.7). Species-specific identification in the field is problematic for some genera, notably for *Carcharhinus* spp., *Sphyrna* spp. and mobulid rays.

### 12.3.4 Discard survival

There have been several studies on the at-vessel mortality of pelagic sharks in longline fisheries, although more limited data are available for purse-seine fisheries. These studies were reviewed by Ellis *et al.* (2017).

## 12.4 Commercial catch composition

No data on the species and length composition of these species were available to WGEF.

## 12.5 Commercial catch and effort data

No CPUE data are available to WGEF for these pelagic sharks in the ICES area. ICCAT is the main source for appropriate catch and effort data for pelagic sharks.

## 12.6 Fishery-independent data

No fishery-independent data are available for these species in the ICES area.

## 12.7 Life-history information

The overall biology of several species has been reviewed, including white shark (Bruce, 2008), silky shark (Bonfil, 2008), oceanic whitetip (Bonfil *et al.*, 2008; Young & Carlson, 2020) and pelagic stingray (Neer, 2008). Other biological information is available in a range of sources (e.g. Branstetter, 1987, 1990; Stevens and Lyle, 1989; Shungo *et al.*, 2003; Piercy *et al.*, 2007). The main biological parameters are summarised in Table 12.3.

There is limited information on nursery or pupping grounds. Silky shark is thought to use the outer continental shelf as primary nursery ground (Springer, 1967; Yokota and Lessa, 2006), and young oceanic whitetip have been found offshore along the Southeast coast of the USA, suggesting offshore nurseries over the continental shelf (Seki *et al.*, 1998). Scalloped hammerhead nurseries are usually in shallow coastal waters.

In relation to *M. mobular*, Fortuna *et al.* (2014) estimated the size of the population of *M. mobular* in the Adriatic Sea as 3255 adults, from 60 field observations and available biological parameters. It was reported that several hundred specimens of *M. mobular* (estimates varied from 200–500) were caught by fishermen of the Gaza Strip on 27 February 2013.

Given the quantities of reported landings of longfin mako *Isurus paucus* and hammerhead sharks, of which *Sphyrna zygaena* is the main species occurring in the ICES area, further information is provided here for these two species.

### 12.7.1 Longfin mako *Isurus paucus*

Longfin mako is a pelagic species that is distributed widely in warm-temperate to tropical waters of the Atlantic, Indian and Pacific Oceans. Whilst most records of this species have been from the western Atlantic, including Cuba (Dodrill & Gilmore, 1979; Hueter *et al.*, 2017; Ruiz-Abierno *et al.*, 2021), it also occurs around the Azores, as far north as 44.8°N (Moreno & Moron, 1992; Queiroz *et al.*, 2008; Mucientes *et al.*, 2013) and occasional individuals have also been reported from the Mediterranean Sea (Hemida & Capapé, 2008).

Biological data for this species are limited. Typical of other lamnid sharks, it has a low fecundity (2–8 pups), which are born at about 97–120 cm (Gilmore, 1983; Compagno, 2001). The length at 50% maturity for males and females has been estimated at 215 cm and 230 cm total length, respectively (Ruiz-Abierno *et al.*, 2021). The smallest mature and largest immature females observed in that study were 220 cm and 257 cm, respectively, whilst the smallest mature and largest immature males were 208 cm and 224 cm, respectively (Ruiz-Abierno *et al.*, 2021).

Hueter *et al.* (2017) satellite tagged two individuals, which moved from the Gulf of Mexico into the oceanic waters of the western North Atlantic. These individuals also undertook vertical migrations, moving into surface waters at night, and spent most time at depths shallower than 600 m, with occasional dives into deeper (to 1767 m) waters.

Ellis *et al.* (2022) give a more detailed overview of the available data relating to longfin mako,

### 12.7.2 Smooth hammerhead *Sphyrna zygaena*

Smooth hammerhead is the more frequently recorded hammerhead shark occurring in both the ICES area and Mediterranean Sea (Celona & De Maddalena, 2005). Whilst this species has a global distribution, the Atlantic population(s) appears to be distinct to the Indo-Pacific (Miller, 2016). It appears to prefer warm (>23°C) surface waters. In the eastern Atlantic, it is more abundant in the warmer waters west of Africa, though the distribution extends up into Division 9.a

(Couto *et al.*, 2018; Santos & Coelho, 2019), with very occasional records as far north as the British Isles (Southall & Sims, 2008).

The biology of the species in the Atlantic is little known, though there are studies from elsewhere in the world (Miller, 2016). Growth parameters for smooth hammerhead caught in the eastern Atlantic have been estimated by Coelho *et al.* (2011), based on 139 specimens of 136–233 cm fork length ( $L_F$ ). The estimated VBGP were  $L_{inf} = 272$  cm  $L_F$ ,  $K = 0.06$ ,  $t_0 = -9.4$  (males) and  $L_{inf} = 285$  cm  $L_F$ ,  $K = 0.07$ ,  $t_0 = -7.3$  (females). A subsequent study with increased sample size ( $n = 304$ ; 126–253  $L_F$ ) estimated the growth parameters as  $L_{inf} = 285$  cm  $L_F$ ,  $K = 0.09$  and  $L_{inf} = 294$  cm  $L_F$ ,  $K = 0.09$  for males and females, respectively (Rosa *et al.*, 2017).

The length-at-maturity (L50%; based on samples from the Pacific) is estimated at 194 cm  $L_T$  and 200 cm  $L_T$  for males and females, respectively (Nava Nava & Márquez-Farías, 2014), with higher estimates (L50% = 239.3 cm  $L_T$  (females) and 263.7 cm  $L_T$  (males)) provided by López-Martínez *et al.* (2020).

The oceanic movements of smooth hammerhead in the Atlantic were described by Santos & Coelho (2018), with neonates and juveniles occurring in shallow, coastal waters, and larger individuals making more oceanic movements (Diemer *et al.*, 2011; Francis, 2016; Santos & Coelho, 2018, 2019). Whilst based on studies in the eastern Pacific, Félix-López *et al.* (2019) suggested that smooth hammerhead displayed philopatric behaviour. The diet of smooth hammerhead has been described for many parts of the geographical range (Smale, 1991; Smale & Cliff, 1998; Gonzalez-Pestana *et al.*, 2017; Dicken *et al.*, 2018; Estupiñán-Montaña *et al.*, 2019).

## 12.8 Exploratory assessments

No assessments have been made of these stocks in the NE Atlantic. Cortés *et al.* (2010) undertook a level 3 quantitative Ecological Risk Assessment (ERA) for eleven pelagic elasmobranchs (blue shark, shortfin and longfin mako, bigeye and common thresher, oceanic whitetip, silky, porbeagle, scalloped and smooth hammerhead, and pelagic stingray). Of these species, silky shark was found to be high risk (along with shortfin mako and bigeye thresher sharks), and oceanic whitetip and longfin mako sharks were also considered to be highly vulnerable.

McCully *et al.* (2012) undertook a level 2, semi-quantitative ERA for pelagic fish in the Celtic Sea area, and of the 19 species considered (eight of which were elasmobranchs), porbeagle and shortfin mako were found to be at the highest risk in longline and setnet fisheries, followed by common thresher. A comparable analysis examining the pelagic ecosystem for the Northeast Atlantic could usefully be considered.

## 12.9 Stock assessment

No stock assessments have been undertaken.

### 12.10 Quality of the assessment

No stock assessments have been undertaken.

### 12.11 Reference points

No reference points have been proposed for these stocks.

## 12.12 Conservation considerations

The recent European Red List of European marine fish (Nieto *et al.*, 2015) listed white shark *Carcharodon carcharias* as Critically Endangered (CR), and giant devil ray *Mobula mobular*, oceanic white-tip *Carcharhinus longimanus* and sandbar shark *Carcharhinus plumbeus* as Endangered (EN) in European seas. Many other pelagic sharks are listed as Data Deficient (DD) in European waters, including silky shark *Carcharhinus falciformis*, blacktip shark *C. limbatus*, dusky shark *C. obscurus*, tiger shark *Galeocerdo cuvier*, scalloped hammerhead *Sphyrna lewini*, great hammerhead *S. mokarran*, smooth hammerhead *S. zygaena* and longfin mako *Isurus paucus*. Pelagic stingray *Pteroplatytrygon violacea* is listed as Least Concern (LC).

Globally, many of the species considered here are listed as Threatened on the IUCN Red List (<https://www.iucnredlist.org>; consulted 16 June 2022), including *C. longimanus*, *S. lewini* and *S. mokarran* (CR), *I. paucus*, *R. typus*, *C. obscurus*, *C. plumbeus*, *C. signatus*, *M. mobular* and *M. birostris* (EN) and *C. carcharias*, *C. brachyurus*, *C. brevipinna*, *C. falciformis*, *C. limbatus* and *S. zygaena* (Vulnerable, VU), with *G. cuvier* listed as Near Threatened (NT) and *P. violacea* as LC.

The Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) lists several elasmobranchs on Appendix I (i.e. Contracting Parties that are a Range State should prohibit the taking of such species) including whale shark *Rhincodon typus*, *Carcharodon carcharias* and *Mobula* spp. These species are also listed on Appendix II of CMS (i.e. species that require international agreements for their conservation and management), with *Isurus paucus*, *Carcharhinus falciformis*, *Carcharhinus obscurus*, *Sphyrna lewini* and *S. mokarran* also listed on Appendix II. In 2020, *Sphyrna zygaena* was also added to Appendix II of CMS.

*Carcharodon carcharias*, *Rhincodon typus*, *Carcharhinus falciformis*, *C. longimanus*, *Sphyrna lewini*, *S. mokarran*, *S. zygaena* and *Mobula* spp. are also listed on Appendix II of CITES.

In 2022, all sharks in the family Carcharhinidae, thus including *Carcharhinus* spp., were added to Appendix II of CITES, with the listing coming into effect from 25 November 2023.

## 12.13 Management considerations

There is a paucity of fishery data for many of the species considered here, and this hampers the provision of management advice.

Some of the species considered in this section are included in various conservation initiatives, including CMS and CITES (see above), with some protected in the Mediterranean Sea, through their listing on Appendix II of the Barcelona Convention.

With sharks in the family Carcharhinidae being listed in Appendix II of CITES, there will be a need for a non-detriment finding (NDF) for import-export, and for when landing relevant species that were caught when vessels were operating outside their area of national jurisdiction.

In 2012, a consortium of scientific institutions (AZTI, IEO, IRD and IFREMER) obtained a contract from the EC to review the fishery and biological data for the main pelagic sharks and rays. The aim was to identify the gaps that could be filled within the framework of the EU's Action Plan for the Conservation and Management of Sharks ("Community Action Plan"), in order to improve the monitoring of these species taken in pelagic fisheries in the Atlantic, Indian and Pacific Oceans. The consortium reviewed and prioritised data and knowledge gaps, and potential research to fill gaps and to support the formulation of scientific advice for managers. The main gaps concerned fishery statistics, which are often not broken down by species, a lack of



size–frequency data and limited regional biological/ecological information. The final report was given to the DG-Mare of the EU in May 2013 (DG-Mare, 2013).

A subsequent project updated this work, providing updated information on the occurrence of pelagic, oceanic sharks and rays in different fisheries, updated information on data collection and methodological approaches for assessing their status, a critical review of existing Conservation and Management Measures (CMMs) for sharks, summaries of their current conservation status, and identified approaches to improve and/or provide alternative options for conservation and fisheries managers. The final report (Coelho *et al.*, 2019) is available at <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/bb27e867-6185-11e9-b6eb-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>.

In 2013, the shark species group of ICCAT proposed the framework of a Shark Research and Data Collection Program (SRDCP) to fill gaps in knowledge on oceanic and pelagic sharks that are responsible for much of the uncertainty in stock assessments and have caused constraints to the provision of scientific advice (ICCAT, 2013).

In October 2019, STECF conducted a dedicated expert working group aiming to review the implementation of the shark finning regulation and to assess the impact of the 2009 European Community Action Plan for the Conservation and Management of sharks. A review of the fisheries potentially involved in catching sharks and in particular marketing shark fins was conducted for the EU nations with the main fishing fleets. This included finning of oceanic sharks, such as smooth hammerhead and silky shark, which have been reported in the fin trade (Fields *et al.*, 2017). The final report provided an overview of progress in fisheries management relating to elasmobranch during the 10 years subsequent to the implementation of the Community Action Plan, and proposed actions for improvements (STECF, 2019).

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## 12.15 Tables and Figures

**Table 12.1. Other pelagic sharks in the Northeast Atlantic. Summary of the distribution of pelagic elasmobranchs in the ICES area. Species that are resident or caught frequently in an area are denoted ●, species that may occur as occasional vagrants denoted ⊙ and species that have not been recorded in an area are denoted ○. Adapted from Whitehead *et al.* (1989) and Ebert & Stehmann (2013).**

Family	Common name	Scientific name	ICES Subarea					Notes
			7	8	9	10	12	
Lamnidae	White shark	<i>Carcharodon carcharias</i>	○	⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙	[1]
	Longfin mako	<i>Isurus paucus</i>	○	○	⊙	●	⊙	
Pseudocarcharidae	Crocodile shark	<i>Pseudocarcharias kamoharai</i>	○	○	○	?	○	
Rhincodontidae	Whale shark	<i>Rhincodon typus</i>	○	○	⊙	⊙	○	
Carcharhinidae	Bronze whaler	<i>Carcharhinus brachyurus</i>	○	○	?	○	○	
	Spinner shark	<i>Carcharhinus brevipinna</i>	○	○	⊙	○	○	
	Silky shark	<i>Carcharhinus falciformis</i>	○	○	⊙	⊙	○	
	Galapagos shark	<i>Carcharhinus galapagensis</i>	○	○	○	⊙	○	[2]
	Blacktip shark	<i>Carcharhinus limbatus</i>	○	○	⊙	○	○	
	Oceanic whitetip	<i>Carcharhinus longimanus</i>	○	⊙	⊙	⊙	?	[3]
	Dusky shark	<i>Carcharhinus obscurus</i>	○	○	⊙	?	○	
	Sandbar shark	<i>Carcharhinus plumbeus</i>	○	⊙	⊙	○	○	
	Night shark	<i>Carcharhinus signatus</i>	○	○	?	○	○	
Galeocerdonidae	Tiger shark	<i>Galeocerdo cuvier</i>	?	?	?	⊙	⊙	[4]
Sphyrnidae	Scalloped hammerhead	<i>Sphyrna lewini</i>	○	○	?	?	○	
	Great hammerhead	<i>Sphyrna mokarran</i>	○	○	?	○	○	
	Smooth hammerhead	<i>Sphyrna zygaena</i>	⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙	?	
Dasyatidae	Pelagic stingray	<i>Pteroplatytrygon violacea</i>	⊙	⊙	●	⊙	?	[5]
Mobulidae	Giant devil ray	<i>Mobula mobular</i>	⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙	○	[6]
	Giant manta ray	<i>Mobula birostris</i>	○	○	⊙	⊙	○	
	Sicklefin devil ray	<i>Mobula tarapacana</i>	○	○	○	⊙	○	
	Bentfin devil ray	<i>Mobula thurstoni</i>	○	○	○	?	○	

[1] Three records from the Bay of Biscay; [2] see Brum and Azevedo (1995); [3] One individual stranded in Swedish waters; [4] Some unconfirmed sightings in northern Europe, see also Domingo *et al.* (2016); [5] Two specimens recorded from the North Sea; [6] Individual specimens reported from the Bay of Biscay (capture) and Celtic Sea (stranding).







**Table 12.2c. Other pelagic sharks in the Northeast Atlantic. Summary of total reported landings data (2000–2021) as reported to ICCAT (Task 1 Nominal catch data; downloaded 20/06/2023; ICCAT version of 26/01/2023, includes landings and dead discards) for Sampling Areas (SAs) BIL94B and BIL94C in the North-east Atlantic. These data relate to both the ICES area and extend southwards into the central eastern Atlantic (to 5°N). Data for the Mediterranean Sea (BIL95) not included. These data may include coding errors and taxonomic errors.**

Species	Species code	Nation	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021		
<i>S. lewini</i>	SPL	TAI																0.0								
		CUW																			0.4					
		SLV																			0.6					
		ESP		0.1		0.1	2.2				0.3		0.5								3.1					
		FRA											0.1						0.0	0.0	1.5	0.1	0.0		0.0	
		GBR											11.5	0.3												
		GTM																				0.1				
		KOR																		0.1						
		MAR													1.0	0.4										
		PAN																							0.3	
RUS																								0.0		
<i>S. mokarran</i>	SPK	CUW																							0.0	
		SLV																								0.2
		ESP																								0.8
		FRA																								0.1
		GTM																								0.0
		LBR																								1.2
PAN																								0.3		
<i>S. zygaena</i>	SPZ	TAI																	0.1		0.0					
		CUW																								0.1
		SLV																								0.0
		ESP	1.6	4.8	1.7	0.6	12.6				2.0		0.2													0.3
		FRA																				0.8	0.4	9.9	2.0	
		PRT				2.0		3.9	10.2	10.6	0.1	1.1	5.9			0.7	0.7	0.2								0.2
		GBR														0.0	0.0			0.0		0.1				0.0
		GTM																								0.0
		KOR													0.8	1.0		0.1								
		MAR													153.0	155.0										
		PAN																								0.0
		RUS																				0.1	0.0	0.1		
		SEN							7.0								1.4	438.7		2.3						

**Table 12.2d. Other pelagic sharks in the Northeast Atlantic. Summary of total reported landings data (2000–2021) as reported to ICCAT (Task 1 Nominal catch data; downloaded 20/06/2023; ICCAT version of 26/01/2023, includes landings and dead discards) for Sampling Areas (SAs) BIL94B and BIL94C in the North-east Atlantic. These data relate to both the ICES area and extend southwards into the central eastern Atlantic (to 5°N). Data for the Mediterranean Sea (BIL95) not included. These data may include coding errors and taxonomic errors.**

Species	Species code	Nation	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	
<i>Sphyrna</i> spp.	SPN	ESP	369.2	303.9	429.0	287.1	446.5			130.5		126.7		0.1											
		FRA												0.1											
		PRT	0.2	0.3		8.6	16.9	26.1	25.4	20.9	24.4	15.1	44.9			0.1	0.3								
		SEN	57.0	1464.0	36.0	71.0	168.0	318.0	173.0	154.0	110.0	101.0	56.0	51.0	101.0			112.5	166.9				87.2	91.7	
		USA								0.1															
Sphyrnidae	SPY	TAI												0.0	0.2										
		CUW																							0.0
		SLV																							0.1
		ESP									138.6														0.3
		FRA													0.1										
		GTM																							0.0
		PAN																							0.0
		SEN														1.0			238.7	28.8	35.8	243.2			





**Table 12.3. Other pelagic sharks in the Northeast Atlantic. Preliminary compilation of life-history information for NE Atlantic sharks.**

Species	Distribution Depth range	Max. TL cm	Egg development	Maturity size cm	Age at maturity (years)	Gestation period (months)	Litter size	Size at birth (cm)	Lifespan years	Growth	Trophic level
White shark <i>Carcharodon carcharias</i>	Cosmopolitan 0–1280 m	720	Ovoviviparous+ oophagy	372–402	8–10	?	7–14	120–150	36	$L_{\infty} = 544$ $K = 0.065$ $T_0 = -4.40$	4.42–4.53
Longfin mako <i>Isurus paucus</i>	Cosmopolitan	417	Ovoviviparous	230 F 215 M			2–8	97–120			4.5
Spinner shark <i>Carcharhinus brevipinna</i>	Circumtropical 0–100 m	300	Viviparous	176–212	7.8–7.9	10–12	Up to 20	60–80		$L_{\infty} = 214$ FL $K = 0.210$ $T_0 = -1.94$	4.2–4.5
Silky shark <i>Carcharhinus falciformis</i>	Circumtropical 0–500 m	350	Viviparous	210–220 M 225 F	6–7 7–9	12	2–15	57–87	25	$L_{\infty} = 291/315$ $K = 0.153 / 0.1$ $T_0 = -2.2 / -3.1$	4.4–4.52
Oceanic whitetip <i>Carcharhinus longimanus</i>	Cosmopolitan 0–180 m	396	Viviparous	175–189	4–7	10–12	1–15	60–65	22	$L_{\infty} = 245 / 285$ $K = 0.103 / 0.1$ $T_0 = 2.7 / -3.39$	4.16–4.39
Dusky shark <i>Carcharhinus ob- scurus</i>	Circumglobal	420	Viviparous	220–280	14–18	22–24	3–14	70–100	40	$L_{\infty} = 349 / 373$ $K = 0.039 / 0.038$ $T_0 = -7.04 / -6.28$	4.42–4.61
Sandbar shark <i>Carcharhinus plumbeus</i>	Circumglobal 0–1800 m	250	Viviparous	130–183	13–16	12	1–14	56–75	32	$L_{\infty} = 186$ FL $K = 0.046$ $T_0 = -6.45$	4.23–4.49
Night shark <i>Carcharhinus sig- natus</i>	Atlantic 0–600 m	280	Viviparous	185–200	8–10	~12	4–12	60		$L_{\infty} = 256 / 265$ $K = 0.124 / 0.114$ $T_0 = -2.54 / -2.7$	4.44–4.5
Tiger shark <i>Galeocerdo cuvier</i>	Circumglobal 0–350 m	740	Ovoviviparous	316–323	8–10	13–16	10–82	51–104	50	$L_{\infty} = 388 / 440$ $K = 0.18 / 0.107$ $T_0 = -1.13 / -2.35$	4.54–4.63

Species	Distribution Depth range	Max. TL cm	Egg development	Maturity size cm	Age at maturity (years)	Gestation period (months)	Litter size	Size at birth (cm)	Lifespan years	Growth	Trophic level
Scalloped hammerhead <i>Sphyrna lewini</i>	Cosmopolitan 0–512 m	430	Viviparous	140–250	10–15	9–10	13–31	45–50	35	$L_{\infty} = 320 / 321$ $K = 0.249 / 0.222$ $T_0 = -0.41 / -0.75$	4.0–4.21
Great hammerhead <i>Sphyrna mokarran</i>	Circumglobal 1–300 m	610	Viviparous	250–292		11	13–42	60–70		$L_{\infty} = 264 / 308$ (FL) $K = 0.16 / 0.11$ $T_0 = -1.99 / -2.86$	4.23–4.43
Smooth hammerhead <i>Sphyrna zygaena</i>	Circumglobal 0–200 m	500	Viviparous	210–265		10–11	20–50	50–60			4.32–4.5
Pelagic stingray <i>Pteroplatytrygon violacea</i>	Cosmopolitan 37–238	160	Ovoviviparous	35–40 DW	2–3	2–4	4–9	15–25 DW	~10	$L_{\infty} = 116$ DW $K = 0.0180$	4.36
Gian devilray <i>Mobula mobular</i>	NE Atl. + Med. epipelagic	520	Ovoviviparous			25	1	≤ 166 DW			3.71

## 13 Demersal elasmobranchs in the Barents Sea

### 13.1 Ecoregion and stock boundaries

The ecology of the Barents Sea ecosystem (ICES Subarea 1, extending into the eastern parts of Subarea 2) has been described comprehensively by Jakobsen and Ozhigin (2012).

Lynghammar *et al.* (2013) reviewed the occurrence of chondrichthyan fish in the Barents Sea ecoregion. The skate species reported from the offshore areas of this ecoregion include thorny skate *Amblyraja radiata*, Arctic skate *Amblyraja hyperborea*, round skate *Rajella fyllae*, spinytail skate *Bathyraja spinicauda*, common skate complex (*Dipturus batis* and/or *D. intermedius*, but see Section 26.1), sailray *Rajella lintea*, long-nosed skate *Dipturus oxyrinchus*, shagreen ray *Leucoraja fullonica* and thornback ray *Raja clavata* (Andriashev, 1954; Dolgov, 2000; Dolgov *et al.*, 2005a; Wienerroither *et al.*, 2011; Knutsen *et al.*, 2017 WD), but few occur at high abundance. All skate species occurring in offshore areas also occur in more coastal areas, with the exception of *A. hyperborea*, *D. oxyrinchus* and *R. lintea* (Williams *et al.*, 2008). The spatial distribution of chondrichthyan fishes in the Barents Sea, as observed in recent surveys, has been described by Wienerroither *et al.* (2011, 2013).

The stock boundaries are not known for the skates in this area, nor the potential movements of species between coastal and offshore areas. Further investigations are necessary to determine potential movements and migrations between elasmobranch populations within this ecoregion and with adjacent areas.

*Amblyraja radiata* is the dominant skate species, comprising 96% by number and about 92% by biomass of skates caught in surveys or as bycatch. The next most abundant species are *A. hyperborea* and *R. fyllae* (3% and 2% by number, respectively), and the remaining species are scarce (Dolgov *et al.*, 2005a; Drevetnyak *et al.*, 2005).

The species composition of skates caught in the Barents Sea differs from those recorded in the Norwegian Deep and northeastern Norwegian Sea (Skjaeraasen and Bergstad, 2000, 2001). Although *A. radiata* is the dominant species in both areas, the proportion of warmer-water species (*B. spinicauda* and *R. lintea*) is lower, and the proportion of cold-water species (*A. hyperborea*) is higher in the Barents Sea.

In terms of other elasmobranchs, sharks known to occur in the Barents Sea include spurdog (Section 2), velvet belly lanternshark (Section 5), porbeagle shark (Section 6), Greenland shark (Section 24) and, in the southern part of the area, blackmouth catshark (Section 25). One chimaeroid (*Chimaera monstrosa*) also occurs.

### 13.2 The fishery

#### 13.2.1 History of the fishery

All skate species in the ecoregion may be taken as bycatch in demersal fisheries, but there are at present no fisheries targeting skates in the Barents Sea. Detailed data on catches of skates from the Barents Sea are available from bycatch records and surveys, as shown for the periods 1996–2001 and 1998–2001, respectively, by Dolgov *et al.* (2005a, 2005b). Bottom-trawl fisheries targeting cod *Gadus morhua* and haddock *Melanogrammus aeglefinus*, and longline fisheries targeting cod, blue catfish *Anarhichas denticulatus* and Greenland halibut *Reinhardtius hippoglossoides* have a skate bycatch, which is generally discarded.

Dolgov *et al.* (2005b) estimated the total catch of skates taken by the Russian fishing fleet operating in the Barents Sea and adjacent waters in 1996–2001, and found that it ranged from 723 to 1891 tonnes (average of 1250 tonnes per year). *A. radiata* accounted for 90–95% of the total skate bycatch. *A. radiata* is also the predominant skate in catches of the Norwegian Reference Fleet operating in ICES Subarea 1, and accounts for around 90% of the catches (Albert *et al.*, 2016 WD).

### 13.2.2 The fishery in 2022

No new information. Since 2012, reported Norwegian skate landings have increased sharply and both in 2015 and 2017 they doubled compared to the previous year (157 tonnes to 369 tonnes, 374 tonnes to 704 tonnes, respectively). The reason for this increase is unknown. Norwegian landings have remained above 500 tonnes in the last years and was for the first time over 1000 tonnes in 2022. Germany reported between <0.1 tonnes and 5 tonnes landed for the years 2013–2018, but none in 2019–2022.

### 13.2.3 ICES advice applicable

ICES does not provide advice on the status of skate stocks in this ecoregion.

### 13.2.4 Management applicable

There are no TACs for any of the skate species in this ecoregion. Norway has a general ban on discarding. Since 2010, all dead or dying skates and other fish in the catches should be landed, whereas live specimens can be released (discarded).

## 13.3 Catch data

### 13.3.1 Landings

For ICES Subarea 1, landings data are limited and only available for all skate species combined (Table 13.1). Landings from the most westerly parts of the Barents Sea ecoregion fall within Subarea 2 (see Section 14). Russia and Norway are the main countries landing skates from the Barents Sea, and Figure 13.1 shows their landings from 1973 to 2022. However, Russian landings are not available since 2011.

Elasmobranch landings from ICES Subarea 1 are low, but there have been large fluctuations in Russian landings. The peak in Russian landings in the 1980s corresponded to an experimental fishery for skates, where the bycatch (mainly comprised of *Amblyraja radiata*) was landed (Dolgov, personal communication, 2006).

Based on data from the Norwegian Reference fleets, and the expert judgement detailed in Albert *et al.* (2016 WD), Norwegian landings by species and species groups from ICES Subarea 1 were estimated for years 2012–2015 (Table 13.2). Landings tend to be restricted to the larger specimens of *Raja clavata*, *Bathyrāja spinicauda* and *Amblyraja hyperborea*.

### 13.3.2 Discards

Based on interviews of the Norwegian Reference Fleet and landing sites, the expected discards of skates varied extensively between species and is assumed almost 100% for specimens <50 cm total length. For *Rajella fyllae* and *Amblyraja radiata*, nearly all specimens are probably discarded,



whereas the discards of *Raja clavata* by the coastal fleet is expected to be negligible (Albert *et al.*, 2016 WD).

### 13.3.3 Quality of catch data

Recent reported data on skate catch and landings from the Barents Sea are almost exclusively from Norway, and species information from the Norwegian Reference Fleet (Table 13.2) may be indicative of the species composition of total catch and landings. The estimation of total skate catches and landings by species relied on some strong assumptions, e.g. that data from the Coastal and Oceanic Reference Fleets operating in the Barents Sea are representative for vessels below and above 21 m respectively, and that the relative species composition of skate catches in these two reference fleets has been stable over the last ten years. These assumptions were made due to limited availability of data. With increased data and extended time series, these assumptions should be relaxed by including running averages over shorter time periods, e.g. 3–5 years.

For years 2012–2015, even after allocating skate landings to species based on data from the Reference Fleet, the generic “Skates and rays” category still accounted for more than 50% of the total skate landings (Table 13.2). In 2021, about 90% of skate landings were still reported as Rajidae the rest being reported as *Raja clavata*.

In addition, the splitting of catches by species should be validated by independent surveys. The best way to do this is probably to include skates on the list of species to sample from selected landing ports. Skates are mostly landed as wings in Norway, which can make conventional species identification more difficult (although skate identification could be confirmed with genetic barcoding). Programmes for market sampling of skate landings could usefully be undertaken.

### 13.3.4 Discard survival

No data available to WGEF for the fisheries in this ecoregion.

## 13.4 Commercial catch composition

Generally, larger skates are more often caught in longline fisheries than in trawl fisheries (Dolgov *et al.*, 2005b).

Vinnichenko *et al.* (2010 WD) reported that catches of skates in Russian trawl and longline bottom fisheries in 2009 (60–400 m depths) were dominated by *A. radiata* (90–95%). Information on length and sex composition can be found in ICES (2014). Other species occurring were *R. fyllae*, *A. hyperborea*, *B. spinicauda* and *R. lintea*. These findings are supported by data from the Norwegian Reference Fleet (Vollen, 2010 WD; Albert *et al.*, 2016 WD).

Dolgov *et al.* (2005b) reported the mean length and the sex ratio for four species of skate in the Barents Sea. The sex ratio was 1:1 in commercial catches for all skate species except *A. hyperborea*, of which males dominated in the longline fishery (see ICES, 2007 for further information).

## 13.5 Commercial catch and effort data

Some CPUE data are available for *A. radiata*, *A. hyperborea*, *R. fyllae* and the common skate complex in trawl and longline fisheries, respectively. Total catches of skates in Russian fisheries in the Barents Sea and adjacent areas for the years 1996–2001 were summarized in ICES (2007).

Catch data from other nations are limited and analyses of more recent Russian data are required.

## 13.6 Fishery-independent surveys

### 13.6.1 Russian bottom trawl survey (RU-BTr-Q4)

For the offshore areas, data from October–December surveys (RU-BTr-Q4) were available for the years 1996–2003 (Dolgov *et al.*, 2005b; Drevetnyak *et al.*, 2005; summarized in ICES, 2007). These studies described the distribution and habitat utilization of skates (*A. radiata*, *A. hyperborea*, *R. fyllae*, *D. batis* complex, *B. spinicauda* and *R. lintea*) in the Barents Sea.

Vinnichenko *et al.* (2010 WD) reported on catches of *A. radiata* from the 2009 Russian bottom-trawl survey in October–December (RU-BTr-Q4). The overall length range was 8–61 cm total length (TL). The mean length of males (41.6 cm TL) was larger than that of females (38.8 cm TL), and the sex ratio was about 1.02:1.

### 13.6.2 Norwegian coastal survey (NOcoast-Aco-Q4)

The distribution and diversity of elasmobranch species in the northern Norwegian coastal areas were assessed by Williams *et al.* (2008). The results were summarized in ICES (2007, 2008). New data from, for example, the Norwegian coastal survey should be analysed and presented to the WGEF when sufficient data becomes available.

### 13.6.3 Deep stations from multiple Norwegian surveys (NO-GH-Btr-Q3 and others)

Vollen (2009 WD) reported on elasmobranch catches from deep trawl hauls (400–1400 m) along the continental slope (62–81°N) in 2003–2009. The area investigated covered the Norwegian Sea ecoregion, as well as the border between the Norwegian Sea and Barents Sea ecoregions (see Section 14 of ICES, 2009).

### 13.6.4 Joint Russian-Norwegian surveys (BS-NoRu-Q1 (BTr), Eco-NoRu-Q3 (Aco)/Eco-NoRu-Q3 (Btr))

Two joint Russian–Norwegian surveys are conducted in the Barents Sea. The surveys run in February (BS-NoRu-Q1 (BTr)), in the southern Barents Sea northwards to the latitude of Bear Island, and August–September (Eco-NoRu-Q3 (Aco)/Eco-NoRu-Q3 (Btr)), covering the whole of the Barents Sea including waters near Spitsbergen and Franz Josef Land. The Norwegian part of the February survey started in 1981, but data on elasmobranchs are missing for some years. The August–September survey started in 2003. All skate species are recorded during these surveys, and length data are collected. Some biological data are also collected on Russian vessels. However, due to initial species identification problems, species-specific data should only be used from the years 2006–2007 onwards (applies also to Norwegian data).

Vinnichenko *et al.* (2010 WD) analysed data on elasmobranch species from the joint surveys in 2009. The results were reported in Section 13 of ICES (2014). Wienerroither *et al.* (2011, 2013) used data from the August–September (Q3) survey (2004–2009) and February (Q1) survey (2007–2012) to describe the spatial distribution of chondrichthyan fishes in the Barents Sea. For some species, length composition data are also available. The information on the main skate species is summarized below. It should be noted that length distributions are not directly comparable between the two surveys due to differences in sampling design and coverage in time and area.

*A. radiata*: The most common skate species in the Barents Sea. Widely distributed in the surveyed area, except in Arctic waters (Figure 13.2). Size distribution was similar in the two surveys, ranging from 5–65 cm (Figure 13.3). Based on a simple swept area model utilizing the Q3 data, the stock appeared to vary in both biomass and number of individuals, without showing any apparent trend (Knutsen, *et al.*, 2017 WD).

*A. hyperborea*: The species was found in deeper waters along the shelf edge towards the Norwegian Sea and Polar basin, and in Arctic water in the deeper parts of the eastern Barents Sea (Figure 13.2). The length range was 6 to 85 cm. Only few specimens <38 cm were caught during the Q1 survey, although this size class was very numerous in the Q3 survey (Figure 13.3). The stock increased in biomass and numbers between 2007 and 2014. For subsequent years, the estimates were at a similar level as before 2007 (Knutsen *et al.* 2017 WD).

*B. spinicauda*: During the Q1 survey, the species was found in larger parts of the central basin. During the Q3 survey, the distribution was more towards the western part of the surveyed area (Figure 13.2). Recorded lengths ranged from 6 to 183 cm (Figure 13.3). The largest specimen exceeded the reported maximum length of 172 cm. Fewer small and more large individuals were caught in the Q1 survey than in the Q3 survey. Generally, the stock appeared to be relatively stable in terms of biomass, and number of individuals (Knutsen *et al.*, 2017 WD).

*R. fyllae*: The species was found in warm-water areas in the southwestern part of the surveyed area, and along the slope west of Svalbard/Spitsbergen (Figure 13.2). The length distribution ranged from 6–60 cm, with two peaks around 10–15 and 46–50 cm (Figure 13.3). Although there were some annual fluctuations in number of individuals in the Barents Sea, the general trend was stable, as was the trend for biomass (Knutsen *et al.*, 2017).

### 13.6.5 Quality of survey data

Species identification for skates is a major issue, especially with some of the earlier data. Williams (2007) gave a detailed description of identification issues for *A. radiata* vs. *R. clavata* in the Norwegian Sea ecoregion.

Furthermore, the occurrence of the common skate complex (possibly confused with *B. spinicauda*) adds potential identification errors (see also Section 26.1). The depth distribution of the two species in Dolgov *et al.* (2005a) and *L. fullonica* in the Barents Sea has been questioned by Lynghamar *et al.* (2014), as no specimens could be obtained for genetic analyses since 2007. Consequently, appropriate quality checks of these survey data are required prior to use in assessments.

In order to improve quality of current survey data, better identification practices using appropriate identification literature needs to be put in place. Ongoing work to improve future sampling at IMR includes workshops to educate staff as well as improved field guides and keys used for species identification. A workshop series in 2019 established the basis for an updated identification guide to be used for surveys and by the reference fleet.

## 13.7 Life-history information

Length data for *A. radiata*, *A. hyperborea*, *R. fyllae*, common skate complex and *B. spinicauda* are available in Dolgov *et al.* (2005a; 2005b) and Vinnichenko *et al.* (2010 WD; see ICES, 2007; 2010). Some biological information is available in the literature (e.g. Berestovskii, 1994). Sampling of elasmobranch egg cases has been included in Norwegian trawl surveys from mid-2009, and may provide future information on egg-laying (spawning) grounds.

## 13.8 Exploratory assessment models

No exploratory assessments have been conducted, due to the limited data available. Analyses of survey trends may allow to evaluate the status of the more frequent species, although species identification issues need to be addressed first.

## 13.9 Exploratory assessment models

No assessments have been conducted.

## 13.10 Quality of assessments

No assessments have been conducted.

## 13.11 Reference points

No reference points have been proposed.

## 13.12 Conservation considerations

See Section 12.11.

## 13.13 Management considerations

Landings of skates in this ecoregion have steadily increased in the recent years, with high levels in 2019 and 2021. There are no TACs for any of the demersal skate stocks in this region.

The elasmobranch fauna of the Barents Sea comprises relatively few species. The most abundant skate in the area is *A. radiata*, which is widespread and abundant in this ecoregion and adjacent waters. This species dominated the large historical Russian landings, but is otherwise generally discarded.

Data from the Norwegian Reference Fleet indicate that the most commonly landed skates today are larger specimens of *Raja clavata*, *Batyhrraja spinicauda* and *Amblyrraja hyperborea*. These are not abundant in the Barents Sea and the information on stock status is limited.

Further studies are required, particularly for the larger-bodied skates, which may be more vulnerable to overfishing.

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### **13.15 Tables and Figures**

**Table 13.1. Demersal elasmobranchs in the Barents Sea. Total landings (t) of skates from ICES Subarea 1 (1973–2022); “n.a.” = no data available, “.” = zero catch, “+” = <0.5 tonnes.**

	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986
Belgium	.	.	.	1	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
France	.	.	.	81	49	44	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
Germany	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
Iceland	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
Norway	.	.	.	1	3	4	8	2	2	2	1	10	11	3
Portugal	.	.	100	11	1	.	.	+	.	.	.	.	.	.
USSR/Russian Fed.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	1126	168	93	3	1	n.a.	563	619	2137
Spain	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
UK(E&W)	78	46	49	33	70	9	8	4	+	1	.	+	+	+
UK(Scotland)	.	.	1	2	2	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
Total	78	46	150	129	125	1183	184	99	5	4	1	573	630	2140
	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Belgium	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
France	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
Germany	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	2	.	.	.	.	.	.
Iceland	.	.	.	.	.	.	1	.	.	+	1	.	.	4
Norway	14	7	4	1	5	24	29	72	9	27	3	13	21	12
Portugal	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
USSR/Russian Fed.	2364	2051	1235	246	n.a.	399	390	369	n.a.	n.a.	399	790	568	502
Spain	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	7	.	.	.	.	.
UK(E&W)	2	.	+	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	+	.
UK(Scotland)	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
Total	2380	2058	1239	247	5	423	420	443	16	27	403	803	589	518

**Table 13.1 (continued). Demersal elasmobranchs in the Barents Sea. Total landings (t) of skates from ICES Subarea 1 (1973–2022); “n.a.” = no data available, “.” = zero catch, “+” = <0.5 tonnes.**

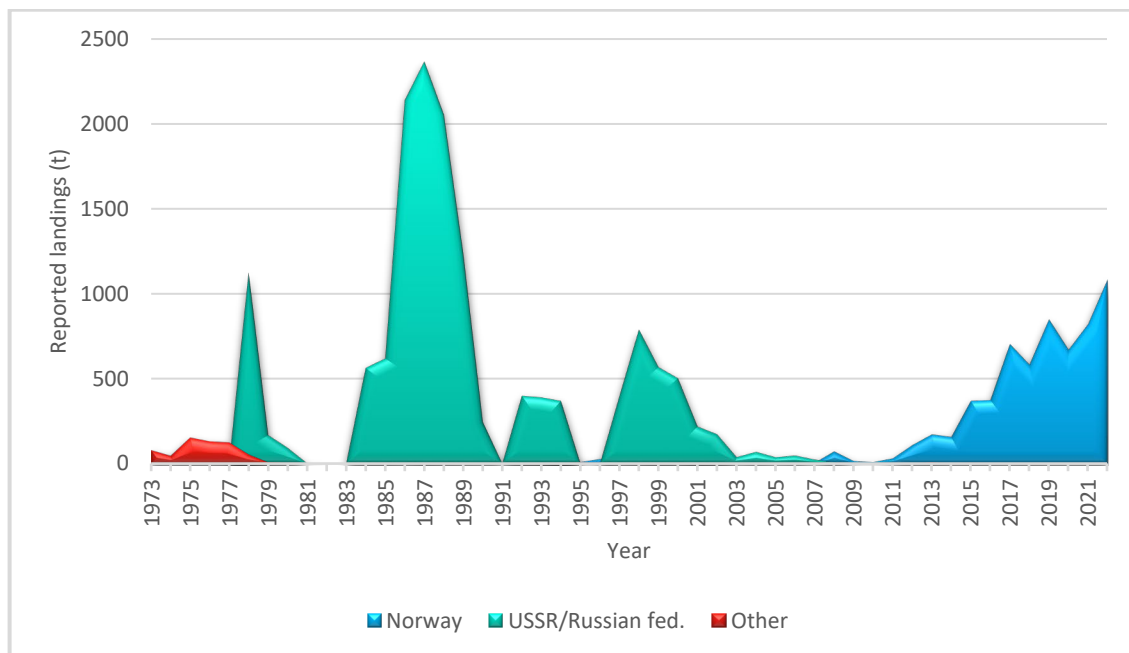
Belgium	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
France	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
Germany	.	.	.	.	.	.	+	.	.	+	.	.	+	+	5	
Iceland	.	.	.	3	3	.	.	.	.	.	.	1	8	.	.	
Norway	30	26	2	1	4	13	4	72	15	9	31	109	172	157	369	
Portugal	.	.	.	+	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	
USSR/Russian Fed.	218	173	38	69	37	48	24	6	2	1	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	
Spain	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	
UK(E&W)	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	+	.	.	.	.	
UK(Scotland)	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	
<b>Total</b>	<b>248</b>	<b>199</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>157</b>	<b>374</b>	

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Belgium	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
France	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
Germany	2	+	2	.	.	.	.
Iceland	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
Norway	374	704	582	849	670	821	1084
Portugal	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
USSR/Russian Fed.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Spain	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
UK(E&W)	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
UK(Scotland)	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
<b>Total</b>	<b>376</b>	<b>704</b>	<b>584</b>	<b>849</b>	<b>670</b>	<b>821</b>	<b>1084</b>



**Table 13.2. Demersal elasmobranchs in the Barents Sea. Estimated Norwegian landings (t) of skates and rays by species in ICES Subarea 1. Source: Albert *et al.* (2016 WD).**

Species	2012	2013	2014	2015
<i>Amblyraja hyperborea</i>	10	17	2	14
<i>Bathyraja spinicauda</i>	13	22	3	19
<i>Dipturus oxyrinchus</i>	1	1	0	1
<i>Raja clavata</i>	10	13	25	50
Rajidae indet.	76	116	127	285
Total	108	170	157	368



**Figure 13.1. Demersal elasmobranchs in the Barents Sea. Reported landings (t) of skates from ICES Subarea 1 (1973–2022).**

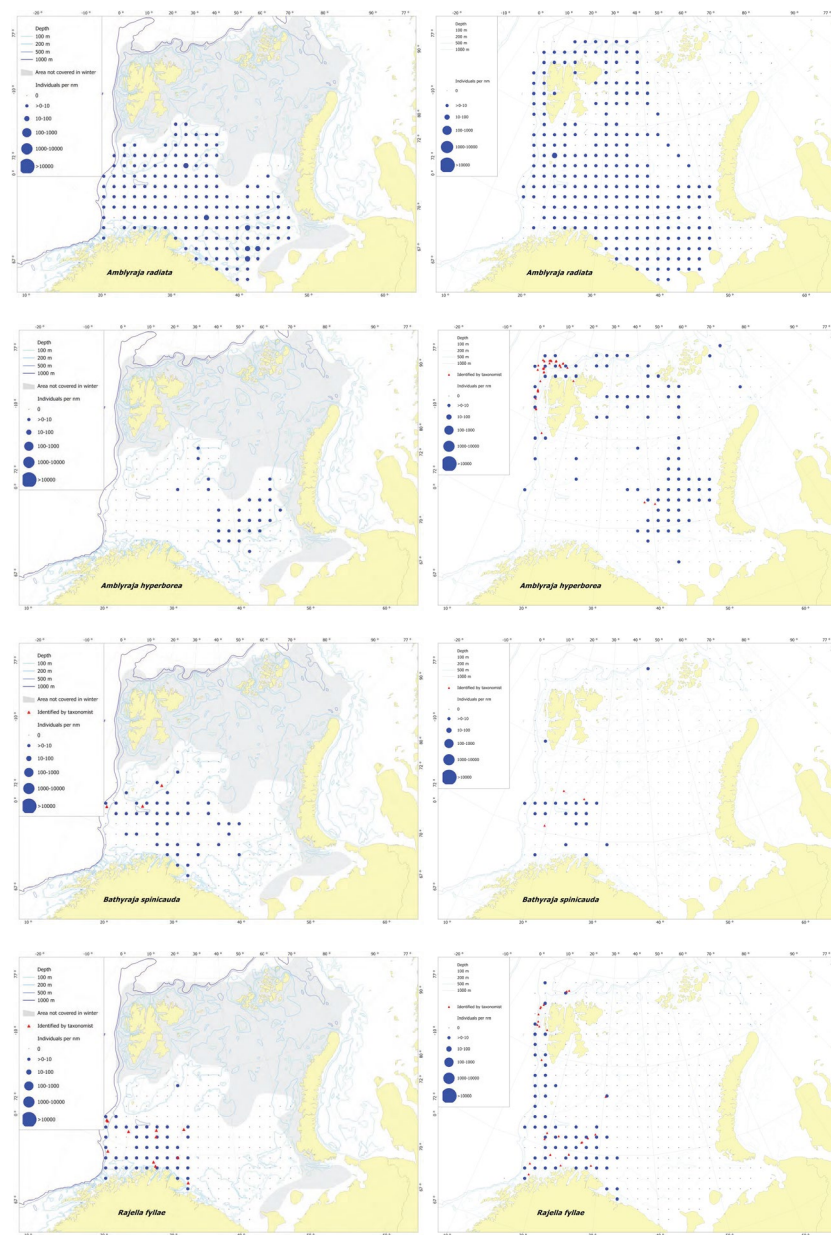
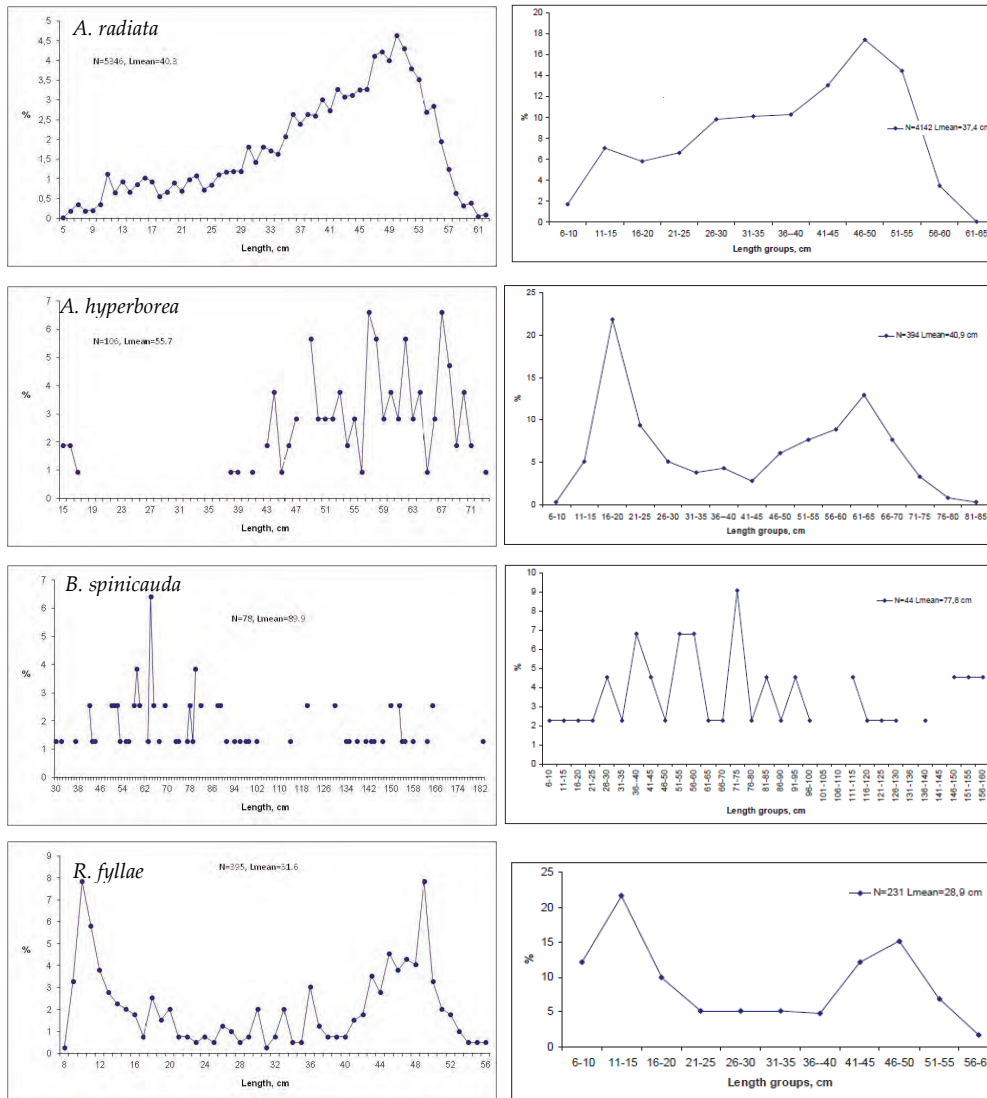


Figure 13.2. Demersal elasmobranchs in the Barents Sea. Spatial distribution of *A. radiata*, *A. hyperborea*, *B. spinicauda* and *R. fyllae* (top to bottom) in Q1 (left) and Q3 (right) Joint Russian–Norwegian surveys. Source: Wienerroither *et al.* (2011, 2013).



**Figure 13.3. Demersal elasmobranchs in the Barents Sea. Length distributions of *A. radiata*, *A. hyperborea*, *B. spinicauda* and *R. fyllae* (top to bottom) in Q1 (left) and Q3 (right) Joint Russian–Norwegian surveys. Note that length distributions are not directly comparable between the two surveys. Source: Wienerroither *et al.* (2011, 2013).**

## 14 Demersal elasmobranchs in the Norwegian Sea

### 14.1 Ecoregion and stock boundaries

The Norwegian Sea connects with the Northeast Atlantic Ocean to the southwest, the Icelandic Waters ecoregion and Greenland Sea to the west along the edge to the shallower Iceland Sea between the Faroe Islands, and northwards to Jan Mayen. To the south it borders the shallower North Sea along the 62°N parallel between Norway and the Faroe Islands, and to the northeast with the shallower Barents Sea (ICES 2019). It comprises ICES Divisions 2.a-b.

The occurrence of chondrichthyan species in the Norwegian Sea ecoregion was reviewed by Lynghammar *et al.* (2013). In coastal areas, thorny skate *Amblyraja radiata* is the most abundant skate species (Williams *et al.*, 2008). While more abundant in the north, this species is common at all latitudes along the Norwegian coast.

Other species that have been confirmed in the coastal area are thornback ray *Raja clavata*, common skate complex (most likely flapper skate *Dipturus intermedius* (Lynghammar *et al.*, 2014; C. Junge, pers. obs.)), sailray *Rajella lintea*, Norwegian skate *Dipturus nidarosiensis*, sandy ray *Leucoraja circularis*, shagreen ray *Leucoraja fullonica*, round skate *Rajella fyllae*, arctic skate *Amblyraja hyperborea* and spinytail skate *Bathyraja spinicauda*. Long-nose skate *Dipturus oxyrinchus* is distributed mainly along the southern section of the coastline, south of latitude 65°N. Records of blond ray *R. brachyura* and spotted ray *R. montagui* need to be confirmed by voucher specimens, although they are present in catch statistics (Lynghammar *et al.*, 2014).

In deeper areas of the Norwegian Sea, *A. radiata* and *A. hyperborea* are the two most abundant species, but *B. spinicauda* and *R. fyllae* also occur regularly, particularly north of 70°N (Skjaeraasen and Bergstad, 2001; Vollen, 2009 WD).

Sharks in the Norwegian Sea ecoregion include spurdog *Squalus acanthias* (Section 2), velvet belly lanternshark *Etmopterus spinax* (Section 5), porbeagle *Lamna nasus* (Section 6), basking shark *Cetorhinus maximus* (Section 7), Greenland shark *Somniosus microcephalus* (Section 24), black-mouth catshark *Galeus melastomus*, and lesser-spotted dogfish *Scyliorhinus canicula* (Section 25). One chimaera, the rabbitfish *Chimaera monstrosa*, is also found in the Norwegian Sea.

Stock boundaries of skates and rays in the Norwegian Sea are not known, neither are the potential movements of species between the coastal and offshore areas. Further investigations are necessary to determine potential migrations or interactions of elasmobranch populations within this ecoregion and adjacent areas.

### 14.2 The fishery

#### 14.2.1 History of the fishery

There are no fisheries targeting skates or sharks in the Norwegian Sea, though they are caught in various demersal fisheries targeting teleost species. All skate species in the ecoregion may be taken as bycatch, with only larger individuals thought to be landed (see Section 14.3).

#### 14.2.2 The fishery in 2022

No new information.

### 14.2.3 ICES advice applicable

ICES does not provide advice for the skate stocks in this ecoregion, although some stocks of North Sea skates may extend into the southern parts of the Norwegian Sea.

### 14.2.4 Management applicable

There are no TACs for any of the skate stocks in this ecoregion.

Norway has a general ban on discarding. Since 2010, all dead or dying skates in the catches should be landed, whereas live specimens can be discarded.

## 14.3 Catch data

### 14.3.1 Landings

Landings data for skates are provided for the years 1973–2022 (Table 14.1). For ICES Subarea 2, landings data are limited and, for skates, aggregated across all species. This Subarea covers all of the Norwegian Sea ecoregion, but also includes the most westerly parts of the Barents Sea ecoregion (Section 13).

Overall landings throughout time have been low, ca. 200–330 t per year for all fishing countries, with moderate fluctuations. The peak in the late 1980s resulted from Russian fisheries landing over 1900 t of skates in 1987, subsequently dropping to low levels two years later. This peak was a consequence of an experimental fishery, when skate bycatch was landed, whereas normally they are discarded (Dolgov, pers. comm.). Russia and Norway are the main countries landing skates from the Norwegian Sea and Figure 14.1 shows their landings from 1973 to 2022.

Landings data (usually not discriminated at species level) since 2010 have been provided by Norway (2010–2022), France (2010–2013), Germany (2010, 2013–2020), the UK (2010–2011, 2013, 2015–2016, 2021), Spain (2010, 2012–2014), the Netherlands (2015), and Denmark (2021). Russian landings have not been available since 2010.

Based on data from the Norwegian Reference fleets, and the expert judgement detailed in Albert *et al.* (2016 WD), Norwegian landings by species and species groups from ICES Subarea 2 were estimated (Table 14.2). The main species landed tend to be larger specimens of *Dipturus oxyrinchus*, *Bathyraja spinicauda* and *Raja clavata*.

### 14.3.2 Discard data

Based on interviews of the Norwegian Reference Fleet and landing sites, the expected discards of skates vary extensively between species and is assumed to be almost 100% for specimens <50 cm TL. For *Rajella fyllae* and *Amblyraja radiata*, nearly all specimens are probably discarded, whereas the discarding of *Raja clavata* by the coastal fleet is expected to be negligible (Albert *et al.*, 2016 WD).

### 14.3.3 Quality of catch data

Catch data are not species disaggregated.

Recent data on skate catch and landings in the Norwegian Sea are almost exclusively from Norway, and species information from the Norwegian Reference Fleet (Table 14.2) may be indicative of the species composition of total catch and landings. The estimation of total skate catches and

landings by species relied on some strong assumptions, e.g., that data from the Coastal and Oceanic Reference Fleets operating in the Norwegian Sea are representative of vessels below and above 21 m, respectively. Also, that the relative species composition of skate catches in either of these two reference fleets has been stable over the last ten years. These assumptions were made due to limited data availability.

Even after allocating skate landings to species based on data from the Reference Fleet, the generic “Skates and rays” category still accounted for about 30% of the total skate landings. A further reduction of this proportion should, however, be achievable in the future. Work on improving species identification by arranging workshops for reference fleet crew and education during visits at sea is ongoing.

As mentioned here since 2016, in addition, the splitting by species should also be validated by independent surveys. The best way to do this is probably to include skates on the list of species sampled from selected landing ports. Skates are mostly landed as wings in Norway, which can make conventional species identification more difficult (although skate identification could be confirmed with genetic barcoding). Programmes for market sampling of skate landings could usefully be undertaken.

#### **14.3.4 Discard survival**

No data is available to WGEF for the fisheries in this ecoregion.

### **14.4 Commercial catch composition**

#### **14.4.1 Species and size composition**

In 2009, Russian landings of skates were taken as bycatch during the longline and trawl demersal fisheries at depths ranging from 50–900 m deep in February–November. The main skate caught was *A. radiata*, with *A. fyllae*, *A. hyperborean*, and *B. spinicauda* found in minor quantities (Vinnichenko *et al.*, 2010 WD).

*A. radiata* (27–58 cm  $L_T$ ) were recorded in the commercial bottom-trawl catches, comprising mostly males of 41–55 cm and females of 36–50 cm (Figure 14.2a). The proportion of small individuals was lower than in the Barents Sea. The mean length of females (43.7 cm) was smaller than that of males (45.0 cm). Males were slightly more abundant in catches (sex ratio of 1.1:1).

Vinnichenko *et al.* (2010 WD) presented data on *A. radiata* compiled from samples taken by scientific observers on commercial fishing vessels, the Russian survey, and the joint Russian–Norwegian surveys. These are presented in Section 14.6.

#### **14.4.2 Quality of the data**

Information on the species composition of commercial catches is required.

Data from the Norwegian Reference Fleet demonstrated that elasmobranch catches in ICES Sub-area 2 were dominated by *A. radiata* and *R. clavata* (Table 14.2; Vollen, 2010 WD), although misidentification problems may exist.

For vessels in the Oceanic Reference Fleet, elasmobranch bycatch differed between bottom trawl, bottom gillnet and longline. Whereas *A. radiata* made up the bulk of trawl and longline catches (55% and 79% by numbers, respectively), *R. clavata* dominated in gillnet catches (82%). This was probably influenced by the dominance of trawl and longline vessels further north, and more southerly fishing grounds for gillnetters, but potential misidentifications issues should also be

investigated. Catches of *A. radiata* were higher in Subarea 2 than in Subarea 1 for trawl catches (61 kg per 100 trawl hours for Subarea 2; 43 kg per 100 trawl hours for Subarea 1), but lower for longline catches (119 kg per 10 000 hooks vs. 135 kg per 10 000 hooks, respectively).

Data from the Coastal Reference Fleet indicated that the common skate complex (most likely misidentified) and unidentified skates dominated the landed catches in this area (39% and 33% by weight, respectively). Discards were dominated by unidentified skates (32% by weight). As opposed to the Oceanic Reference Fleet, *A. radiata* was only sporadically recorded in this area.

## 14.5 Commercial catch and effort data

Limited data available (but see above).

## 14.6 Fishery-independent surveys

### 14.6.1 Russian bottom trawl survey (RU-BTr-Q4)

Vinnichenko *et al.* (2010 WD) reported that catches from the 2009 survey were dominated by *A. radiata* (10–56 cm L<sub>T</sub>; Figure 14.2b). In the size distribution, different size/age classes were distinct. The mean length of males (37.7 cm) and females (37.4 cm) were similar, and males predominated slightly (sex ratio = 1.05:1).

*A. hyperborea* (17–91 cm L<sub>T</sub>) were recorded in the catches (Figure 14.2d; specimens > 131 cm were not considered here as they are thought to be typing errors or species misidentifications). The mean length of males (65.1 cm) and females (65.8 cm) were similar, and mostly males were caught (sex ratio = 5:1).

### 14.6.2 Norwegian coastal survey (NOcoast-Aco-4Q)

The distribution and diversity of elasmobranchs in northern Norwegian coastal areas, based on survey data from 1992–2005, were summarized by Williams *et al.* (2008). The southern portion of the coastal area studied was incorporated within the Norwegian Sea ecoregion, and the Barents Sea was defined as the border between Norwegian Directorate of Fisheries Statistical Areas 04 and 05 (<https://portal.fiskeridir.no/portal/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=ea6c536f760548fe9f56e6edcc4825d8>).

Thirteen skate species and four species of shark were recorded from the coastal region (Table 14.3). Regularly occurring skates were *A. radiata*, *A. hyperborea*, common skate complex (most likely *Dipturus intermedius* (Junge/Lynghammar, pers. comm)), *D. nidarosiensis*, *D. oxyrinchus*, *Raja clavata*, *Rajella fyllae* and *L. fullonica*. Occasional or single observations were made of *B. spinicauda*, *R. lintea* and *L. circularis* (also *R. montagui*, *R. brachyura* were nominally recorded, but see Section 14.6.5). Four species of shark were identified: *E. spinax*, *G. melastomus* and *S. acanthias*, as well as one specimen of *S. microcephalus*.

*A. radiata* appeared to fluctuate in both biomass and numbers, but the stock had an increasing trend in 2008–2016 (Knutsen *et al.*, 2017 WD). *D. oxyrinchus* also fluctuated in biomass, but only slightly in numbers, indicating variance in size composition of the survey catch between years. However, the overall trends in biomass and numbers were positive. The estimates of biomass and abundance of *R. fyllae* were stable over the time-series (2003–2016) (Knutsen *et al.*, 2017 WD).

Although no clear shifts in abundance over time were detected for any species, more robust assessment is necessary to better identify temporal trends in abundances.

### 14.6.3 Deep stations from multiple Norwegian surveys (NO-GH-Btr-Q3 and others)

Vollen (2009 WD) reported on elasmobranch catches from 3185 deep trawl hauls (400–1400 m) along the continental slope (62–81°N) from the Barents Sea to the Skagerrak. Data were combined from multiple deep-water surveys during the period 2003–2009. Data from the Skagerrak are excluded in this section, whereas parts of the Barents Sea ecoregion are included. Overall, nine species (six skates and three sharks) were recorded. *A. radiata* and *A. hyperborea* were the dominant species north of 62°N (ICES Subarea 2), whereas *E. spinax* was most numerous in the Norwegian Deep (Division 3.a). *B. spinicauda* and *R. fyllae* also occurred frequently in the catches in all areas. Reports of *R. clavata* were considered to be misidentifications of other species. Results were reported in more detail in ICES (2009).

### 14.6.4 Joint Russian-Norwegian survey (BS-NoRu-Q1 (BTr), Eco-NoRu-Q3 (Aco)/Eco-NoRu-Q3 (Btr))

Two joint Russian–Norwegian surveys are conducted in the Barents Sea: one during February (BS-NoRu-Q1 (BTr)) in the southern Barents Sea northwards to the latitude of Bear Island, and another in August–September (Eco-NoRu-Q3 (Aco)/Eco-NoRu-Q3 (Btr)) covering much of the Barents Sea, including waters near Spitsbergen and Franz Josef Land. The Norwegian part of the February survey started in 1981, but data on elasmobranchs are missing for some years. The August–September survey started in 2003. All skates are recorded during these surveys, and data on length distributions as well as some biological data (on board Russian vessels) are collected. As a result of initial problems with species identification, species-specific data should only be used from the years 2006–2007 onwards (for Norwegian data). Analyses of data from these surveys are not complete, but some data from the 2009 surveys are presented in Vinnichenko *et al.* (2010 WD).

*A. radiata* was the dominant species in the August–September survey. The length range was 5–61 cm total length (TL), with most specimens in the range 33–37 cm (Figure 14.2c; Vinnichenko *et al.*, 2010 WD).

Vinnichenko *et al.* (2010 WD) also presented data on *A. radiata* compiled for samples collected by scientific observers on commercial fishing vessels, the Russian survey, and the joint Russian–Norwegian surveys. Males prevailed in these samples (1.7:1). Most males and females (over 70%) were immature, the rest were in developing stages or were mature. Unlike in the Barents Sea, no individuals at the active stage were reported in the area. The main prey (by weight) were crustaceans (spider crab *Hyas* spp.: 33%; northern shrimp *Pandalus borealis*: 14%; amphipods: 6%), fish (capelin *Mallotus villosus*: 14%; Atlantic hookear sculpin *Artediellus atlanticus*: 12%; unidentified fish remains: 6%) and polychaete worms.

### 14.6.5 Quality of survey data

The difficulties associated with identifying skate species are a concern when considering the validity of the data used for any assessment. Identification problems between *A. radiata* and *R. clavata* were highlighted by Williams (2007) and summarized in ICES (2007). Despite sampling since 2007, Lynghammar *et al.* (2014) did not catch any specimens of common blue skate *Dipturus batis*, *R. brachyura* or *R. montagui* in the Norwegian Sea: giving more credence to suspected misidentifications in earlier years. Indeed, a record of *R. montagui* from central Norway was known from a museum specimen, but Lynghammar *et al.* (2014) identified it as *R. clavata*. *D. intermedius*



may occur in small numbers in the Norwegian Sea. There were also no contemporary records of *L. fullonica*, though this species was reported in historical accounts.

To achieve a better quality of survey data, it is important to improve the identification practices and use appropriate identification literature. Ongoing work to improve sampling at the Institute of Marine Research includes workshops to educate staff as well as improved guides and keys used for species identification, including a new simplified guide for commercial longliners since January 2021. A workshop series in 2019 established the basis for an updated complete identification guide that is to be used for surveys and by the reference fleet.

## 14.7 Life-history information

Some length data are available for *A. radiata* and *A. hyperborea* (Vinnichenko *et al.*, 2010 WD; ICES, 2010). Some biological information is also available in the literature (e.g., Berestovskii, 1994). Sampling of elasmobranch egg-cases was included in Norwegian trawl surveys from mid-2009 until 2020 (from 2021: egg cases are still recorded but only sampled when caught in large numbers per station), which may provide future information on nursery grounds.

## 14.8 Exploratory assessment models

Due to limited data availability, no exploratory assessments have been conducted. Analyses of survey trends may allow evaluation of the status of more frequently caught species, although species identification issues need to be addressed first.

## 14.9 Stock assessment

No assessments have been conducted.

## 14.10 Quality of assessments

No assessments have been conducted.

## 14.11 Reference points

No reference points have been proposed for any of these skate stocks.

## 14.12 Conservation considerations

The International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN Red List of Threatened species (IUCN, 2017)) listings for species occurring in this area include (assessment year in parentheses):

- “Critically endangered”: common skate complex (2006; Europe: 2015) – this complex comprises *Dipturus batis* and *Dipturus intermedius*, but their status has not been assessed on a species level yet
- “Endangered”: *L. circularis* (2014)
- “Vulnerable”: *L. fullonica* (2014)
- “Near threatened”: *B. spinicauda* (2006), *D. nidarosiensis* (2014), *D. oxyrinchus* (2014) and *R. clavata* (2005; Europe: 2014)

Demersal elasmobranchs listed on the Norwegian Red List (Nedreaas *et al.*, 2015), excluding species assessed as “Least concern”, is only the common skate complex (“Critically endangered”).

### 14.13 Management considerations

There are no TACs for any of the skates in this ecoregion. The demersal elasmobranch fauna of the Norwegian Sea comprises several species that also occur in the Barents Sea (Section 13) and/or the North Sea (Section 15). Further investigations are required and could offer valuable information for the management of these neighbouring ecoregions.

### 14.14 References

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## 14.15 Tables and Figures

**Table 14.1. Demersal elasmobranchs in the Norwegian Sea. Total landings (t) of skates from ICES Subarea 2 (and Division 2.a and 2.b) from 1973–2022. “n.a.” = no data available, “.” = means zero catch, “+” = < 0.5 tonnes. Countries with only occasional catches are not included by country in the landings table: Denmark (1994, 2021), Belgium (1 tonne 1975), Sweden (+ in 1975), Netherlands (1979, 2015), Iceland (2001, 2011), Estonia (2002, 2005), and Ireland (2007, 2009). Species included are: *A. radiata*, *D. licha*, *D. pastinaca*, *D. spp.*, *L. circularis*, *L. fullonica*, *L. naevus*, *M. aquila*, *R. brachyura*, *R. clavata*, *R. montagui*, *R. alba*, *T. marmorata*, Rajiformes (indet).**

	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986
Faroe Islands	.	.	.	5	2	1	1	.	.	.	.	.	.	4
France	.	.	1	68	61	18	2	1	12	109	2	6	5	11
Germany	+	1	52	12	59	114	84	85	53	7	2	112	124	102
Norway	201	158	89	34	99	82	126	191	137	110	96	150	104	133
Portugal	.	.	.	34	39	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
USSR/Russ. Fed.	.	.	.	.	.	302	99	39	.	.	.	537	261	1633
Spain	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	28	.	17	5
UK – E, W & NI	65	18	14	20	90	10	6	2	+	+	.	5	1	2
UK – Scotland	2	1	.	+	1	+	.	.	.	.	.	.	+	+
Other	.	.	1	.	.	.	2	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
Total	268	178	157	173	351	527	320	318	202	226	128	810	512	1890
	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Faroe Islands	.	15	.	42	.	2	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
France	21	42	8	56	11	15	9	7	8	6	8	5	.	5
Germany	95	76	32	52	.	+	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	2
Norway	214	112	148	216	235	135	286	151	239	198	169	214	239	244
Portugal	.	.	.	.	.	.	22	11	.	10	28	46	10	6
USSR/Russ. Fed.	1921	1647	867	208	n.a.	181	112	257	n.a.	n.a.	77	139	247	400
Spain	.	9	.	.	.	.	.	.	3	.	3	15	6	.
UK - E, W & NI	4	.	2	1	+	1	+	+	1	4	.	+	1	+
UK – Scotland	2	+	+	+	+	+	+	.	+	+	+	+	1	1
Other	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	+	.	.	.	.	.	.
Total	2257	1902	1057	575	246	334	429	426	251	218	285	419	504	658

Table 14.1 cont'. Demersal elasmobranchs in the Norwegian Sea. Total landings (t) of skates from ICES Subarea 2 (and Division 2.a and 2.b) from 1973–2022. “n.a.” = no data available, “.” = means zero catch, “+” = < 0.5 tonnes. Countries with only occasional catches are not included by country in the landings table: Denmark (1994,2021), Belgium (1 tonne 1975), Sweden (+ in 1975), Netherlands (1979, 2015), Iceland (2001, 2011), Estonia (2002, 2005), and Ireland (2007, 2009). Species included are: *A. radiata*, *D. licha*, *D. pastinaca*, *D. spp.*, *L. circularis*, *L. fullonica*, *L. naevus*, *M. aquila*, *R. brachyura*, *R. clavata*, *R. montagui*, *R. alba*, *T. marmorata*, Rajiformes (indet).

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Faroe Islands	.	.	2	12	15	13	9	13	4	3	n.a.	.	n.a.	n.a.
France	4	7	2	7	9	7	2	5	3	5	1	1	+	+
Germany	.	2	2	7	1	.	.	.	+	1	.	.	1	2
Norway	233	118	111	142	133	146	189	259	258	250	198	121	147	105
Portugal	3	.	8	2	1	14	13	2	.	.	.	.	.	.
USSR/Russ. Fed.	113	38	6	50	20	16	20	.	8	2	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Spain	7	11	32	.	1	.	.	.	.	+	.	+	1	+
UK - E, W & NI*	.	.	.	.	2	4	1	1	+	+	+	.	1	.
UK – Scotland*	1	3	3	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
Other	4	5	.	.	.	.	1	.	+	.	.	.	.	.
<b>Total</b>	<b>365</b>	<b>184</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>220</b>	<b>182</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>235</b>	<b>280</b>	<b>273</b>	<b>261</b>	<b>199</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>108</b>
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022						
Faroe Islands	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.						
France	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.						
Germany	2	1	1	6	+	.	.	.						
Norway	112	198	111	213	275	328	180	193						
Portugal	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.						
USSR/ Russ. Fed.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.						
Spain	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.						
UK (com- bined)*	2	+	.	.	.	.	+	.						
Other	+	.	.	.	.	.	+	.						
<b>Total</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>219</b>	<b>276</b>	<b>328</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>193</b>						

**Table 14.2. Demersal elasmobranchs in the Norwegian Sea. Estimated Norwegian landings (tonnes) of skates and rays by species in ICES Subarea 2. Source: Albert *et al.* (2016 WD).**

	2012	2013	2014	2015
<i>Amblyraja hyperborea</i>	9	11	7	10
<i>Bathyraja spinicauda</i>	23	28	19	23
Common skate complex (most likely <i>Dipturus intermedius</i> )	7	9	7	7
<i>Dipturus oxyrinchus</i>	23	28	23	20
<i>Leucoraja circularis</i>	2	2	2	2
<i>Leucoraja fullonica</i>	1	1	1	1
<i>Raja clavata</i>	14	17	14	12
<i>Rajella lintea</i>	6	7	5	6
Rajidae indet.	36	43	27	32
Total	121	146	104	112

**Table 14.3. Catch data (number of individuals per species) for the Norwegian Sea ecoregion from the Annual Autumn Bottom-trawl Surveys of the North Norwegian Coast, from 1992 to 2005. Adapted from Williams *et al.* (2007 WD).**

Species	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	Total catch	Total % of positive samples	Catch rate (No. per survey)
<i>Amblyraja radiata</i>	7	44	23	15	8	41	9	16	9	6	10	10	19	9	226	11%	17.4
<i>Bathyraja spinicauda</i>	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0%	0.1
<i>Rajella fyllae</i>	0	4	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	5	6	4	0	20	1%	1.5
<i>Raja clavata</i>	0	4	15	1	0	2	3	6	0	0	0	0	2	0	33	2%	2.5
Common skate complex (most likely <i>Dipturus intermedius</i> )	0	2	0	1	3	7	7	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	24	1%	1.8
<i>Leucoraja fullonica</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	3	9	3	0	0	1	20	1%	1.5
<i>Leucoraja circularis</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	9	5	7	23	1%	1.8
<i>Raja montagui</i> *	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	1	0	1	0	5	<1%	0.4
<i>Dipturus oxyrinchus</i>	0	0	54	3	2	30	2	0	0	1	2	6	4	2	106	5%	8.2
<i>Dipturus nidarosiensis</i>	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	3	1	0	1	0	7	<1%	0.5
<i>Amblyraja hyperborea</i>	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	1	0	6	<1%	0.5
<i>Raja brachyura</i> *	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	<1%	0.3
<i>Rajella lintea</i>	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	<1%	0.1
<i>Galeus melastomus</i>	0	24	1883	1197	105	1269	189	480	258	812	1196	275	640	48	8376	24%	644.3
<i>Etmopterus spinax</i>	0	829	8453	473	1061	2733	584	3881	1485	1401	2417	785	2305	1369	27 776	33%	2136.6
<i>Squalus acanthias</i>	0	21	51	26	20	5	106	168	12	68	43	21	104	17	662	8%	50.9
<i>Somniosus microcephalus</i>	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	<1%	0.1
Number of samples	17	163	106	77	74	96	78	81	76	56	78	65	77	63			

\*Probably misidentifications, the occurrence of the species in the area has not been confirmed (see Section 14.6.5).

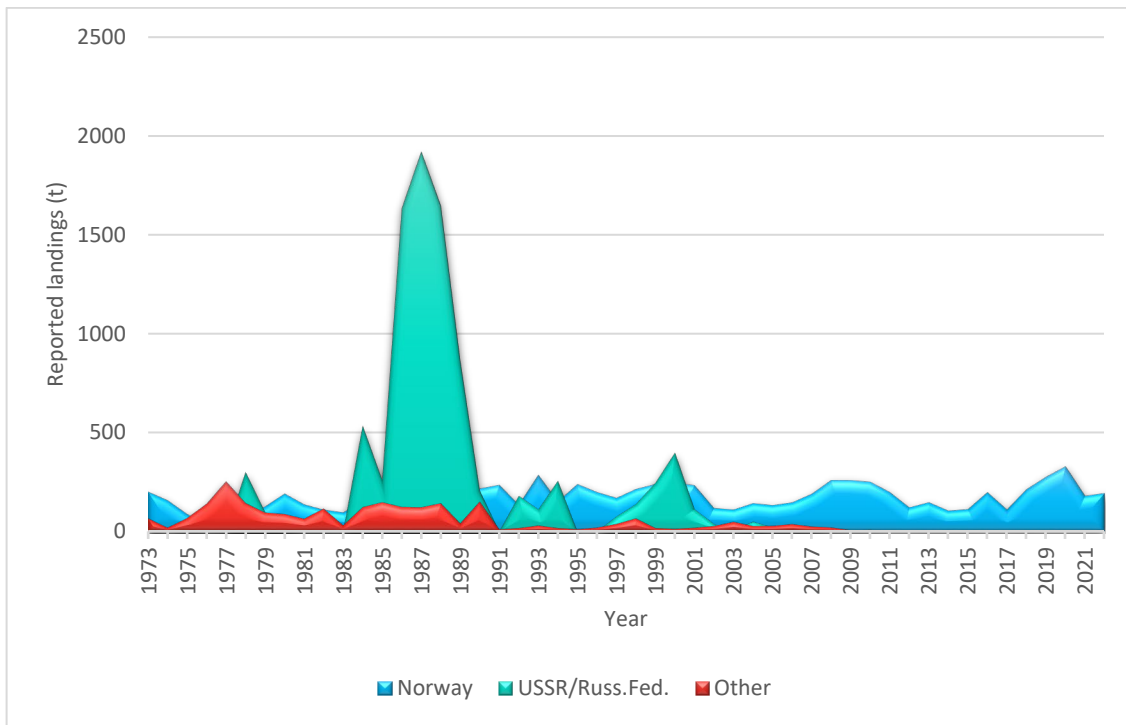


Figure 14.1. Demersal elasmobranchs in the Norwegian Sea. Total landings (t) of skates from ICES Subarea 2 (1973–2022).

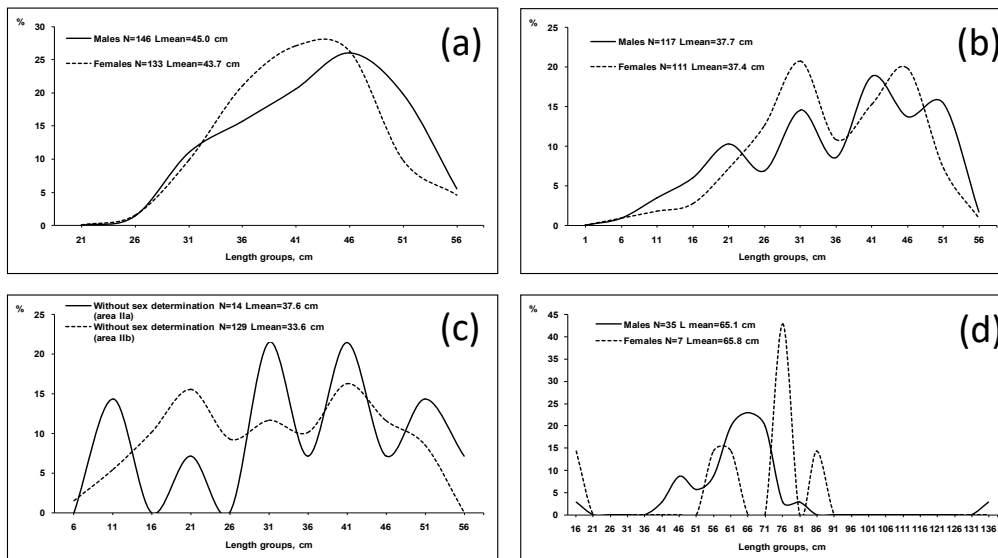


Figure 14.2. Demersal elasmobranchs in the Norwegian Sea showing the length composition of *A. radiata* in (a) commercial bottom-trawl catches in the Norwegian Sea in 2009, (b) Russian demersal survey (October–December 2009) and (c) the Norwegian Sea based on data from the joint Russian–Norwegian ecosystem survey (August–September 2009); and (d) length composition of *A. hyperborea* in the Norwegian Sea (Division 2.b) from the Russian demersal survey (October–December 2009). Specimens exceeding 131 cm are probably typing errors or misidentifications. Source: Vinnichenko *et al.* (2010 WD).



# 15 Demersal elasmobranchs in the North Sea, Skagerrak, Kattegat and eastern Channel

## 15.1 Ecoregion and stock boundaries

In the North Sea, about ten skate and ray species occur, as well as about ten demersal shark species (Daan *et al.*, 2005). Thornback ray *Raja clavata* is the most important skate for the commercial fisheries. *R. clavata* in the Greater Thames Estuary (southern part of Division 4.c) is known to move into the eastern English Channel (Walker *et al.*, 1997; Ellis *et al.*, 2008b). Bird *et al.* (2020) compiled and reviewed 50 years of tagging data, including release and return information, for several skate and ray species. Thornback ray is the most frequently tagged ray species in European waters and from individuals tagged in the North Sea, 99% of tag returns came from within the current stock unit. Though there is a clear exchange of thornback ray within divisions 4.b-c and 7.d, information on the exchange with division 3.a and 4.a is very limited.

For Blonde ray *R. brachyura*, the stock boundaries are not well known and currently there are two stock units defined in this ecoregion (rjh.27.4a6 and rjh.27.4bc7d). The southern stock (rjh.27.4bc7d) was benchmarked in 2023 and during this process division 4.b was included in the stock unit definition (for details see ICES 2023a).

Spotted ray *R. montagui* has limited information on stock structure. Tagging studies showed recaptures within the stock unit of release (Bird *et al.*, 2020). However, no information is available to confirm the inclusion of division 4.a in the stock unit. More information on stock identity of rjc.27.3a47d, rjh.27.4bc7d and rjm.27.3a47d can be found in their respective stock annexes.

For most other demersal ray species in the North Sea ecoregions, stock boundaries are not well known. Cuckoo ray *Leucoraja neavus* (rjn.27.3a4) and the northern blonde ray stock (rjh.27.4a6) probably extend into the waters west of Scotland (Ellis *et al.*, 2015). Starry ray *Amblyraja radiata* (rjr.27.23a4), is mostly distributed to the north-east (between UK and Sweden) and is rarely found below the 54°N parallel (ICES 2023b).

*Dipturus batis*, frequently referred to as common skate, has been confirmed to comprise of two species which were erroneously assumed to be one species in the 1920s (Iglésias *et al.*, 2010; Griffiths *et al.*, 2010). The smaller species (previously described as *Dipturus flossada* by Iglésias *et al.*, 2010) is the common blue skate (*Dipturus batis* (FAO code RJB)) and the larger species may refer to the flapper skate (*Dipturus intermedius* (FAO code DRJ)). The member of the common skate complex present in the northern North Sea is *Dipturus intermedius*, which is generally considered the more vulnerable to fishing pressure. Both species were accepted by Last *et al.* (2016) and are now also accepted in the Catalog of Fishes (Fricke *et al.*, 2021) and WoRMS. The distribution and stock boundaries of the two species are uncertain. The larger-bodied flapper skate occurs in the north-western North Sea, and this stock is likely the same as occurs of North-west Scotland. The presence and geographical extent of blue skate in this region is uncertain, but this species may have occurred in the southern North Sea historically. Further information on *Dipturus* species is presented in Section 26.

This section focuses primarily on skates (Rajidae). For the main demersal sharks in this ecoregion, the reader is referred to the relevant chapters for spurdog (Section 2), tope (Section 10), smooth-hounds (Section 21) and lesser-spotted dogfish and other catsharks (Section 25).

## 15.2 The fishery

### 15.2.1 History of the fishery

Demersal elasmobranchs are caught as a bycatch in the mixed demersal fisheries for roundfish and flatfish. A few inshore vessels target skates and rays with tangle nets and longlines. For a description of the demersal fisheries see the fisheries overview for the Greater North Sea Ecoregion (ICES, 2022a).

In 2007, the EC brought in a 25% bycatch ratio (see also Section 15.2.4, footnote 1) for vessels over 15 m. This has restrained some fisheries and may have resulted in misreporting, both of area and species composition.

### 15.2.2 The fishery in 2022

The landings peaked in the middle of the 1980s and declined steadily thereafter in the North Sea (Figure 15.3.1). Since 2008, the TAC appears to have been restrictive for the fisheries in the North Sea (Subarea 4), with landings ranging between approximately 1300–1600 t since 2010. A similar trend is observed for Division 7.d although since 2015, landings have increased by >50% to ~1700 t.

### 15.2.3 ICES Advice

Stock-specific advice for several species/stocks in this region was provided in 2023, see table below (and Section 15.9). Note that for most of stocks ICES provides biennial advice, however, for common skate complex and starry ray quadrennial advice is provided. Three North Sea ray stocks were benchmarked in 2023 and their ICES Data Category was updated from a Category 3 to a Category 2 (ICES, 2023a)

ICES stock code	Stock description	ICES Data Category	Advice basis	ICES advice
rjb.27.3a4	Common skate <i>Dipturus batis-complex</i> Subarea 4 and Division 3.a	6.3.0	Precautionary approach	Zero catch in each of the years 2024-2027.
rjc.27.3a47d	Thornback ray <i>Raja clavata</i> Subarea 4 and divisions 3.a and 7.d	2	MSY approach	5274 t in 2024 5307 t in 2025
rjh.27.4a6	Blonde ray <i>Raja brachyura</i> Subarea 6 and divisions 4.a	5.2	Precautionary approach	7 t in each of the years 2024-2027
rjh.27.4bc7d	Blonde ray <i>Raja brachyura</i> Divisions 4.b, 4.c and 7.d	2	MSY approach	1262 t in 2024 1209 t in 2025
rjm.27.3a47d	Spotted ray <i>Raja montagui</i> Subarea 4 and divisions 3.a and 7.d	2	MSY approach	1517 t in 2024 1415 t in 2025
rjn.27.3a4	Cuckoo ray <i>Leucoraja naevus</i> Subarea 4 and Division 3.a	3.2	MSY approach	79 t in 2024 and 2025
rjr.27.23a4	Starry ray <i>Amblyraja radiata</i> Subareas 2, 4 and Division 3.a	3.1.5	Precautionary approach	Zero catch in each of the years 2024-2027

ICES stock code	Stock description	ICES Data Category	Advice basis	ICES advice
raj.27.3a47d	Other skates and rays Subarea 4 and divisions 3.a and 7.d	6.2.0	Insufficient data to provide ad- vice	NA

## 15.2.4 Management applicable

Since 1999, the EC have also used a common TAC for skates and rays in the North Sea. This was extended to three ecoregions in 2009 and is now applied in the Celtic Seas (ICES subarea 6 and divisions 7.a-c and 7.e-k; SRX/67AKXD), Biscay and Iberian waters (ICES subareas 8 and 9; SRX/89-C) and Greater North Sea (ICES subarea 4 and divisions 2.a, 3.a and 7.d) (STECF, 2022). The latter has been separated into three TAC areas: Union waters of Division 3.a (SRX/03A-C); UK and Union waters of Division 2.a and Subarea 4 (SRX/2AC4-C); and UK and Union waters of Division 7.d (SRX/07D). Furthermore, from 2008 onwards, the EC has obliged Member States to provide species-specific landings data for the major North Sea species: *R. clavata*, *R. montagui*, *R. brachyura*, *L. naevus*, *A. radiata* and the common skate complex.

The TACs (Council Regulation (EU) 2022/109) for skates and rays in 2022 are: 1764 t for EU waters of Division 2.a and Subarea 4; 1537 t for Division 7.d; and 48 t for Division 3.a. Some transfer (5%) between the Division 7.d TAC area and the Celtic Seas ecoregion is allowed, which may account for some quota overshoot of the TAC in 7.d.

In 2015 a separate species-specific precautionary TAC for undulate ray (*Raja undulata*) was set within the overall skate TAC for Division 7.d. A special condition applied that up to 5% may be fished in Union waters of 7.e and reported under the following code: (RJU/\*67AKD). However, in 2018 France requested ICES to update the advice for undulate ray in divisions 7.d–e and 8.a–b (ICES, 2018). The outcomes of that request contributed to a separate TAC for undulate ray in divisions 7.d and 7.e from 2019 onwards.

The list of prohibited species on EU fisheries regulations (Council Regulation (EU) 2016/72) included the following species within the North Seas ecoregion: white skate *Rostroraja alba* (Union waters of ICES subareas 6–10), thornback ray *Raja clavata* (Union waters of Division 3.a), starry ray *Amblyraja radiata* (Union waters of Divisions 2.a, 3.a and 7.d and Subarea 4) and common skate complex in Union waters of Division 2.a and ICES subareas 3, 4, 6–10.

Year	TAC*	TAC for 2.a and 4	TAC for 7.d	TAC for RJU 7.d-e	TAC for 3.a	Landings**
1999	6060	6060				3997
2000	6060	6060				3992
2001	4848	4848				4011
2002	4848	4848				3904
2003	4121	4121				3797
2004	3503	3503				3237
2005	3220	3220				3238 (3030)
2006	2737	2737				2928 (2845)
2007	2190	2190 <sup>(1)</sup>				3145 (3141)
2008	1643	1643 <sup>(2)</sup>				3183 (3025)
2009	2755	1643 <sup>(3,4,5)</sup>	1044 <sup>(i, ii)</sup>		68 <sup>(a, b)</sup>	3069 (3192)
2010	2342	1397 <sup>(3,4,5)</sup>	887 <sup>(i, ii, iii)</sup>		58 <sup>(a, b)</sup>	2883 (2951)
2011	2342	1397 <sup>(3,4,5)</sup>	887 <sup>(i, ii, iii)</sup>		58 <sup>(a, b)</sup>	2682 (2672)
2012	2340	1395 <sup>(3,4,5)</sup>	887 <sup>(i, ii, iii)</sup>		58 <sup>(a, b)</sup>	2800 (2738)
2013	2106	1256 <sup>(3,4,5)</sup>	798 <sup>(ii, iii, iv)</sup>		52 <sup>(c,d)</sup>	2977 (3000)
2014	2101	1256 <sup>(4,6,7)</sup>	798 <sup>(iii,v,vi)</sup>		47 <sup>(e,f)</sup>	2839 (2603)
2015	2307	1382 <sup>(4,6,7)</sup>	878 <sup>(iii, vii, viii)</sup>		47 <sup>(e)</sup>	2541
2016	2326	1313 <sup>(6,8,9)</sup>	966 <sup>(iii, vii, ix)</sup>		47 <sup>(e)</sup>	2682
2017	2488	1378 <sup>(6,8,9)</sup>	1063 <sup>(iii, vii, ix)</sup>		47 <sup>(e)</sup>	2797
2018	2977	1654 <sup>(6,8,9,10)</sup>	1276 <sup>(v,x,xi,xiii)</sup>		47 <sup>(e)</sup>	3471
2019	3105	1654 <sup>(6,8,9,10)</sup>	1404 <sup>(v,x,xi,xiii)</sup>	234 <sup>(1a)</sup>	47 <sup>(e)</sup>	3499
2020	3258	1737 <sup>(6,8,9,10)</sup>	1474 <sup>(v,x,xi,xiii)</sup>	234 <sup>(1a)</sup>	47 <sup>(e)</sup>	3307
2021	3095	1650 <sup>(6,8,9,10)</sup>	1400 <sup>(v,x,xi,xiii)</sup>	234 <sup>(1a)</sup>	45 <sup>(e)</sup>	3345
2022	3309	1764 <sup>(6,8,9,10)</sup>	1497 <sup>(v,x,xi,xiii)</sup>	234 <sup>(1a)</sup>	48 <sup>(e)</sup>	2982
2023	3349	1764 <sup>(6,8,9,10)</sup>	1537 <sup>(v,x,xi,xiii)</sup>	3192 <sup>(1a)</sup>	48 <sup>(e)</sup>	

\*TAC does not include TAC for rju.27.7de.

\*\*Data from 2005 onwards revised following 2016–2021 Data Call, with previous estimates in brackets. Data contain those species that are part of the TAC (raj.27.3a47d, rjc.27.3a47d, rjm.27.3a47d, rjh.27.4a6, rjh.27.4c7d and rjn.27.3a4) and include landings for *Raja undulata* and *Raja microcellata* declared by Member States in 7.d.

- 1) By-catch quota. These species shall not comprise more than 25% by live weight of the catch retained on board.
- 2) Catches of cuckoo ray *Leucoraja naevus*, thornback ray *Raja clavata*, blonde ray *Raja brachyura*, spotted ray *Raja montagui*, starry ray *Amblyraja radiata* and common skate *Dipturus batis* to be reported separately.
- 3) Catches of cuckoo ray *Leucoraja naevus*, thornback ray *Raja clavata*, blonde ray *Raja brachyura*, spotted ray *Raja montagui* and starry ray *Amblyraja radiata* to be reported separately.
- 4) By-catch quota. These species shall not comprise more than 25% by live weight of the catch retained on board. This condition applies only to vessels over 15 m length overall.
- 5) Does not apply to common skate *Dipturus batis*. Catches of this species may not be retained on board and shall be promptly released unharmed to the extent practicable. Fishers shall be encouraged to develop and use techniques and equipment to facilitate the rapid and safe release of the species.
- 6) Catches of cuckoo ray *Leucoraja naevus*, thornback ray *Raja clavata*, blonde ray *Raja brachyura* and spotted ray *Raja montagui* to be reported separately.
- 7) Shall not apply to common skate *Dipturus batis* complex and starry ray *Amblyraja radiata*. When accidentally caught, these species shall not be harmed. Specimens shall be promptly released. Fishermen shall be encouraged to develop and use techniques and equipment to facilitate the rapid and safe release of the species.
- 8) By-catch quota. These species shall not comprise more than 25% by live weight of the catch retained on board per fishing trip. This condition applies only to vessels over 15 metres' length overall. This condition applies only to vessels over 15 m LOA. This provision shall not apply for catches subject to the landing obligation as set out in Article 15(1) of Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013.

9) Shall not apply to blonde ray *Raja brachyura* in Union waters of 2.a and small-eyed ray *Raja microocellata* in Union waters of 2.a and 4. When accidentally caught, these species shall not be harmed. Specimens shall be promptly released. Fishermen shall be encouraged to develop and use techniques and equipment to facilitate the rapid and safe release of the species

10) Special condition: of which up to 10 % may be fished in Union waters of 7.d (SRX/\*07D2.), without prejudice to the prohibitions set out in Articles 13 and 45 of this Regulation for the areas specified therein. Catches of blonde ray (*Raja brachyura*) (RJH/\*07D2.), cuckoo ray (*Leucoraja naevus*) (RJN/\*07D2.), thornback ray (*Raja clavata*) (RJC/\*07D2.) and spotted ray (*Raja montagui*) (RJM/\*07D2.) shall be reported separately. This special condition shall not apply to small-eyed ray (*Raja microocellata*) and undulate ray (*Raja undulata*).

(i) Catches of cuckoo ray *Leucoraja naevus*, thornback ray *Raja clavata*, blonde ray *Raja brachyura*, spotted ray *Raja montagui* and starry ray *Amblyraja radiata* to be reported separately.

(ii) Does not apply to common skate *Dipturus batis* and undulate ray *Raja undulata*. Catches of these species may not be retained on board and shall be promptly released unharmed to the extent practicable. Fishers shall be encouraged to develop and use techniques and equipment to facilitate the rapid and safe release of the species.

(iii) Of which up to 5% may be fished in EU waters of 6.a-b, 7.a-c and 7.e-k

(iv) Catches of cuckoo ray *Leucoraja naevus*, thornback ray *Raja clavata*, blonde ray *Raja brachyura*, spotted ray *Raja montagui*, small-eyed ray *Raja microocellata* and starry ray *Amblyraja radiata* to be reported separately.

(v) Catches of cuckoo ray *Leucoraja naevus*, thornback ray *Raja clavata*, blonde ray *Raja brachyura*, spotted ray *Raja montagui* and small-eyed ray *Raja microocellata* to be reported separately.

(vi) Does not apply to common skate complex *Dipturus batis*, undulate ray *Raja undulata* and starry ray *Amblyraja radiata*. Catches of these species may not be retained on board and shall be promptly released unharmed to the extent practicable. Fishers shall be encouraged to develop and use techniques and equipment to facilitate the rapid and safe release of the species.

(vii) Catches of cuckoo ray *Leucoraja naevus*, thornback ray *Raja clavata*, blonde ray *Raja brachyura*, spotted ray *Raja montagui*, small-eyed ray *Raja microocellata* and undulate ray *Raja undulata* to be reported separately.

(viii) Undulate ray not to be targeted, with a trip limit of 20 kg live weight per trip, and catches to remain under an overall quota of 11 t

(ix) Undulate ray not to be targeted, with a trip limit of 40 kg live weight per trip, and to remain under an overall quota of 12 t

(x) of which up to 5 % may be fished in Union waters of 6.a, 6.b, 7.a-c and 7.e-k. This special condition shall not apply to small-eyed ray *Raja microocellata* and to undulate ray *Raja undulata*.

(xi) of which up to 10 % may be fished in Union waters of 2a and 4. This special condition shall not apply to small-eyed ray *Raja microocellata*.

(xii) Undulate ray not to be targeted. The catches shall remain under an overall quota of 19 t.

(xiii) Not applicable to undulate ray *Raja undulata*

1a) This species shall not be targeted in the areas covered by this TAC. This species may only be landed whole or gutted. The former provisions are without prejudice to the prohibitions set out in Articles 14 (16 in 2020 regulations) and 50 (52 in 2020 regulations) of this Regulation for the areas specified therein.

a) Catches of cuckoo ray *Leucoraja naevus*, thornback ray *Raja clavata*, blonde ray *Raja brachyura*, spotted ray *Raja montagui* and starry ray *Amblyraja radiata* to be reported separately.

b) Does not apply to common skate *Dipturus batis*. Catches of this species may not be retained on board and shall be promptly released unharmed to the extent practicable. Fishers shall be encouraged to develop and use techniques and equipment to facilitate the rapid and safe release of the species.

c) Catches of cuckoo ray *Leucoraja naevus*, blonde ray *Raja brachyura*, spotted ray *Raja montagui* and starry ray *Amblyraja radiata* to be reported separately.

d) Does not apply to common skate *Dipturus batis* and thornback ray *Raja clavata*. Catches of this species may not be retained on board and shall be promptly released unharmed to the extent practicable. Fishers shall be encouraged to develop and use techniques and equipment to facilitate the rapid and safe release of the species.

e) Catches of cuckoo ray *Leucoraja naevus*, blonde ray *Raja brachyura* and spotted ray *Raja montagui* to be reported separately.

f) Does not apply to common skate complex *Dipturus batis*, thornback ray *Raja clavata* and starry ray *Amblyraja radiata*. Catches of this species may not be retained on board and shall be promptly released unharmed to the extent practicable. Fishers shall be encouraged to develop and use techniques and equipment to facilitate the rapid and safe release of the species.

Within the North Sea ecoregion, some of the UK's Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities (IFCAs), formerly Sea Fisheries Committees, have a minimum landing size of 40 cm disc width for skates and rays.

In 2013, Dutch Producer Organisations introduced a minimum landings size of 55 cm (total length) for skates and rays. In addition, to keep landings within the national quota, the POs have implemented landing restrictions which may vary throughout the year to control the quota uptake. Restriction can vary between 40 and 250 kg dead weight. Since 2019, the weekly landings

were capped to 160 kg rays per trip. Similarly, Belgium implements a minimum landing size of 50 cm (total length) for skates and rays.

Since 2009, Norway has had a discard ban that applies to skates and sharks, as well as other fish, in the Norwegian Economic Zone. Whilst some discarding of skates is likely to have continued, the precise quantity is unknown.

## 15.3 Catch data

### 15.3.1 Landings

The landings tables for all rays and skates combined (tables 15.3.1–15.3.3) were updated in 2023. Since 2008, EC member states are required to provide species-specific landings data for the main species of rays and skates and these are collated by stock (Table 15.3.4). These data were all based on data submitted in the 2022 Data Call, with appropriate corrections made, following the recommendations of WKSHARK2 (ICES, 2016). During the 2023 WGEF data preparation meeting, historic data in the landings table were further harmonized and corrections were applied to certain stocks (i.e. re-assigning certain landings to the correct stock), including those that were benchmarked (ICES, 2023a).

Figure 15.3.1 shows the total international landings of rays and skates from Division 3.a, Subarea 4, and Division 7.d since 1973. The figure also includes the combined landings from Division 3.a and Subarea 4 plus the TAC for recent years. Data from 1973 onwards are WGEF estimates.

Up to the early 1990s, landings of skates in Division 7.d have been relatively stable around 1500 t, thereafter decreasing with lowest levels reported in the early 2000s (<1000 t). During 2007–2017 landings fluctuated around 1300 t. In 2020, landings were over 50% larger compared to 2015 (ca. 1808 t). Historically, estimated landings in Division 7.d have been much lower compared to landings in Subarea 4. However, in recent years landings in Division 7.d have increased and are higher than those estimated for the North Sea.

Landings of skates in Division 3.a (Skagerrak and Kattegat) are low compared to both other areas. Before the early 2000s landings have been relatively stable around 150 t. Since 2005 landings largely decreased (<50 t) with recent years showing similar levels to earlier years.

### 15.3.2 Discards

Information on discards in the different demersal fisheries is being collected by several Member States and was submitted to WGEF. In 2020, all discard data available in the WGEF accessions folders were collated into a single discard table. Since 2020, submitted discard data (both Inter-Catch and accessions) are added to the table annually. In 2023, the discard table was further harmonized and where applicable, corrections were made (i.e. adding blonde ray discards from Division 4.b to the in 2023 updated stock unit rjh.27.4bc7d). Whilst discard data are shown per stock from 2009 to 2022 (Table 15.3.5), these should be viewed with caution as further work is required in terms of QA/QC procedures prior to use in the assessments (see Section 1.14).

The estimation of elasmobranch total discards has raised concerns. This is because raising to national catch levels is uncertain, with raising procedures not standardized among member states. Consequently discard data were deemed unreliable and were not included in the 2021 advice of the skates within the North Sea ecoregion. The main issues concerning discards data are summarized in Section 1.14 of this report.

With the transition of *R. clavata*, *R. brachyura* and *R. montagui* from a Category 3 to Category 2 stocks, discard data is now included in the SPiCT models and the advice given in 2023. Further

information on the discard processing, reconstruction and inclusion in the models can be found in their respective stock annexes.

### 15.3.3 Discard survival

Skates and rays were due to come under the European Landing Obligation (LO) from 1 January 2019 onwards, and given the disparity in quota and actual landings, they were expected to become “choke” species in certain fisheries. As stated in STECF 2014 “Article 15 paragraph 2(b)”, exemptions from the LO are possible for species for which “scientific evidence demonstrates high survival rates”. There have since been exemptions made for skates and rays in the North Sea such that discarding has been allowed to occur until the end of 2023. During this period, additional data and information have been collected on survivability.

Ellis *et al.* (2017) provided a review of discard survival studies. Skates taken in coastal fisheries using trawls, longlines, gillnets and tangle nets generally show low at-vessel mortality (Ellis *et al.*, 2008a, 2018), though it should be noted that the inshore fleet generally have limited soak times and haul durations. Studies for beam trawlers indicate that just over 70% of skates may survive (Depestele *et al.*, 2014).

The SUMARiS project funded by the INTERREG 2 Seas Programme (2014–2020) provided further information on the vitality, reflex impairment, injury and survival probability of skates discarded in the English Channel and North Sea after being captured onboard commercial fishing vessels using active (beam trawl, otter trawl) or passive (gillnets, trammel nets) fishing gears. A total of 31 trips were organized on-board of French, English and Belgian commercial vessels. The discard survival probability (using immediate and delayed survival estimates (monitored in captivity for 21 days)) for thornback ray and blonde ray discarded by beam trawlers were 54% and 67%, respectively. Meanwhile otter trawlers showed overall survival estimates for thornback and blonde ray of 72% and 86%, respectively. For spotted ray and undulate ray by beam trawlers, the overall discard survival estimates were 27% and 58%, respectively (Van Bogaert *et al.*, 2020).

A Dutch study quantitatively estimated the longer-term discard survival probability of thornback ray. Discard survival was assessed during nine trips with commercial pulse-trawlers, monitoring survival in captivity for 15–18 days (Schram and Molenaar, 2018). The discard survival probability estimates varied among sea trips, resulting in a survival probability estimate of 53% (95% CI 40–65%). Also, during two trips, discard survival probabilities were estimated for spotted ray, resulting in survival probabilities of 21% and 67%. Given the limited numbers of observations per species, estimates should be considered and treated as a first indication of the actual discard survival probability for these species in the 80 mm pulse-trawl fisheries. Further quantitative estimates of longer-term survival are required for a variety of elasmobranchs captured in various European fisheries (Ellis *et al.*, 2018).

A more recent study combined available discard survival data for thornback ray, blonde ray and spotted ray from the SUMARiS project, FROM NORD (French flyshoot study) and Wageningen Marine Research (Villagra *et al.*, 2023). Discard survival was calculated for beam trawls, other bottom trawls, flyshoot gears and netters (when applicable). The results from this study were used during the 2023 benchmark to calculate the dead discards for each of the three benchmarked stocks (ICES, 2023).

## 15.4 Commercial landings composition

### 15.4.1 Length data of the catch

Length-frequency distributions of retained and discarded elasmobranchs were provided through the WKLIFE data-call in 2022 and in the WGEF data-call in 2023. In 2022, during the WGEF meeting, length data for all stocks were collected from both InterCatch and the accessions folder and collated into a single length data table. In 2023, additional data was added during the WGEF data preparation meeting.

### 15.4.2 Quality of data

Length data may have insufficient samples in a single year to be used annually and as a consequence length data is often pooled. For those stocks that were assessed following the *r/b* rule, length data were presented during the WGEF meeting and for each stock, it was decided whether data were sufficient to be used in the assessment. COVID-19 also reduced sampling levels in 2020 and 2021.

## 15.5 Commercial catch-effort data

There are no effort data specifically for North Sea skates and rays.

## 15.6 Fishery-independent surveys

Time-series of abundance and biomass indices for the most relevant species are available and are based on North Sea IBTS, BTS, and CGFS-Q4 surveys. Data were extracted from the DATRAS database or supplied by national laboratories. A description of the surveys is given below. Additional information on all these surveys was collated during WSKATE (ICES, 2021).

### 15.6.1 International Bottom Trawl Survey North Sea Q1 (IBTS-Q1) and Q3 (IBTS-Q3)

Fishery-independent data are available from the International Bottom Trawl Survey (IBTS), in winter (Q1) and summer (Q3). An overview of IBTS survey data for North Sea elasmobranchs is presented in Daan *et al.* (2005), with further information collated during WSKATE on all skates and rays encountered during these surveys (ICES, 2021).

Daan *et al.* (2005) also analysed the time-series of abundance for the major species caught for the period 1977–2004 (see Figure 12.3 of ICES, 2006). *A. radiata* appears to have increased from the late 1970s to the early 1980s, followed by a decline. The reasons for this decline are unknown, but could include changing environmental conditions, multi-species interactions (including with other skates), fishing impacts, or even improved species identification. The same patterns seem to apply to *L. naevus* and *R. montagui*, however, these species have also shown an increase in the most recent ten years in both the Q1 and Q3 surveys. The ‘common skate complex’ showed an overall decline, supporting the findings of ICES (2006). Since 2009 an increase of the ‘common skate complex’ has been observed (Figure 15.6.5). *R. clavata* has been stable, with one outlier in 1991 owing to a single exceptionally large catch (confirmed record), but shows an increasing trend in most recent years (Figure 15.6.3).



### 15.6.2 Channel groundfish survey

Martin *et al.* (2005) analysed data from the Channel Groundfish Survey (CGFS-Q4) and the Eastern Channel Beam Trawl Survey (UK (BTS-Q3)) for the years 1989–2004. Migratory patterns related to spawning and nursery areas were postulated, with the coast of southeast England an important habitat for *R. clavata*. Updated analyses for this survey were recently published by Martin *et al.* (2010, 2012). CGFS-Q4 continued in 2013, where high indices were noted for *R. clavata* and *R. undulata*. While most species fluctuate without a clear trend, *R. clavata* has increased in the last ten years. Information on *R. undulata* is presented in Section 18, as the main part of the stock is considered to occur in Division 7.e. For further information see also the 2021 WSKATE report (ICES, 2021).

### 15.6.3 Beam trawl surveys

The UK beam trawl survey in quarter 3 (BTS-Eng-Q3) started in the late 1980s, although the survey grid was not standardized until 1993 (see Ellis *et al.*, 2005a, b and Parker-Humphreys, 2005 for a description of the survey, ICES, 2021). The primary target species for the survey are commercial flatfish (plaice *Pleuronectes platessa* and sole *Solea solea*) and so most sampling effort occurs in relatively shallow water. *Raja brachyura*, *R. clavata*, *R. montagui* and *R. undulata* are all sampled during this survey.

The Dutch beam trawl survey in quarter 3 consists of two parts: the BTS-ISIS-Q3 started in the late 1980s, and the NL BTS Tridens or BTS-TRI-Q3 started in the 1990s. The primary target species for these surveys are commercial flatfish (plaice and sole). The BTS ISIS fishes in the Southern North Sea, and the BTS Tridens fishes in the Southern and central North Sea. For more detailed information see also WSKATE report (ICES, 2021).

Data from the German beam trawl survey in quarter 3 (BTS-GFR-Q3) has also been available since the late 2000s (ICES, 2021). Catch rates are generally lower than for the other BTS surveys, with the exception of *A. radiata*.

Data from the Belgian beam trawl survey in quarter 3 (BTS-BEL-Q3) have been uploaded to DATRAS for the following years 2010–2022. Historical data (prior to 2010) are being prepared for uploading to DATRAS. This North Sea survey is organized yearly at the end of August and beginning of September since 1985 on-board of the RV Belgica and covers an important area in the south-western part of the North Sea (i.e. Greater Thames estuary and the Wash). The most abundant skate species observed in the survey are thornback ray *Raja clavata* and spotted ray *Raja montagui*. Figure 15.6.8 shows the distribution plots for these species from all BTS surveys in the central-southern North Sea and shows that the highest concentrations (numbers per km<sup>2</sup>) are covered by the Belgian BTS. Other elasmobranchs such as lesser-spotted dogfish (*Scyliorhinus canicula*) are caught in large numbers, while smooth-hounds *Mustelus sp.* and blonde ray *Raja brachyura* are also caught, though in smaller numbers. For more detailed information see also WSKATE report (ICES, 2021).

### 15.6.4 Index calculations

Survey data for the IBTS Q1 and Q3, as well as BTS-ISI-Q3, BTS-TRI-Q3 and BTS-GFR-Q3 were downloaded from DATRAS in June 2022 as CPUE per length per haul. For the CGFS-Q4 and BTS-Eng-Q3, exchange data were downloaded from DATRAS, while the BTS-BEL-Q3 survey data refer to data held within the national database.

For IBTS and BTS, starting from the CPUE (in numbers per hour) per length per haul, indices were calculated for n. hr<sup>-1</sup>, biomass hr<sup>-1</sup>, and exploitable biomass h<sup>-1</sup>. Data for exploitable biomass

relate to individuals  $\geq 50$  cm total length. This was done by first combining observations for *Dipturus batis* (including for the junior synonym *Dipturus flossada*) and *Dipturus intermedius* as “common skate complex”, and then by splitting the observations for *Raja brachyura* for areas 4.a and 4.c. Only IBTS roundfish areas 1–7 were used when calculating indices for the IBTS-Q1 and IBTS-Q3. Data included in the calculations relate to successfully fished (valid) hauls.

Zero observations were added for all length-haul combinations. The average CPUE per length per ICES statistical was then calculated from the CPUE per length per haul. The CPUE per length per ICES statistical rectangle data was combined with the life history information to obtain CPUE per length per ICES statistical rectangle in numbers per hour and in weight per hour. These were summed across lengths to obtain the overall CPUE per ICES statistical rectangle (numbers and biomass).

For each survey, the annual index value was calculated for the mean catch rate by abundance (mean  $n \cdot h^{-1}$ ), total biomass (mean  $kg \cdot h^{-1}$ ) and exploitable biomass ( $kg \cdot h^{-1}$ ) with associated confidence intervals (95% CI). These values were obtained through the method of bootstrapping (1000 replicates) using ‘boot’ R package (Davison and Hinkley, 1997; Canty and Ripley, 2021). Input data were the total number (abundance), total biomass and exploitable biomass per statistical rectangle and year (including zero catches), thus obtaining an annual mean value with a lower and upper confidence limit.

For the BTS-Eng-Q3, survey indices for the whole time series were updated following recommendations from WKSKATE (ICES, 2021). Additionally, calculations are now based on DATRAS exchange data as per ICES (2021) and this is contrary to the indices used in the 2019 assessments, with the latter previously described in Silva and Ellis (2019).

The CGFS-Q4 indices were calculated using a swept area approach ( $km^2$ ) for the total abundance, total and exploitable biomass, following the methodology developed during WKSKATE (ICES, 2021). Catches in weight per haul were calculated using a length-weight relationship from McCully *et al.* (2012).

The abundance indices in  $n \cdot h^{-1}$  for the different species are presented in Tables 15.6.1–15.6.7. The biomass indices in  $kg \cdot h^{-1}$  are presented in Tables 15.6.8–15.6.14. The exploitable biomass indices in  $kg \cdot h^{-1}$  are presented in Tables 15.6.15–15.6.21. CGFS-Q4 results are per  $km^2$  instead of per hour in all the tables. It is important to note that while CGFS-Q4 2020 data are shown in this report, these should be viewed with caution as survey spatial coverage was reduced due to the lack of dispensation to fish in ICES rectangles 29F1 and 30E9. All indices including the 95% CIs are also given in Figures 15.6.1–15.6.7.

## 15.7 Life-history information

Elasmobranchs are not routinely aged, although techniques for ageing are available (e.g. Walker, and Hislop, 1998; Serra-Pereira *et al.*, 2005). Limited numbers of species have been aged in dedicated studies.

Updated length-weight conversion factors and lengths-at-maturity are available for nine skate species (McCully *et al.*, 2012; Silva *et al.*, 2013). The length-weight conversions used for the calculations of the fisheries independent biomass indices are given in Table 15.7.1. Three species had conversion factors specific to the North Sea ecoregion, with the lengths at maturity for both sexes of *L. naevus*, and female *R. clavata*, being significantly smaller in the North Sea than the Celtic Seas ecoregion.

Demographic modelling requires more accurate life-history parameters, in terms of age or length and fecundity. An overview of the life-history parameters for North Sea stocks of *R. clavata*, *R. brachyura* and *R. montagui* was provided by Ellis *et al.* (2023a) and included information on the

length-weight relationship, length-at-maturity, growth rates and annual fecundity. This overview provided initial proposals for values that could be used in the benchmark assessment process. Further information on life-history parameters for these stocks can be found in their respective stock annexes.

With the development of the *rfb* rules by ICES, knowledge of the growth parameter  $k$  and  $L_{inf}$  is needed. Ellis *et al.* (2023b) provided a working document summarising available data on the growth rate from the published literature for some of the main species of skate and catsharks.

### 15.7.1 Ecologically important habitats

Ecologically important habitats for the skates include (a) oviposition (egg-laying) sites (b) nursery grounds; (c) habitats of the rare species, as well as other sites where there can be large aggregations (e.g. for mating or feeding).

Little is known about the presence of egg-laying grounds, although parts of the southern North Sea (e.g. the Thames area) are known to have large numbers of juvenile *R. clavata* (Ellis *et al.*, 2005a) and egg-laying is thought to occur in both the inshore grounds of the Outer Thames estuary and the Wash.

Trawl surveys could provide useful information on catches of (viable) skate egg-cases. This recommendation has therefore been put into the offshore and inshore manuals of the trawl surveys (ICES, 2011). The Netherlands already collects data on viable elasmobranch egg-cases.

Surveys may be able to provide information on the locations of nursery grounds and other juvenile habitats, and these should be further investigated to identify sites where there are large numbers of 0-groups and where these life-history stages are found on a regular basis.

Little is known about the habitats of the rare elasmobranch species, and further investigations on these are required (e.g. Martin *et al.*, 2010; 2012; Ellis *et al.*, 2012).

## 15.8 Exploratory assessment models

Different methods have been explored to assess the stock status of several skate species. Early assessments methods as conducted under the DELASS project (Heessen, 2003) and the SPANdex approach were used to examine changes in abundance and distribution of the four main skate species in the North Sea (*A. radiata*, *L. naevus*, *R. clavata* and *R. montagui*). These have been extensively discussed in previous ICES reports (ICES, 2002 and 2007). In 2017, SPiCT was trialled for two North Sea stocks (*R. clavata* and *L. naevus*). While the model performed reasonably well, these were not further developed until 2023. In 2023, SPiCT was explored and accepted for 3 North Sea stocks (ICES, 2023a).

The ICES Workshop on the Development of Quantitative Assessment Methodologies based on life-history traits, exploitation characteristics, and other relevant parameters for data-limited stocks (WKLIFE) has worked on further developing methods for stock assessment and catch advice for Category 3 and 4 stocks. Within these workshops, methods (i.e. *rfb* rule) for data-limited stocks have been explored and evaluated resulting in the application of these empirical rules for North Sea elasmobranch stocks.

## 15.9 Stock assessment

The stocks listed below were assessed in 2023. For Category 5 and 6 stocks there were no changes to the assessment methods. Category 3 stocks were assessed using the ICES framework (*rfb* rule, method 2.1, ICES, 2022b).

Following the new *rfb* methodology also means that average comparisons of indices has changed from the mean values of the previous two years over the preceding five years (2/5 rule) to the mean values of the previous two years over the preceding three years (2/3 rule).

Three stocks were benchmarked in 2023 and are now Category 2 stocks which were assessed using a Surplus Production model in Continuous Time (SPiCT, Pedersen and Berg 2017).

### 15.9.1 Blonde ray in Subarea 6 and Division 4.a

*Raja brachyura* has a patchy distribution in Subarea 6. It is not encountered in sufficient numbers in surveys to derive trends in abundance/biomass. The stock is considered to extend into the north-western North Sea (Division 4.a) and may also extend along the west coast of Ireland. This Subarea 6 and Division 4.a stock was assessed in North Sea biennial advice years (2021, 2023 etc.) previously, but the decision was made in 2023 that this stock will now be assessed and advice drafted quadrennially. It was last assessed as a Category 5 stock in 2023, using landings data only. WSKATE (ICES, 2021) examined this stock as a case-study and determined that there was no suitable survey or combination of surveys that could be used in a Category 3 assessment.

### 15.9.2 Blonde ray in Divisions 4.b, 4.c and 7.d

*Raja brachyura* has a patchy distribution and the stock boundaries have previously not been well defined. Currently there are two stock units in the North Sea ecoregion (rjh.27.4a6 and rjh.27.4bc7d). The latter stock unit formerly included only Divisions 4.c and 7.d. However, studies using tagging data and analysis of survey data showed a spill-over from the north of 4.c to the south of 4.b in recent years. This has led to the inclusion of Division 4.b in the stock unit in 2023.

In previous assessments, only the French Channel Groundfish Survey (FR-CGFS-Q4) was used to obtain an exploitable biomass index (individuals  $\geq 50$  cm). Catch rates are variable, though there is a clear sign of improving status in recent years. This survey mainly covers Division 7.d. Catch rates in both International Bottom Trawl Surveys (NS-IBTS-Q1 and NS-IBTS-Q3) are highly variable, with a large number of zero hauls recorded. As the NS-IBTS-Q1 and NS-IBTS-Q3 cover a broader range of the stock unit, it was decided to include these surveys for the index calculations (ICES, 2023a). A Generalized Additive Model (GAM) with a Delta-lognormal distribution was used to obtain an exploitable biomass index. The combined index is presented in Figure 15.9.1 and shows that exploitable biomass is low in earlier years of the time series. In years 1990, 1991 and 1996, the numbers of records was too low to estimate exploitable biomass. Since 2012, there is an increase in exploitable biomass and a wider spatial distribution in Divisions 4.c and 7.d.

#### 15.9.2.1 Benchmark assessment

A benchmark assessment of this stock took place in 2023 (WKBELASMO 2023). The results are outlined in the benchmark report (ICES, 2023a) and the stock annex.

The application of a new SPiCT model allowed the estimation of relative reference points. The assessment of the stock indicates that  $F$  is below  $F_{MSY}$  and  $B$  is above  $B_{MSY}$ . ICES catch advice is based on the 15<sup>th</sup> percentile of predicted catch distribution, which is considered more precautionary than the 35<sup>th</sup> percentile which is the default method. The choice of the 15<sup>th</sup> percentile was justified by the need for a more precautionary management for long-lived species such as elasmobranchs, especially where advised catch are much larger than catch in the previous years.

### **15.9.3 Common skate complex (Blue skate *Dipturus batis* and flapper skate *D. intermedius*) in Subarea 4 and Division 3.a**

The common skate complex is known to comprise two species, the common blue skate and the flapper skate. Available information suggests that flapper skate occurs in the northern parts of the stock area, where it likely merges with the neighbouring population in subareas 6 and 2. The distribution extends into the west of Scotland and the Norwegian Sea (based on comparisons of historical and temporary trawl survey data). Common skate has long been considered depleted however, in the last 10 years, catch rates have increased in both IBTS surveys.

No landings of these species have been allowed from UK and EU waters since 2009 and both have been on the prohibited species list since 2010. Nevertheless, ICES estimates of landings are available in Subarea 4 and Division 3.a, with the majority of these landings coming from Denmark. Denmark states that these landings are occurring in Norwegian waters.

In 2023, ICES was requested to provide advice for this stock unit. Given the lack of robust survey data over the stock range, and lack of landings data, a Category 6 assessment was applied to this stock. WGEF considers that trends in stock size or indicator cannot be evaluated.

### **15.9.4 Cuckoo ray in Subarea 4 and Division 3.a**

Cuckoo ray is a small-bodied skate with a widespread distribution. Within the Greater North Sea ecoregion it is found mainly in the northern areas of the North Sea (Division 4.a). The combined exploitable biomass (individuals  $\geq 50$  cm) index ( $\text{kg h}^{-1}$ ) used in the assessment is calculated using the NS-IBTS-Q1 and NS-IBTS-Q3 surveys for years 1991-2022. The stock has shown a decreasing trend in the last years of time series, with an increase in 2022. The 2/3 rule resulted in a decrease of 18%.

In 2023, the stock was assessed using the ICES *rfb*-rule. Length-data is available from 2016-2022, for which the last 4 years (2019-2022) are considered to have sufficient coverage. For 2019, no length data were available, therefore years 2020-2022 were used to calculate the length-based reference points. Full details of the input parameters for the *rfb* assessment can be found in Appendix 1 of this chapter.

### **15.9.5 Spotted ray in Subarea 4 and Divisions 3.a and 7.d**

Spotted ray is a small-bodied skate species with a widespread distribution in the North-east Atlantic. There is limited information available on the stock structure; there is evidence of movement between Divisions 4.c and 4.b and between Divisions 7.d and 4.c, however, there is no information available to confirm the inclusion of Division 4.a in the stock unit. The stock was benchmarked in 2023 (ICES, 2023a).

The inclusion of surveys for this stock unit was assessed in WSKATE in 2020 (ICES, 2021). A combined exploitable biomass (individuals  $\geq 50$  cm) index ( $\text{kg h}^{-1}$ ) for the NS-IBTS-Q1 and NS-IBTS-Q3 has been used with a design-based approach to combine the surveys. In 2023, a modelled-based approach was used for combining different relevant surveys. This led to the

inclusion of five more surveys (FR-CGFS-Q4, BTS-BEL-Q3, BTS-Eng-Q3, BTS-NL-TRI-Q3 and BTS-NL-ISI-Q3). A Generalized Additive Model (GAM) with a Delta-lognormal distribution was used to model two separate indices splitting the different surveys based on seasonality. The NS-IBTS-Q1 and FR-CGFS-Q4 were combined with consecutive years. All surveys carried out in Q3 were combined into a second index. Furthermore, a biomass index of individuals  $\geq 30$  cm was chosen, instead of exploitable biomass. The indices are presented in Figure 15.9.2 and follow the same trend. In summary, biomass has been stable from the beginning of the time series and shows a slight increasing trend since 2006.

#### 15.9.5.1 Benchmark assessment

A benchmark assessment of this stock took place in 2023 (WKBELASMO 2023). The results are outlined in the benchmark report (ICES, 2023a) and the stock annex.

The application of a new SPiCT model allowed the estimation of relative reference points. The assessment of the stock showed that  $F$  is currently below  $F_{MSY}$  and  $B$  is above  $B_{MSY}$ . ICES catch advice is based on the 15<sup>th</sup> percentile of predicted catch distribution, which is considered more precautionary than the 35<sup>th</sup> percentile which is the default method. The choice of the 15<sup>th</sup> percentile was justified by the need for a more precautionary management for long-lived species such as elasmobranchs, especially where advised catch are much larger than catch in the previous years.

### 15.9.6 Starry ray in Subarea 2 and 4 and Division 3.a

This small-bodied skate is distributed mainly in the Northern parts of the North Sea. It is listed on the prohibited species list and has a zero catch advice. The combined abundance index ( $n \text{ h}^{-1}$ ) used in the assessment is calculated using the NS-IBTS-Q1 and NS-IBTS-Q3 surveys for years 1991-2022 and is considered to cover most of the stock area. The stock has been decreasing since 2001 and the 2/3 rule resulted in an  $r$  of 0.75. Length information is limited and derived purely from the discarded proportion of the catch (i.e., no length data from landings data is available). Only the years 2019 and 2022 are considered to have sufficient coverage to facilitate the calculation of the length-based reference points. Full details of the input parameters for the  $r_{fb}$  assessment can be found in Appendix 2 of this chapter. The catch advice resulting from the 2023 assessment is zero t.

### 15.9.7 Thornback ray in Subarea 4 and Divisions 3.a and 7.d

Thornback ray is the most common skate species in the Greater North Sea ecoregion. The population structure has been studied using both genetics and tagging. Genetic studies have shown that within the ecoregion, there are few genetic differences between individuals sampled from the different Divisions. Furthermore, based on available tagging data it was found that there is a clear exchange of thornback ray within Divisions 4.b-c and 7.d. Information on the exchange with Divisions 3.a and 4.a is limited.

There has been no update to the surveys used to indicate the stock status. Currently included surveys are NS-IBTS-Q1, NS-IBTS-Q3, FR-CGFS-Q4, BTS-BEL-Q3 and BTS-Eng-Q3. During the benchmark process, the index calculation process has changed from a design-based to a modelled-based approach. Furthermore it was decided to use a biomass index (individuals  $\geq 30$  cm), instead of an exploitable biomass index. A Generalized Additive Model (GAM) with a Delta-lognormal distribution was used to model two separate indices splitting the different surveys based on seasonality. The NS-IBTS-Q1 and FR-CGFS-Q4 were combined with consecutive years. All surveys carried out in Q3 were combined into a second index. The combined indices are presented in Figure 15.9.3 and show that biomass is low during the earlier years of the time

series. Since 2012, there is a notable increase in biomass up until 2020. In more recent years, biomass has been decreasing. Highest numbers are found in the English Channel (Division 7.d).

#### 15.9.7.1 Benchmark assessment

A benchmark assessment of this stock took place in 2023 (WKBELASMO 2023). The results are outlined in the benchmark report (ICES, 2023a) and the stock annex.

The application of a new SPiCT model allowed for the estimation of relative reference points. The assessment of the stock showed that  $F$  is currently below  $F_{MSY}$  and  $B$  is above  $B_{MSY}$ . ICES catch advice is based on the 15<sup>th</sup> percentile of predicted catch distribution, which is considered more precautionary than the 35<sup>th</sup> percentile which is the default method. The choice of the 15<sup>th</sup> percentile was justified by the need for a more precautionary management for long-lived species such as elasmobranchs, especially where advised catch are much larger than catch in the previous years.

### 15.9.8 Other rays and skates in Subarea 4 and Divisions 3.a and 7.d

This advice unit relates to those skates (order *Rajiformes*) not specified elsewhere in the ICES advisory process. It includes skate stocks in the Greater North Sea ecoregion, but does not refer to stingrays or electric rays. The skate species considered here include Arctic skate *Amblyraja hyperborea*, sandy ray *Leucoraja circularis*, shagreen ray *Leucoraja fullonica*, sailray *Rajella lintea*, and occasional records for species occurring outside of their allocated stock units (e.g. blonde ray in Division 3.a). Blonde ray catches in Division 4.b have now been allocated to rjh.27.4bc7d stock. Some of the generic skate landings are likely to be commercial species for which ICES provides species-specific advice. The species composition of the catch is mostly unknown. The decrease in generic landings is due to the introduction and improvement in species-specific recording of the main commercial skate and ray species since 2009. The majority of landings submitted as unspecified rays and skates are from Divisions 3.a and 4.a. In 2023, the ICES framework for category 6 stocks was applied. Due to the lack of sufficient survey and catch, catch advice on this stock could not be provided.

## 15.10 Quality of assessments

There are several issues that influence the evaluation of stock status:

1. Length data may have insufficient samples in a single year and therefore length data are often pooled.
2. The stock identity for many species is not accurately known (although there have been some tagging and genetic studies to inform on some species).
3. The identification of skate species is considered to be reliable for recent surveys, although occasional misidentifications may still occur.

For the three benchmarked stocks (rjh.27.4bc7d, rjm.27.3a47d and rjc.27.3a47d) SPiCT was adopted as assessment method. These new assessments resulted in stocks moving from the ICES stock Category 3 to Category 2. The application of new methods also led to a changed perception of the stock and a major increase in advised catch.

Increased advice following a stock category change is somewhat expected. This is because as advice under the precautionary approach (ICES category 3) is calculated using a method that is explicitly designed to be precautionary and to prevent stock depletion in the absence of sufficient data to support a quantitative assessment. In comparison, advice for Category 2 stocks is given under the MSY approach.

## 15.11 Reference points

No official reference points have been adopted for any stock that has not been through the benchmark process. The three benchmark stocks have now  $F_{MSY}$  and  $B_{MSY}$  reference points. Proxy length-based reference points are now also calculated for Category 3 stocks that use the ICES *rfb* method.

## 15.12 Conservation considerations

Both members of the ‘common skate complex’ are considered ‘Critically Endangered’ by the IUCN, and ‘*D. batis*’, *R. montagui*, and *R. clavata* are all on the OSPAR list of Threatened and Declining species. However, WKSTATUS considered that both *R. montagui* and *R. clavata* do not continue to justify inclusion in the OSPAR list (ICES, 2020).

Various elasmobranchs are contained in the Swedish Red List (Gärdenfors, 2010), with *R. lintea* considered Near Threatened, *R. clavata* considered Endangered, and ‘*D. batis*’ considered Regionally Extirpated.

The Norwegian Red List (Gjøsæter *et al.*, 2010) includes various skates. ‘*D. batis*’ (complex) is considered Critically Endangered, and *B. spinicauda*, *D. nidarosiensis* and *L. fullonica* are all considered Near Threatened.

## 15.13 Management considerations

Skates are usually caught in mixed fisheries for demersal teleosts, although some inshore long-line and gillnet fisheries target *R. clavata* in seasonal fisheries in the south-western North Sea. *Raja brachyura* may be locally and seasonally important for some inshore fisheries.

Up to 2008, skates were traditionally landed and reported in mixed categories such as “skates and rays”. For assessment purposes, species-specific landings data are essential. Species-specific reporting for the main skate species has been required since 2008. An increasing proportion of skate landings are now reported to species and, whilst there are some inconsistencies, the overall proportions broadly correspond with what would be expected, given survey information. Nevertheless, some doubt exists as to the quality of some of the data provided, particularly the distinction between *R. montagui* and *R. brachyura*. Continued species-specific reporting is required, and further scientific sampling of commercial catches (to validate species-specific landings) and training are required.

A TAC for skates was first established for Union waters of Division 2.a and Subarea 4 (combined) in 2009. Since 2009, there have been three separate TAC areas in this ecoregion: Union waters of Division 2.a and Subarea 4 (combined); Division 3.a; and Division 7.d.

Landings have been at or above the TAC since 2006 (but slightly above in Division 7.d, possibly due to transfer between 7.d and 7.e) (Figure 15.3.1) and may now be restrictive for some fisheries. Since its introduction, the TAC has gradually been reduced, which may have induced regulatory discarding. In recent years (2016–2020), the TAC has increased slightly.

At-vessel mortality is low for inshore trawlers in the south-western North Sea, as tow duration tends to be relatively short and longline fisheries also have low at-vessel mortality (Ellis *et al.*, 2008a, b, 2018). At-vessel mortality in gillnets may also be low, depending on soak-time. A study on survival from beam trawlers indicated survival of >70% for skates (Depestele *et al.*, 2014). Discard survival probability varies significantly according to species and gear combination and ranged between 27% and 86%. Fish condition, individual length and sorting time strongly



affected both short and medium-term survival (Van Bogaert *et al.*, 2020). In pulse-trawlers the long-term discard survival probability for thornback ray was estimated to be 53% (Schram and Molenaar, 2018).

Effort restrictions and high fuel prices have resulted in reduced effort, but can also result in using different gears with different catchabilities for skates. Also, some fisheries may redirect effort to fishing grounds closer to port, which may affect more coastal species, such as *R. clavata* in the Thames estuary and in the Wash in the south-western North Sea.

Current TAC regulations have a condition so that “up to 5% [of the TAC for Union waters of 6.a-b, 7.a-c and 7.e-k] may be fished in Union waters of 7.d”. Whilst it is pragmatic allowing vessels in the English Channel (7.d-e) to transfer quota between these divisions, further studies to examine the implications of this needs to be evaluated. For example, 5% of the overall 2014 quota for 6.a-b, 7.a-c and 7.e-k (8032 t) is 401.6 t, which is more than half of the 2014 TAC for 7.d (798 t). Whilst this is a theoretical maximum and unlikely to be realised, further studies of this issue are required.

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## 15.15 Tables and Figures

**Table 15.3.1.** Demersal elasmobranchs in the North Sea, Skagerrak, Kattegat and eastern Channel. Total landings of skates (Rajidae) in ICES Division 3.a (in tonnes). Note blank = no data reported; that "0" indicates landings <0.5. Data from 2005 onwards from the 2016–2022 Data Call.

Year	DK	DE	NL	NOR	SE	Total
1999	11			208	2	221
2000	41			123	2	166
2001	56			154	12	222
2002	22			159	13	194
2003	36			163	9	208
2004	129			85	20	234
2005	65	0		94	10	170
2006	25	0.5	0	51	18	95
2007	8	0	0	13	11	33
2008	4	0		23	6	33
2009	12			33	2	47
2010	12			24	10	45
2011	43	0		25	3	71
2012	16	0		28	3	47 <sup>^</sup>
2013	18	0		50	6	74 <sup>^</sup>
2014	14	0		39	3	56
2015	27	0	0	32		60
2016	40		0	50	0	90
2017	72	0		55	0	128
2018	157	0	0	52	0	209
2019	122		0	34	2	159
2020	108		2	31	0	141
2021	122		0.8	41	0	164
2022	100		0.5	31	0	132

<sup>^</sup> Data revised in 2021.

**Table 15.3.2. Demersal elasmobranchs in the North Sea, Skagerrak, Kattegat and eastern Channel. Total landings of skates (Rajidae) in ICES Subarea 4 (in tonnes). Note: blank = no data reported; "0" indicates landings <0.5. Data from 2005 onwards from the 2016–2021 Data Call. Data include accepted lower quantities of landings for *Raja microcellata* and *Raja undulata* declared by Member States in 4.c.**

Year	BEL	DK	FRA	DE	IRL	NLD	NOR	SE	GBR	Total
1999	336	45	41	16		515	152		1583	2688
2000	332	93	31	23		693	161		1376	2709
2001	370	65	61	11		834	173		1298	2812
2002	436	34	62	22		805	83		1353	2794
2003	323	33	36	21		686	113		1278	2490
2004	276	25	37	17		561	77		1062	2055
2005	350	25	60	28		493	87	0	833	1876
2006	346	28	77	16		530	98	0	732	1826
2007	261	29	66	17		659	71	0	704	1807
2008	387	24	72	29		506	97	0	762	1878
2009	302^	30	80	22		379	121	0	666	1600^
2010	288	30	95^	32		390	105	0	663^	1604^
2011	237	38	63^	19		212	56	0.5	788	1412^
2012	188	21	49	17		431	69	0	662	1438^
2013	214	45	51	25		312	74	0	804	1526
2014	199	45^	53	32		225	88	0	778	1422^
2015	246	40	25	25		274	62		666	1338^
2016	188^	41	40	50		281	69	0	664^	1334^
2017	181^	40	38	42		287	91	0	700	1382^
2018	178	55^	36	55		362	118	0	809	1615^
2019	148	67^	47	53		320	128	0	768	1530^
2020	95	34	55	52		372	106	0	496	1291^
2021	172^	72	29	12		321	72		674	1353^
2022	123	59	17	19	2	336	86		514	1156

^ Data revised in 2022.

**Table 15.3.3. Demersal elasmobranchs in the North Sea, Skagerrak, Kattegat and eastern Channel. Total landings of skates (Rajidae) in ICES Division 7.d (in tonnes). Note: blank = no data reported; "0" indicates landings <0.5. Data from 2005 onwards from the 2016–2021 Data Call. Data include landings of *Raja microcellata* and *Raja undulata* declared by Member States in 7.d.**

Year	BEL	DE	FRA	IRL	NLD	UK	Total
1999	93		558			437	1088
2000	69		693			355	1117
2001	79		729			169	977
2002	113		725			140	978
2003	153		796			186	1135
2004	96		695			157	948
2005	100		940	0	9	144	1193
2006	113		738		12	144	1007
2007	158		926		18	204	1305
2008	171		880		12	209	1272
2009	119		1185		10	164	1327 <sup>^</sup>
2010	88 <sup>^</sup>		1033 <sup>^</sup>		10	139	1203 <sup>^</sup>
2011	106		966 <sup>^</sup>		12	152 <sup>^</sup>	1201 <sup>^</sup>
2012	105		931 <sup>^</sup>		14	172	1315 <sup>^</sup>
2013	131		1024 <sup>^</sup>		4	193	1368 <sup>^</sup>
2014	112		1040 <sup>^</sup>		6	194 <sup>^</sup>	1358 <sup>^</sup>
2015	115		879 <sup>^</sup>		3	147 <sup>^</sup>	1143 <sup>^</sup>
2016	137 <sup>^</sup>		916 <sup>^</sup>		8	201 <sup>^</sup>	1261 <sup>^</sup>
2017	142 <sup>^</sup>		917 <sup>^</sup>		9	237 <sup>^</sup>	1304 <sup>^</sup>
2018	166		1182 <sup>^</sup>		25	302 <sup>^</sup>	1674 <sup>^</sup>
2019	183		1303 <sup>^</sup>		31	309 <sup>^</sup>	1826 <sup>^</sup>
2020	207		1321 <sup>^</sup>		43	313 <sup>^</sup>	1884 <sup>^</sup>
2021	182 <sup>^</sup>		1304	2	33	313	1833 <sup>^</sup>
2022	202	0.7	1161	0.9	54	289	1706

<sup>^</sup> Data revised in 2022.

**Table 15.3.4. Demersal elasmobranchs in the North Sea, Skagerrak, Kattegat and eastern Channel. Landings per stock and country in the North Seas ecoregion (Subarea 4 and divisions 3.a and 7.d) (in tonnes). Note: blank = no data reported; "0" indicates landings <0.5; ^ data revised in 2022**

raj.27.3a47d										
Year	BEL	DE	DK	FRA	GBR	IRL	NLD	NOR	SE	Total
2005	450.1	28.3	90.0	754.9	977.2	0.1	501.5	181.0^	10.4	2993.4^
2006	458.4	16.6	53.0	675.1	876.2		541.8	149.2	17.7	2788.0
2007	417.2	17.6	37.0	735.4	907.8		677.1	84.3	11.2	2887.5
2008	183.1^	29.3	28.0	806.7	720.5^		64.1^	119.6	6.4	1957.7^
2009	126.9^	22.1	40.0	578.1	408.9^		2.2^	153.6	2.0	1333.8^
2010	134.1^	32.4	39.0	444.7	202.4^		4.2^	128.9^	9.5	995.2^
2011	92.1^	19.0	77.0	378.7	134.1^		5.1^	80.5^	2.8	789.4^
2012	37.6^	16.8	37.0	248.9	102.6^		19.8^	97.1^	1.6	561.4^
2013	6.8^	25.1	60.0	107.1	95.4^		9.0^	123.6^	4.2	431.3^
2014	3.0^	32.2	49.0	40.5	78.0^		7.7^	127.3^	3.2	341.0^
2015	2.4^	25.1	62.6	17.5	28.9^		2.2^	94.7		233.4^
2016	11.2^	11.7	74.8	19.9	24.3^		0.5^	119.1	0	261.4^
2017	1.1^	8.4	88.2	25.6	30.6^		0.7^	146.0	^	300.4^
2018	4.3	9.8	169.8	21.0	29.5^			169.4		403.8^
2019	0.7	2.3^	117.3	9.7	45.4^			162.3	2.6	340.3^
2020	1.1		74.4^	10.0	18.8^			137.1	0.4	241.8^
2021	6.0^		135.1^	13.9	29.0^			112.3	0	296.3^
2022	0.4		105.2	10.8	17.7			116.9		251.1

rjb.27.3a4								
Year	BEL	DE	DK	FRA	GBR	NLD	SE	Total
2005					0.7			0.7
2006					0.1		0.4	0.5
2007					0.1		0	0.1
2008	0				0.2	0.5	0	0.8
2009				2.0	0.2	7.0		9.2
2010	0			2.0	0.5	0.7	0.5	3.7
2011				1.0	0.1	4.2	0	6.0
2012						1.8	0.5	3.7
2013					0.0	1.0	1.9	2.9
2014					0.0	0.3		0.3
2015				0.7		0.3		1.0
2016				2.0		0.3	0	2.4
2017				15.7	0.1	0.7	0	16.5
2018	0			25.3		0.4^	0.5	26.0
2019				14.8		0	0.2	15.1
2020			0	7.3		0.7	0.5	8.6



rjb.27.3a4								
Year	BEL	DE	DK	FRA	GBR	NLD	SE	Total
2021			5.1		0	0.1		5.2
2022		0	12.1		0.1			12.3

rjc.27.3a47d										
Year	BEL	DE	DK	FRA	GBR	IRL	NLD	NOR	SE	Total
2005				196.4	0			0.8		197.2
2006				107.8					0	107.9
2007	0.6			155.3	0				0	155.9
2008	214.2			90.1	208.9		196.6	0.0		709.7
2009	153.9		0.3^	458.9^	335.6^		178.1			1126.6^
2010	163.0^		1.2^	546.2^	410.0^		203.1			1323.4^
2011	163.9		1.0	530.1^	486.2^		97.0		0	1278.5^
2012	154.3		0.3^	764.2^	478.6^		186.3		0	1583.8
2013	200.7		2.1^	926.6^	573.8^		149.0			1852.3^
2014	205.9		8.7^	987.8^	571.6^		130.8			1904.7^
2015	219.1		3.7	833.0^	448.3^		160.6			1664.7^
2016	197.3^	33.8	2.7	869.9^	519.3^		185.2		0	1808.1^
2017	174.8^	27.6^	1.1	824.5^	598.3^		162.6		0^	1789.3^
2018	193.3	33.0	1.7	1115.5^	665.3^		209.8^		0	2218.8^
2019	192.2	36.9	0.1	1197.9^	592.4^		193.6^		0	2213.1^
2020	169.1	41.5	3.7	1256.3^	489.8^		282.7			2243.0^
2021	175.7^	10.4	18.7	1239.4	561.7^	1.7	230.9			2238.7^
2022	177.2	15.6	29.3	1101.4	436.9	0.4	204.5			1965.5

rjm.27.3a47d							
Year	BEL	DE	DK	FRA	GBR	NLD	Total
2005				41.9	0.0		41.9
2006				25.9			25.9
2007	0.1			93.4	0.0		93.5
2008	38.7			46.2	9.4	240.4	334.7
2009	34.4			28.0^	28.5	199.7	290.8^
2010	24.0			33.9^	56.5	182.3	296.8^
2011	31.2			29.4^	91.3^	108.0	259.9^
2012	10.0			25.2	82.5	180.0	297.8^
2013	11.6			30.0^	127.4	119.4	288.6^
2014	4.3		1.0	34.2^	107.0^	66.4	213.2^
2015	9.4		0.1	16.1^	124.0^	76.9	226.4^
2016	9.9	4.1		16.0^	117.6	76.3	223.8^
2017	15.7	5.9		36.9	114.2^	87.4	260.1^

rjm.27.3a47d							
Year	BEL	DE	DK	FRA	GBR	NLD	Total
2018	27.1	11.8		16.0	189.1^	112.2	356.1^
2019	40.9	12.5	0.1	22.9	170.5^	92.6	339.4^
2020	17.0	9.7	0.7	25.1	117.4^	86.8	256.7^
2021	42.0^	1.8	7.7	14.7	137.3	71.6	275.1^
2022	35.1	2.9	4.0	8.6	108.7	79.4	238.7

rjh.27.4bc7d								
Year	BEL	DE	DK	FRA	GBR	IRL	NLD	Total
2005								
2006								
2007	0.2							0.2
2008	115.8				22.4		14.6	152.8
2009	104.9			10.7	39.2		8.2	163.0
2010	48.5			19.8	46.8		11.0	1126.1
2011	46.8			28.0	68.9		13.5	157.2
2012	85.7			22.2	50.4		58.6	216.8
2013	118.3		0	21.2	74.5		38.8	252.8
2014	91.3		0	27.6	61.0		26.1	206.1
2015	119.1		0	28.0	40.8		37.5	225.3
2016	97.0	0		34.2	24.9		26.7	182.9
2017	114.8	0	0	49.8	31.2		45.0	240.8
2018	107.8	0.2		47.9	34.2		64.6	254.8
2019	83.4	1.1		75.4	28.4		64.8	253.1
2020	101.1	0.5	1.7	59.6	33.7		46.4	243.1
2021	129.6	0.2	13.0	45.7	56.8	0	52.4	298.8
2022	110.9	0.9	8.4	32.0	66.9	2.8	106.0	328.0

rjh.27.4a6							
Year	BEL	DK	ES	FRA	GBR	IRL*	Total
2005							
2006							
2007							
2008					6.8		6.8
2009	0		0	0.9	5.2	0	6.4
2010	0				6.7	3.7	10.4
2011					16.6	0.9	17.5
2012					4.0	1.4	5.4
2013					0.5	23.6	24.1
2014				0.6	0.7	8.6	10.0
2015		0		0.8	3.4	9.3	13.6
2016				0.6	2.3	10.9	13.8
2017				0	1.1	5.4	6.8
2018				1.2	2.8	23.0	27.0
2019				0.7	1.5^	33.2	35.4
2020	0			0.6	0	20.4	21.5
2021		0		0	0.7	13.6	14.7
2022		0		0	1.7	3.2	5.4

\*Landings of Ireland are declared coming out of Subarea 6.

rjn.27.3a4							
Year	BEL	DE	DK	FRA	GBR	NLD	Total
2005							
2006							
2007							
2008	2.5			0	0	0	3.3
2009	1.0			1.1	4.6	0	7.1
2010	3.7			1.0	81.2	0	86.3
2011	5.0		2.0	1.0	143.1		151.1
2012	1.1			0.5	115.5		117.1
2013	0.6		1.0	0	122.6	0	124.4
2014	0.5			0	151.7	0	152.5
2015	3.1		0	0	169.0		172.5
2016	0		1.4	0	167.6	0	169.7
2017	0		7.4	0	154.3		162.4
2018	0		14.6	0	179.6		194.5
2019	0		56.8	1.1	201.6		259.7
2020	0		53.8	0	176.1		230.5
2021			14.7	0	167.6		182.4
2022				0	136.0		136.1

rjr.27.23a4								
Year	BEL	DE	DK	FRA	GBR	NLD	SE	Total
2005								
2006								
2007								
2008	0							0.1
2009					0			0.1
2010					0			0
2011				1.2			0	1.3
2012					0	0		0.3
2013				0	0			0
2014	0			0	0			0
2015				0				0
2016				0				0
2017			0	0				0.1
2018		0	1.1	0.9	0			2.4
2019			2.6	0.6	0			3.2
2020				1.2	0	0.1		1.3
2021		0		1.5			0	1.6
2022				0.5	0			0.6

**Table 15.3.5 Demersal elasmobranchs in the North Sea, Skagerrak, Kattegat and eastern Channel. Discards per stock and country in the North Seas ecoregion (Subarea 4 and divisions 3.a and 7.d) (in tonnes). "0" indicates discards <0.5. Values to be viewed with caution as further QA/QC procedures still required prior to use in assessment (see Section 15.3.2).**

raj.27.3a47d										
Year	BEL	DE	DK	FRA	GBR	IRL	NLD	NOR	SE	Total
2009										
2010										
2011										
2012										
2013										
2014			0							0
2015										
2016				778						778
2017				827						827
2018			8.0						4.5	12.6
2019			10.9						1.7	12.5
2020			2.4							2.4
2021			3.5							3.4
2022			1.4						4.7	6.0

rjb.27.3a4								
Year	BEL	DE	DK	FRA	GBR	NLD	SE	Total
2009			18.3					18.3
2010			13.3					13.3
2011			28.9					28.9
2012			100.7					100.7
2013			34.8					34.8
2014			1.6					1.6
2015			4.4					4.4
2016			8.2					8.2
2017			2.3					2.3
2018			15.3				0.6	15.9
2019			2.7				1.9	4.6
2020			5.2					5.2
2021			2.1					2.1
2022			0			0.5		0.7

rjc.27.3a47d									
Year	BEL	DE	DK	FRA	GBR	NLD	NOR	SE	Total
2009					97.7			2.0	125.1
2010					151.4			8.0	252.5
2011			2.3	199.9	90.0	166.8		3.1	462.1
2012			2.7	127.8	314.8	158.3		14.8	618.4
2013	137.7		2.4	455.8	220.2	99.0		0.7	915.9
2014	237.5		1.4	68.3	129.3	249.8		0.6	687.0
2015	183.2		8.8	390.6	197.4	174.7		9.1	963.7
2016	143.1	5.7	11.8	163.2	443.6	152.1		3.5	922.9
2017	240.2		11.2	458.1	495.1	510.2		1.8	1716.6
2018	118.7	114.3	10.0	214.6	83.3	303.0		15.0	859.0
2019	228.9	34.6	10.0	320.7	286.0	593.5		12.9	1486.5
2020	191.5	78.0	35.9	583.3	80.6	417.6		0.3	1386.9
2021	368.7	8.8	17.0	215.5	72.7	730.3		NA	1412.9
2022	170.1	0	20.5	123.7	119.7	338.8		26.2	798.9

rjm.27.3a47d							
Year	BEL	DE	DK	FRA	GBR	NLD	Total
2009				1.7	65.9		67.6
2010				5.8	44.8		50.5
2011				33.6	37.4	384.1	455.1
2012				0	123.8	299.7	423.5
2013	7.6				141.4	285.0	434.1
2014	2.2			11.0	128.3	346.2	487.7
2015	4.4				149.8	198.0	352.2
2016	9.0			0.5	132.5	375.4	517.4
2017	11.2	0.2		10.2	98.2	804.6	924.3
2018	42.5	172.5	1.0	2.6	117.3	662.2	998.1
2019	20.9	164.2	1.8	9.4	113.7	361.2	671.1
2020	43.0	98.9	0.6	22.2	8.7	457.8	631.2
2021	58.5	47.4	0.5		11.9	826.3	944.6
2022		1.2	2.0		32.2	295.8	331.2

rjh.27.4bc7d							
Year	BEL	DE	DK	FRA	GBR	NLD	Total
2009					5.6		5.6
2010				0.0	19.5		19.5
2011				0.6		123.0	123.6
2012			0	0.8	53.6		54.4
2013	16.7			1.3	2.3		20.3
2014	22.2			4.8	14.6		41.6
2015	43.7			1.2	3.7	80.2	128.7
2016	46.9		0	5.1			52.0
2017	25.1			2.8		161.1	189.0
2018	28.5			6.9		147.6	183.1
2019	28.0	0.1		1.0		240.1	269.3
2020	36.6	0.1			0.0	46.5	83.2
2021	20.3			2.1	3.1	75.0	100.5
2022	30.4			3.3			33.7

rjh.27.4a6							
Year	BEL	DK	ES	FRA	GBR	IRL	Total
2009						4.2	4.2
2010						2.2	2.2
2011						2.4	2.4
2012						0	0
2013						5.7	5.7
2014						0.6	0.6
2015						0.9	0.9
2016		0				0	0
2017						0	0
2018		0				3.6	3.8
2019			0			0.5	0.5
2020			0			0.6	0.6
2021							
2022			2.0				2.0



rjn.27.3a4								
Year	BEL	DE	DK	FRA	GBR	NLD	SE	Total
2009			0		11.1			11.6
2010					1.3			1.3
2011			0		5.6			5.8
2012					11.1	36.3		47.3
2013	0				5.3			5.6
2014	0		0.9		25.7	4.3		31.0
2015			1.2		22.7			23.9
2016	0		3.6		1.9	1.2		7.0
2017	1.0		0.8	7.2				8.9
2018			12.6	15.7	1.5	7.1	0	37.2
2019	0		7.2	269.6	1.9			278.9
2020			0	12.0	218.1			230.1
2021			6.5		159.8			166.3
2022					231.2			231.2

rjr.27.23a4									
Year	BEL	DE	DK	ES	FRA	GBR	NLD	SE	Total
2009			3245.4						3245.4
2010			2453.7						2453.7
2011			3612.0						3612.0
2012			3548.8						3548.8
2013			1083.3						1083.3
2014			1767.3						1767.3
2015			2979.6						2979.6
2016			1317.3						1317.3
2017			1017.1		1.3		139.0		1157.4
2018			488.8		4.7		92.7	95.8	682.0
2019			622.6				66.6	122.6	811.7
2020			420.3			609	85.5		1114.9
2021			363.8				29.6^		393.4
2022			378.9	23.0		337.1	48.2	109.5	896.6

^ Discard data available for beam trawls only due to sampling coverage, while previous years for NLD have been available for both beam trawls and other bottom trawls.

**Table 15.6.1. Demersal elasmobranchs in the North Sea, Skagerrak, Kattegat and eastern Channel. Time-series of abundance estimates ( $n \cdot h^{-1}$ ) for *Amblyraja radiata* (all individuals). Information obtained from IBTS-Q1, IBTS-Q3 (roundfish areas 1–7) and several BTS surveys in the period 1987–2020. Data extracted from DATRAS. Time-series updated in 2021.**

Year	IBTS-Q1	IBTS-Q3	BTS-ISI-Q3	BTS-TRI-Q3	BTS-GFR-Q3
1987	7.095	NA	NA	NA	NA
1988	2.670	NA	0.621	NA	NA
1989	6.612	NA	0.382	NA	NA
1990	4.891	NA	1.472	NA	NA
1991	4.171	9.449	0.447	NA	NA
1992	7.528	2.463	0.184	NA	NA
1993	12.232	1.773	0.053	NA	1.322
1994	3.913	1.994	0.045	NA	7.743
1995	8.526	1.930	0.188	NA	1.325
1996	7.111	2.227	0.118	20.452	NA
1997	5.518	1.822	0.000	16.279	11.542
1998	5.692	2.180	0.000	23.308	0.898
1999	6.473	3.134	0.143	34.191	15.780
2000	7.914	3.215	0.000	34.000	NA
2001	11.358	6.520	0.037	21.217	17.531
2002	4.353	3.307	0.031	25.459	0.865
2003	4.543	3.722	0.067	18.972	0.517
2004	3.795	2.143	0.071	20.762	0.375
2005	4.022	2.270	0.303	19.343	0.098
2006	1.992	2.499	0.179	13.729	NA
2007	3.180	3.794	0.000	14.557	17.412
2008	2.521	2.646	NA	15.174	15.396
2009	0.982	2.967	0.897	14.759	10.693
2010	0.945	1.939	0.000	15.479	9.950
2011	1.012	2.435	0.000	13.842	8.783
2012	1.502	2.014	0.091	13.239	18.278
2013	0.684	1.367	0.069	13.379	13.372
2014	1.088	1.630	0.817	12.298	1.462
2015	1.605	2.223	0.172	10.101	9.518
2016	1.137	2.059	0.469	8.315	11.737
2017	1.255	1.453	NA	4.059	8.463
2018	0.326	1.528	NA	4.293	6.158
2019	0.564	1.238	NA	6.184	5.250
2020	0.272	1.119	NA	5.531	6.240
2021	0.352	0.306	NA	12.218	16.168

**Table 15.6.2. Demersal elasmobranchs in the North Sea, Skagerrak, Kattegat and eastern Channel. Time-series of abundance estimates ( $n \cdot h^{-1}$ ) for *Leucoraja naevus* (all individuals). Information obtained from IBTS-Q1, IBTS-Q3 (roundfish areas 1–7) and several BTS surveys in the period 1987–2020. Data extracted from DATRAS. Time-series updated in 2021.**

Year	IBTS-Q1	IBTS-Q3	BTS-ISI-Q3	BTS-TRI2-Q3
1987	0.131	NA	NA	NA
1988	0.526	NA	0.035	NA
1989	0.550	NA	0.000	NA
1990	0.575	NA	0.000	NA
1991	0.549	0.316	0.000	NA
1992	0.764	0.439	0.000	NA
1993	0.903	0.144	0.000	NA
1994	0.586	0.186	0.000	NA
1995	0.611	0.138	0.000	NA
1996	0.499	0.157	0.000	0.905
1997	0.262	0.235	0.000	1.302
1998	0.478	0.113	0.000	3.115
1999	0.398	0.436	0.000	3.841
2000	0.556	0.371	0.000	2.169
2001	0.332	0.589	0.000	1.478
2002	0.449	0.428	0.000	2.840
2003	0.278	0.373	0.000	3.015
2004	0.306	0.362	0.000	0.972
2005	0.308	0.433	0.000	1.659
2006	0.397	0.535	0.000	1.420
2007	0.487	0.367	0.000	2.507
2008	0.420	0.795	NA	4.400
2009	0.401	0.700	0.000	2.013
2010	0.459	0.855	0.000	0.576
2011	0.489	0.798	0.000	0.958
2012	0.464	0.920	0.000	1.013
2013	0.804	0.623	0.000	1.220
2014	0.525	0.486	0.000	1.465
2015	0.911	0.543	0.000	0.702
2016	0.545	0.541	0.000	1.333
2017	0.891	0.770	NA	1.772
2018	0.393	0.744	NA	1.827
2019	0.508	0.578	NA	1.606
2020	0.364	0.461	NA	1.615
2021	0.527	0.309	NA	1.541

**Table 15.6.3. Demersal elasmobranchs in the North Sea, Skagerrak, Kattegat and eastern Channel. Time-series of abundance estimates ( $n \cdot h^{-1}$ ) for 'common skate complex' (all individuals). Information obtained from IBTS-Q1, IBTS-Q3 (round-fish areas 1–7) and BTS-TRI-Q3 in the period 1987–2020. Data extracted from DATRAS. Time-series updated in 2021.**

Year	IBTS-Q1	IBTS-Q3	BTS-TRI-Q3
1987	0.000	NA	NA
1988	0.013	NA	NA
1989	0.000	NA	NA
1990	0.000	NA	NA
1991	0.026	0.007	NA
1992	0.000	0.000	NA
1993	0.019	0.000	NA
1994	0.000	0.000	NA
1995	0.000	0.000	NA
1996	0.020	0.000	0.000
1997	0.000	0.000	0.000
1998	0.006	0.014	0.000
1999	0.013	0.033	0.000
2000	0.000	0.000	0.000
2001	0.000	0.000	0.000
2002	0.007	0.021	0.000
2003	0.000	0.000	0.000
2004	0.000	0.000	0.000
2005	0.006	0.013	0.105
2006	0.000	0.005	0.000
2007	0.051	0.000	0.000
2008	0.006	0.026	0.000
2009	0.013	0.013	0.000
2010	0.044	0.000	0.000
2011	0.056	0.033	0.000
2012	0.000	0.133	0.160
2013	0.093	0.062	0.000
2014	0.039	0.067	0.086
2015	0.063	0.013	0.080
2016	0.080	0.064	0.000
2017	0.055	0.100	0.076
2018	0.157	0.030	0.000
2019	0.135	0.108	0.000
2020	0.220	0.055	0.020
2021	0.136	0.000	0.033

**Table 15.6.4. Demersal elasmobranchs in the North Sea, Skagerrak, Kattegat and eastern Channel. Time-series of abundance estimates for *Raja clavata* (all individuals). Information obtained from IBTS-Q1, IBTS-Q3 (roundfish areas 1–7), several BTS surveys and eastern Channel CGFS-Q4 in the period 1987–2020. Data extracted from DATRAS, except for BTS-BEL-Q3 (extracted from the National database). Estimates are in  $n \cdot h^{-1}$  for all surveys except CGFS-Q4 where  $n \cdot km^{-2}$  are used. Time-series updated in 2021.**

Year	IBTS-Q1	IBTS-Q3	BTS-ISI-Q3	BTS-ENG-Q3	BTS-TRI-Q3	BTS-GFR-Q3	BTS-BEL-Q3	CGFS-Q4
1987	0.926	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
1988	0.219	NA	0.023	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
1989	0.931	NA	0.741	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
1990	0.631	NA	0.982	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
1991	19.181	0.457	0.000	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
1992	1.237	0.646	0.579	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
1993	0.355	0.571	0.000	3.060	NA	0.000	NA	15.906
1994	0.379	0.065	0.030	2.759	NA	0.000	NA	18.878
1995	0.083	0.015	0.083	1.632	NA	0.000	NA	14.909
1996	0.362	0.372	0.162	3.221	0.048	NA	NA	11.035
1997	0.593	0.140	0.825	2.553	0.000	0.000	NA	35.887
1998	0.669	0.028	0.023	2.823	0.269	0.000	NA	22.977
1999	0.211	0.052	2.057	3.895	0.000	0.000	NA	25.515
2000	0.460	0.020	0.357	3.897	0.197	NA	NA	25.818
2001	0.440	0.059	0.000	4.766	0.087	0.000	NA	27.423
2002	0.593	0.276	0.078	2.780	0.972	0.000	NA	38.587
2003	0.551	0.020	0.100	3.846	0.558	0.000	NA	36.264
2004	0.263	0.065	0.000	4.100	0.085	0.000	1.170*	36.659
2005	0.513	0.020	0.182	4.115	0.091	0.000	2.097	55.343
2006	0.610	0.277	0.000	5.444	0.181	NA	3.062*	41.059
2007	0.283	0.060	0.024	4.678	0.647	0.000	2.303	49.569
2008	1.014	0.288	NA	5.360	0.030	0.000	3.618	64.346
2009	1.164	0.283	0.000	4.573	0.091	0.000	2.767	51.369
2010	0.178	0.393	0.063	8.241	0.214	0.000	1.682*	44.525
2011	0.110	0.138	0.040	9.702	0.085	0.000	2.138*	49.518
2012	1.411	0.290	0.030	6.214	1.713	0.000	2.964*	88.805
2013	0.545	0.841	0.035	8.834	0.557	0.000	4.165*	134.990
2014	0.681	0.811	0.320	14.455	0.257	0.000	6.375	156.574
2015	0.976	1.863	0.368	12.401	0.481	0.066	4.774	123.857
2016	0.706	2.103	0.261	11.592	1.306	0.000	5.662	143.286
2017	1.369	0.351	NA	15.528	0.287	0.000	8.246	89.121
2018	0.617	1.425	NA	23.898	2.798	0.033	8.485	142.200
2019	1.265	0.748	NA	25.270	0.330	0.000	8.831	353.680
2020	1.082	0.523	NA	18.368	0.577	0.200	9.323	371.786
2021	0.825	0.388	NA	17.365	1.588	0.000	5.634	

^CGFS-Q4 data for 2020 here shown but not used for assessment purposes due to reduced survey area.

\*Data revised in 2022

**Table 15.6.5. Demersal elasmobranchs in the North Sea, Skagerrak, Kattegat and eastern Channel. Time-series of abundance estimates for *Raja montagui* (all individuals). Information obtained from IBTS-Q1, IBTS-Q3 (roundfish areas 1–7), several BTS surveys and eastern Channel CGFS-Q4 in the period 1987–2020. Data extracted from DATRAS, except for BTS-BEL-Q3 (extracted from the National database). Estimates are in n.h<sup>-1</sup> for all surveys except CGFS-Q4 where n.km<sup>-2</sup> are used. Time-series updated in 2021 except for CGFS-Q4 (last update for this species provided in 2019 WGEF).**

Year	IBTS-Q1	IBTS-Q3	BTS-ISI-Q3	BTS-ENG-Q3	BTS-TRI-Q3	BTS-BEL-Q3	CGFS-Q4
1987	0.053	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
1988	0.065	NA	0.000	NA	NA	NA	15.349
1989	0.180	NA	0.592	NA	NA	NA	6.469
1990	0.117	NA	0.278	NA	NA	NA	10.278
1991	1.210	0.172	0.579	NA	NA	NA	2.725
1992	0.188	0.200	0.184	NA	NA	NA	0.451
1993	0.223	0.221	0.637	0.349	NA	NA	3.594
1994	0.151	0.346	0.000	0.606	NA	NA	5.921
1995	0.387	0.082	0.000	0.526	NA	NA	3.099
1996	0.138	0.150	0.824	0.390	0.667	NA	3.343
1997	0.543	0.007	0.226	0.585	0.000	NA	4.29
1998	0.165	0.102	0.000	0.538	1.123	NA	3.019
1999	0.146	0.377	0.000	0.684	1.079	NA	0.567
2000	0.159	0.027	0.029	0.359	0.648	NA	1.274
2001	0.127	0.054	0.000	0.338	1.015	NA	1.285
2002	0.355	0.074	0.000	0.605	0.361	NA	0.637
2003	0.395	0.061	0.033	0.105	0.247	NA	2.596
2004	0.276	0.094	0.000	0.288	0.359	0.620*	0.261
2005	0.539	0.376	0.000	0.066	0.136	1.394	3.425
2006	0.122	0.361	0.000	0.253	0.536	1.292*	1.385
2007	0.694	0.859	0.000	0.123	0.239	1.022	1.441
2008	1.125	0.394	NA	0.333	0.167	0.522	0.229
2009	1.151	1.100	0.000	0.195	0.242	1.633*	0
2010	0.895	1.184	0.000	0.425	0.273	1.102*	0.29
2011	0.759	1.401	0.000	0.312	0.928	1.033*	4.398
2012	0.678	1.419	0.000	0.188	1.305	1.139*	2.169
2013	1.322	0.828	0.046	0.263	0.841	0.986*	2.047
2014	0.979	1.254	0.160	0.212	0.543	1.923	4.248
2015	1.242	0.521	0.058	0.313	0.550	2.580	2.514
2016	1.060	0.915	0.135	1.026	2.445	2.609	0.671
2017	0.905	0.615	NA	0.390	0.911	4.132	1.28
2018	1.052	1.026	NA	0.395	1.366	5.320	0.729
2019	1.246	1.477	NA	0.885	0.871	3.281	NA
2020	1.028	0.352	NA	0.733	1.191	2.807	NA
2021	0.846	0.223	NA	0.613	1.095	1.186	

\*Data revised in 2022

**Table 15.6.6. Demersal elasmobranchs in the North Sea, Skagerrak, Kattegat and eastern Channel. Time-series of abundance estimates ( $n \cdot h^{-1}$ ) for *Raja brachyura* in 4.a (all individuals). Information obtained from IBTS-Q1, IBTS-Q3 (roundfish areas 1–7) in the period 1987–2020. Data extracted from DATRAS. Time-series updated in 2021.**

Year	IBTS-Q1	IBTS-Q3
1987	0.000	NA
1988	0.000	NA
1989	0.047	NA
1990	0.000	NA
1991	0.000	0.000
1992	0.119	0.000
1993	0.035	0.000
1994	0.000	0.000
1995	0.000	0.000
1996	0.022	0.000
1997	0.000	0.000
1998	0.007	0.000
1999	0.021	0.000
2000	0.000	0.000
2001	0.000	0.000
2002	0.000	0.000
2003	0.064	0.000
2004	0.000	0.000
2005	0.000	0.000
2006	0.064	0.000
2007	0.429	0.077
2008	0.292	0.039
2009	0.286	0.200
2010	0.471	0.000
2011	0.137	0.340
2012	0.000	0.000
2013	0.654	0.000
2014	0.490	0.000
2015	0.039	0.000
2016	0.019	0.071
2017	0.000	0.036
2018	0.000	0.000
2019	0.061	0.000
2020	0.727	0.036
2021	0.000	0.000

**Table 15.6.7. Demersal elasmobranchs in the North Sea, Skagerrak, Kattegat and eastern Channel. Time-series of abundance estimates for *Raja brachyura* in 4.c and 7.d (all individuals). Information obtained from IBTS-Q1, IBTS-Q3 (round-fish areas 1–7) and several BTS surveys and eastern Channel CGFS-Q4 in the period 1987–2020. Data extracted from DATRAS, except for BTS-BEL-Q3 (extracted from the National database). Estimates are in  $n \cdot h^{-1}$  for all surveys except CGFS-Q4 where  $n \cdot km^{-2}$  are used. Time-series updated in 2021.**

Year	IBTS-Q1	IBTS-Q3	BTS-ISI-Q3	BTS-ENG-Q3	BTS-TRI-Q3	BTS-BEL-Q3	CGFS-Q4
1987	0.000	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
1988	0.000	NA	0.000	NA	NA	NA	0.000
1989	0.000	NA	0.000	NA	NA	NA	4.229
1990	0.000	NA	0.000	NA	NA	NA	0.458
1991	0.000	0.000	0.000	NA	NA	NA	0.000
1992	0.308	0.000	0.000	NA	NA	NA	0.000
1993	0.160	0.000	0.000	0.159	NA	NA	0.000
1994	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.121	NA	NA	1.351
1995	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.053	NA	NA	2.103
1996	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.052	0.000	NA	0.000
1997	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.027	0.000	NA	1.132
1998	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.077	0.000	NA	2.455
1999	0.039	0.000	0.000	0.158	0.000	NA	1.586
2000	0.000	0.000	0.056	0.103	0.000	NA	1.567
2001	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.154	0.000	NA	1.741
2002	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.105	0.000	NA	4.454
2003	0.019	0.000	0.000	0.132	0.000	NA	4.111
2004	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.137	0.242	0.113*	4.139
2005	0.039	0.000	0.071	0.262	0.000	0.238	0.000
2006	0.115	0.000	0.000	0.054	0.323	0.260	2.191
2007	0.154	0.000	0.000	0.164	0.600	0.088	3.346
2008	0.423	0.000	NA	0.083	0.000	0.329	0.255
2009	0.051	0.000	0.000	0.153	0.000	0.589	3.579
2010	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.027	0.000	0.402*	1.415
2011	0.037	0.000	0.000	0.140	0.000	0.117	4.877
2012	0.154	0.095	0.071	0.082	0.000	0.377*	5.932
2013	0.111	0.000	0.000	0.187	0.000	0.588*	3.432
2014	0.995	0.000	0.000	0.291	0.000	0.417	12.208
2015	0.346	0.000	0.000	0.132	1.239	0.762	4.441
2016	0.205	0.429	0.000	0.269	0.000	0.987	6.165
2017	0.481	0.333	NA	0.524	0.000	0.579	9.015
2018	0.747	0.571	NA	0.526	0.091	0.785	5.554
2019	0.852	0.238	NA	0.423	1.000	0.862	6.851
2020	0.160	0.500	NA	0.427	1.500	0.541	2.235
2021	0.692	1.506	NA	0.987	1.636	0.793	

\*Data revised in 2022



**Table 15.6.8. Demersal elasmobranchs in the North Sea, Skagerrak, Kattegat and eastern Channel. Time-series of biomass estimates ( $\text{kg}\cdot\text{h}^{-1}$ ) for *Amblyraja radiata* (all individuals). Information obtained from IBTS-Q1, IBTS-Q3 (roundfish areas 1–7) and several BTS surveys in the period 1987–2020. Data extracted from DATRAS.**

Year	IBTS-Q1	IBTS-Q3	BTS-ISI-Q3	BTS-TRI-Q3	BTS-GFR-Q3
1987	3.746	NA	NA	NA	NA
1988	1.451	NA	0.178	NA	NA
1989	3.325	NA	0.075	NA	NA
1990	2.423	NA	0.387	NA	NA
1991	2.040	4.158	0.124	NA	NA
1992	3.485	1.340	0.038	NA	NA
1993	6.208	0.880	0.014	NA	0.391
1994	1.898	0.940	0.023	NA	3.200
1995	4.206	0.832	0.102	NA	0.295
1996	3.493	0.980	0.237	4.493	NA
1997	2.684	0.857	0.000	4.383	4.021
1998	2.861	1.207	0.000	6.313	0.154
1999	2.352	1.312	0.059	8.558	6.100
2000	3.282	1.386	0.000	8.015	NA
2001	1.236	2.124	0.016	4.733	4.890
2002	1.573	1.123	0.035	5.947	0.179
2003	1.469	1.270	0.034	4.551	0.164
2004	1.283	0.675	0.015	5.140	0.111
2005	1.158	0.772	0.171	5.407	0.036
2006	0.741	0.899	0.112	4.089	NA
2007	1.404	1.605	0.000	5.191	6.359
2008	1.192	1.232	NA	6.182	5.996
2009	0.533	1.542	0.494	6.321	4.587
2010	0.484	1.029	0.000	6.176	3.765
2011	0.501	1.239	0.000	4.709	2.789
2012	0.641	0.848	0.051	3.467	5.721
2013	0.265	0.561	0.047	3.253	2.753
2014	0.586	0.728	0.318	3.475	0.535
2015	0.716	1.148	0.074	4.071	3.039
2016	0.527	0.941	0.165	2.700	3.112
2017	0.597	0.606	NA	1.558	2.829
2018	0.167	0.614	NA	1.236	1.956
2019	0.238	0.463	NA	1.379	1.633
2020	0.120	0.441	NA	1.317	1.407
2021	0.131	0.135	NA	3.193	2.075

**Table 15.6.9. Demersal elasmobranchs in the North Sea, Skagerrak, Kattegat and eastern Channel. Time-series of biomass estimates ( $\text{kg}\cdot\text{h}^{-1}$ ) for *Leucoraja naevus* (all individuals). Information obtained from IBTS-Q1, IBTS-Q3 (roundfish areas 1–7) and several BTS surveys in the period 1987–2020. Data extracted from DATRAS. Time-series updated in 2021.**

Year	IBTS-Q1	IBTS-Q3	BTS-ISI-Q3	BTS-TRI2-Q3
1987	0.109	NA	NA	NA
1988	0.518	NA	0.021	NA
1989	0.476	NA	0.000	NA
1990	0.558	NA	0.000	NA
1991	0.444	0.167	0.000	NA
1992	0.739	0.407	0.000	NA
1993	0.828	0.110	0.000	NA
1994	0.390	0.166	0.000	NA
1995	0.520	0.184	0.000	NA
1996	0.450	0.095	0.000	0.503
1997	0.198	0.308	0.000	0.726
1998	0.387	0.121	0.000	1.382
1999	0.342	0.322	0.000	0.944
2000	0.406	0.259	0.000	0.928
2001	0.215	0.282	0.000	0.379
2002	0.240	0.250	0.000	0.573
2003	0.170	0.214	0.000	1.080
2004	0.145	0.196	0.000	0.453
2005	0.181	0.296	0.000	0.544
2006	0.250	0.330	0.000	0.460
2007	0.286	0.225	0.000	0.854
2008	0.246	0.512	NA	1.473
2009	0.192	0.475	0.000	0.795
2010	0.296	0.630	0.000	0.258
2011	0.343	0.606	0.000	0.489
2012	0.375	0.705	0.000	0.514
2013	0.558	0.459	0.000	0.449
2014	0.376	0.315	0.000	0.564
2015	0.836	0.470	0.000	0.279
2016	0.430	0.432	0.000	0.577
2017	0.702	0.562	NA	0.798
2018	0.327	0.495	NA	0.689
2019	0.376	0.348	NA	0.424
2020	0.288	0.250	NA	0.467
2021	0.331	0.229	NA	0.481

**Table 15.6.10. Demersal elasmobranchs in the North Sea, Skagerrak, Kattegat and eastern Channel. Time-series of biomass estimates (kg.h<sup>-1</sup>) for 'common skate complex' (all individuals). Information obtained from IBTS-Q1, IBTS-Q3 (round-fish areas 1–7) and BTS-TRI-Q3 in the period 1987–2020. Data extracted from DATRAS. Time-series updated in 2021.**

Year	IBTS-Q1	IBTS-Q3	BTS-TRI-Q3
1987	0.000	NA	NA
1988	0.029	NA	NA
1989	0.000	NA	NA
1990	0.000	NA	NA
1991	0.113	0.010	NA
1992	0.000	0.000	NA
1993	0.042	0.000	NA
1994	0.000	0.000	NA
1995	0.000	0.000	NA
1996	0.030	0.000	0.000
1997	0.000	0.000	0.000
1998	0.015	0.028	0.000
1999	0.021	0.010	0.000
2000	0.000	0.000	0.000
2001	0.000	0.000	0.000
2002	0.015	0.025	0.000
2003	0.000	0.000	0.000
2004	0.000	0.000	0.000
2005	0.014	0.041	0.046
2006	0.000	0.009	0.000
2007	0.061	0.000	0.000
2008	0.004	0.059	0.000
2009	0.003	0.002	0.000
2010	0.026	0.000	0.000
2011	0.224	0.020	0.000
2012	0.000	0.249	0.130
2013	0.259	0.061	0.000
2014	0.175	0.119	0.025
2015	0.111	0.011	0.215
2016	0.254	0.157	0.000
2017	0.415	0.278	3.140
2018	0.643	0.048	0.000
2019	0.678	0.202^	0.000
2020	1.118	0.670	0.038
2021	0.341	0.000	0.007

^Data revised in 2022

**Table 15.6.11. Demersal elasmobranchs in the North Sea, Skagerrak, Kattegat and eastern Channel. Time-series of biomass estimates for *Raja clavata* (all individuals). Information obtained from IBTS-Q1, IBTS-Q3 (roundfish areas 1–7), several BTS surveys, and eastern Channel CGFS-Q4 in the period 1987–2020. Data extracted from DATRAS, except for BTS-BEL-Q3 (extracted from the National database). Estimates are in kg.h<sup>-1</sup> for all surveys except CGFS-Q4 where kg.km<sup>-2</sup> are used. Time-series updated in 2021.**

Year	IBTS-Q1	IBTS-Q3	BTS-ISI-Q3	BTS-ENG-Q3	BTS-TRI-Q3	BTS-GFR-Q3	BTS-BEL-Q3	CGFS-Q4
1987	1.569	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
1988	0.223	NA	0.004	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
1989	0.916	NA	0.418	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
1990	0.698	NA	0.806	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
1991	8.856	0.534	0.000	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
1992	0.959	0.408	0.698	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
1993	0.310	0.366	0.000	1.088	NA	0.000	NA	19.857
1994	0.218	0.036	0.008	0.974	NA	0.000	NA	45.129
1995	0.081	0.052	0.011	0.782	NA	0.000	NA	32.690
1996	0.243	0.703	0.233	1.326	0.111	NA	NA	7.437
1997	0.512	0.212	0.588	1.162	0.000	0.000	NA	50.848
1998	0.154	0.009	0.004	1.162	0.130	0.000	NA	45.941
1999	0.121	0.131	1.130	1.773	0.000	0.000	NA	36.231
2000	0.261	0.038	0.298	1.577	0.074	NA	NA	47.508
2001	0.279	0.062	0.000	1.540	0.053	0.000	NA	38.327
2002	0.356	0.260	0.088	1.061	0.831	0.000	NA	56.775
2003	0.360	0.034	0.055	1.779	0.408	0.000	NA	41.689
2004	0.177	0.044	0.000	2.475	0.058	0.000	0.652*	38.572
2005	0.393	0.027	0.471	1.557	0.094	0.000	0.395	87.306
2006	0.809	0.274	0.000	1.684	0.150	NA	0.759*	70.294
2007	0.192	0.019	0.022	2.173	0.541	0.000	0.350	92.942
2008	1.594	0.340	NA	2.924	0.014	0.000	1.951	94.537
2009	1.034	0.243	0.000	2.172	0.142	0.000	1.910*	89.228
2010	0.193	0.210	0.004	3.388	0.196	0.000	1.418*	90.478
2011	0.049	0.204	0.096	2.475	0.056	0.000	1.345*	66.975
2012	1.654	0.168	0.084	3.199	0.741	0.000	1.960*	113.665
2013	0.529	1.048	0.012	2.360	0.305	0.000	2.289*	223.638
2014	0.795	1.132	0.263	4.865	0.296	0.000	4.959	265.211
2015	1.031	1.561	0.490	4.670	0.651	0.141	2.766	211.768
2016	0.707	1.644	0.499	4.011	0.525	0.000	3.846	291.861
2017	1.637	0.629	NA	4.398	0.758	0.000	4.649	174.664
2018	0.656	1.621	NA	5.120	1.251	0.027	4.766	302.729
2019	1.415	0.631	NA	6.352	0.202	0.000	4.627	376.898
2020	1.318	0.601	NA	5.546	0.413	0.251	5.162	659.203^
2021	1.023	0.623	NA	4.248	1.193	0.000	2.756	

^CGFS-Q4 data for 2020 here shown but not used for assessment purposes due to reduced survey area.

\*Data revised in 2022

**Table 15.6.12. Demersal elasmobranchs in the North Sea, Skagerrak, Kattegat and eastern Channel. Time-series of biomass estimates for *Raja montagui* (all individuals). Information from IBTS-Q1, IBTS-Q3 (roundfish areas 1–7), several BTS surveys and eastern Channel CGFS-Q4 in the period 1987–2020. Data extracted from DATRAS, except for BTS-BEL-Q3 (extracted from the National database). Estimates are in  $\text{kg}\cdot\text{h}^{-1}$  for all surveys except CGFS-Q4 where  $\text{kg}\cdot\text{km}^{-2}$  are used. Time-series updated in 2021 except for CGFS-Q4 (last update for this species provided in 2019 WGEF).**

Year	IBTS-Q1	IBTS-Q3	BTS-ISI-Q3	BTS-ENG-Q3	BTS-TRI-Q3	BTS-BEL-Q3	CGFS-Q4
1987	0.066	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
1988	0.068	NA	0.000	NA	NA	NA	22.215
1989	0.136	NA	0.163	NA	NA	NA	6.007
1990	0.116	NA	0.055	NA	NA	NA	9.587
1991	0.448	0.130	1.125	NA	NA	NA	3.364
1992	0.211	0.183	0.153	NA	NA	NA	0.721
1993	0.215	0.240	0.422	0.065	NA	NA	4.426
1994	0.179	0.439	0.000	0.212	NA	NA	9.903
1995	0.567	0.091	0.000	0.197	NA	NA	3.027
1996	0.154	0.110	0.584	0.166	0.409	NA	0.653
1997	0.252	0.005	0.262	0.296	0.000	NA	4.61
1998	0.218	0.069	0.000	0.148	0.504	NA	2.767
1999	0.183	0.444	0.000	0.143	0.638	NA	0.266
2000	0.135	0.024	0.013	0.128	0.063	NA	1.586
2001	0.130	0.029	0.000	0.082	0.091	NA	1.376
2002	0.237	0.056	0.000	0.282	0.198	NA	0.447
2003	0.299	0.040	0.058	0.032	0.072	NA	1.863
2004	0.204	0.110	0.000	0.067	0.215	0.212*	0.047
2005	0.378	0.384	0.000	0.079	0.108	0.060*	2.535
2006	0.066	0.263	0.000	0.109	0.482	0.074*	2.999
2007	0.666	0.828	0.000	0.008	0.216	0.084*	1.27
2008	1.020	0.387	NA	0.121	0.118	0.165*	0.055
2009	0.677	0.903	0.000	0.088	0.103	0.514*	0
2010	0.803	1.009	0.000	0.056	0.154	0.302*	0.058
2011	0.633	1.229	0.000	0.144	0.434	0.710*	3.359
2012	0.552	1.451	0.000	0.135	0.873	0.357*	1.621
2013	0.994	0.731	0.043	0.182	0.644	0.356*	2.363
2014	1.017	1.402	0.128	0.091	0.542	0.552*	1.74
2015	1.367	0.588	0.057	0.138	0.566	0.551*	1.63
2016	1.002	1.004	0.097	0.197	0.798	0.819*	0.329
2017	0.855	0.666	NA	0.136	0.501	0.838*	5.443
2018	1.179	1.098	NA	0.208	0.391	1.131*	0.877
2019	1.091	1.584	NA	0.204	0.555	0.809*	NA
2020	1.120	0.343	NA	0.260	0.458	0.378*	NA
2021	0.731	0.123	NA	0.233	0.512	0.228	

\*Data revised in 2022

**Table 15.6.13. Demersal elasmobranchs in the North Sea, Skagerrak, Kattegat and eastern Channel. Time-series of biomass estimates ( $\text{kg}\cdot\text{h}^{-1}$ ) for *Raja brachyura* 4.a (all individuals). Information obtained from the IBTS-Q1 and IBTS-Q3 (roundfish areas 1–7) surveys in the period 1987–2020. Data extracted from DATRAS. Time-series updated in 2021.**

Year	IBTS-Q1	IBTS-Q3
1987	0.000	NA
1988	0.000	NA
1989	0.072	NA
1990	0.000	NA
1991	0.000	0.000
1992	0.062	0.000
1993	0.073	0.000
1994	0.000	0.000
1995	0.000	0.000
1996	0.005	0.000
1997	0.000	0.000
1998	0.016	0.000
1999	0.017	0.000
2000	0.000	0.000
2001	0.000	0.000
2002	0.000	0.000
2003	0.088	0.000
2004	0.000	0.000
2005	0.000	0.000
2006	0.057	0.000
2007	0.895	0.267
2008	1.076	0.142
2009	0.604	0.904
2010	1.849	0.000
2011	0.669	1.515
2012	0.000	0.000
2013	2.724	0.000
2014	1.913	0.000
2015	0.221	0.000
2016	0.092	0.410
2017	0.000	0.116
2018	0.000	0.000
2019	0.237	0.000
2020	3.200	0.054
2021	0.000	0.000

**Table 15.6.14. Demersal elasmobranchs in the North Sea, Skagerrak, Kattegat and eastern Channel. Time-series of biomass estimates for *Raja brachyura* in 4.c and 7.d (all individuals). Information obtained from IBTS-Q1, IBTS-Q3 (roundfish areas 1–7), several BTS surveys and eastern Channel CGFS-Q4, in the period 1987–2020. Data extracted from DATRAS, except for BTS-BEL-Q3 (extracted from the National database). Estimates are in kg.h<sup>-1</sup> for all surveys except CGFS-Q4 where kg.km<sup>-2</sup> are used.**

Year	IBTS-Q1	IBTS-Q3	BTS-ISI-Q3	BTS-ENG-Q3	BTS-TRI-Q3	BTS-BEL-Q3	CGFS-Q4
1987	0.000	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
1988	0.000	NA	0.000	NA	NA	NA	0.000
1989	0.000	NA	0.000	NA	NA	NA	1.488
1990	0.000	NA	0.000	NA	NA	NA	0.000
1991	0.000	0.000	0.000	NA	NA	NA	0.000
1992	0.179	0.000	0.000	NA	NA	NA	0.000
1993	0.456	0.000	0.000	0.182	NA	NA	0.000
1994	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.013	NA	NA	0.342
1995	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.008	NA	NA	3.251
1996	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.006	0.000	NA	0.000
1997	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.003	0.000	NA	1.806
1998	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.008	0.000	NA	3.881
1999	0.084	0.000	0.000	0.049	0.000	NA	2.159
2000	0.000	0.000	0.025	0.012	0.000	NA	0.336
2001	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.069	0.000	NA	2.638
2002	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.076	0.000	NA	2.530
2003	0.034	0.000	0.000	0.066	0.000	NA	6.136
2004	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.045	1.316	0.108*	0.680
2005	0.102	0.000	0.062	0.118	0.000	0.104	0.000
2006	0.024	0.000	0.000	0.026	0.224	0.103*	2.322
2007	0.356	0.000	0.000	0.288	1.868	0.027	7.783
2008	0.766	0.000	NA	0.009	0.000	0.166	0.237
2009	0.071	0.000	0.000	0.068	0.000	0.147	5.765
2010	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.020	0.000	0.122*	3.251
2011	0.009	0.000	0.000	0.097	0.000	0.150	6.315
2012	0.739	0.245	0.062	0.021	0.000	0.095	19.327
2013	0.414	0.000	0.000	0.068	0.000	0.098*	4.609
2014	1.368	0.000	0.000	0.103	0.000	0.108	20.937
2015	0.587	0.000	0.000	0.046	0.129	0.169	17.310
2016	0.316	0.294	0.000	0.124	0.000	0.159	20.450
2017	1.086	0.662	NA	0.166	0.000	0.113	21.502
2018	1.835	0.442	NA	0.305	0.439	0.303	14.664
2019	2.264	0.352	NA	0.216	0.817	0.232	20.477
2020	0.492	0.638	NA	0.088	1.246	0.467	2.355 <sup>^</sup>
2021	0.548	2.299	NA	0.586	3.241	0.724	

<sup>^</sup>CGFS-Q4 data for 2020 here shown but not used for assessment purposes due to reduced survey area.

\*Data revised in 2022

**Table 15.6.15. Demersal elasmobranchs in the North Sea, Skagerrak, Kattegat and eastern Channel. Time-series of exploitable biomass index ( $\text{kg}\cdot\text{h}^{-1}$  for individuals  $\geq 50$  cm  $L_T$ ) for *Amblyraja radiata*. Information obtained from IBTS-Q1, IBTS-Q3 (roundfish areas 1–7) and several BTS surveys in the period 1987–2020. Data extracted from DATRAS. Time-series updated in 2021.**

Year	IBTS-Q1	IBTS-Q3	BTS-ISI-Q3	BTS-TRI-Q3	BTS-GFR-Q3
1987	0.496	NA	NA	NA	NA
1988	0.333	NA	0.000	NA	NA
1989	0.377	NA	0.000	NA	NA
1990	0.370	NA	0.000	NA	NA
1991	0.288	0.361	0.000	NA	NA
1992	0.335	0.128	0.000	NA	NA
1993	0.431	0.112	0.000	NA	0.053
1994	0.231	0.162	0.000	NA	0.679
1995	0.578	0.058	0.000	NA	0.106
1996	0.228	0.096	0.205	0.318	NA
1997	0.293	0.049	0.000	0.313	0.657
1998	0.322	0.175	0.000	0.776	0.000
1999	0.253	0.115	0.000	0.682	1.180
2000	0.363	0.108	0.000	0.419	NA
2001	0.089	0.145	0.000	0.295	0.454
2002	0.141	0.038	0.035	0.213	0.037
2003	0.152	0.067	0.000	0.194	0.000
2004	0.081	0.018	0.000	0.276	0.000
2005	0.053	0.000	0.000	0.066	0.000
2006	0.025	0.011	0.045	0.000	NA
2007	0.069	0.052	0.000	0.000	0.000
2008	0.037	0.000	NA	0.032	0.113
2009	0.012	0.014	0.000	0.038	0.215
2010	0.021	0.096	0.000	0.166	0.256
2011	0.037	0.020	0.000	0.222	0.224
2012	0.052	0.008	0.000	0.170	0.109
2013	0.014	0.014	0.000	0.000	0.000
2014	0.086	0.039	0.000	0.070	0.081
2015	0.008	0.043	0.000	0.028	0.000
2016	0.042	0.000	0.000	0.029	0.053
2017	0.030	0.007	NA	0.057	0.053
2018	0.031	0.000	NA	0.000	0.063
2019	0.000	0.007	NA	0.000	0.056
2020	0.000	0.014	NA	0.000	0.000
2021	0.000	0.000	NA	0.112	0.000



**Table 15.6.16. Demersal elasmobranchs in the North Sea, Skagerrak, Kattegat and eastern Channel. Time-series of exploitable biomass index ( $\text{kg}\cdot\text{h}^{-1}$  for individuals  $\geq 50$  cm L<sub>T</sub>) for *Leucoraja naevus*. Information obtained from IBTS-Q1, IBTS-Q3 (roundfish areas 1–7) and several BTS surveys in the period 1987–2020. Data extracted from DATRAS. Time-series updated in 2021.**

Year	IBTS-Q1	IBTS-Q3	BTS-ISI-Q3	BTS-TRI2-Q3
1987	0.094	NA	NA	NA
1988	0.458	NA	0.000	NA
1989	0.352	NA	0.000	NA
1990	0.485	NA	0.000	NA
1991	0.329	0.097	0.000	NA
1992	0.639	0.326	0.000	NA
1993	0.670	0.098	0.000	NA
1994	0.245	0.154	0.000	NA
1995	0.396	0.174	0.000	NA
1996	0.362	0.068	0.000	0.392
1997	0.145	0.293	0.000	0.417
1998	0.294	0.106	0.000	0.782
1999	0.269	0.245	0.000	0.400
2000	0.328	0.174	0.000	0.380
2001	0.137	0.118	0.000	0.048
2002	0.130	0.131	0.000	0.209
2003	0.102	0.115	0.000	0.234
2004	0.055	0.070	0.000	0.180
2005	0.091	0.156	0.000	0.185
2006	0.119	0.191	0.000	0.136
2007	0.160	0.122	0.000	0.434
2008	0.130	0.305	NA	0.112
2009	0.084	0.330	0.000	0.188
2010	0.182	0.435	0.000	0.050
2011	0.209	0.437	0.000	0.190
2012	0.276	0.520	0.000	0.255
2013	0.349	0.354	0.000	0.147
2014	0.218	0.167	0.000	0.218
2015	0.691	0.391	0.000	0.097
2016	0.328	0.328	0.000	0.186
2017	0.530	0.418	NA	0.191
2018	0.252	0.360	NA	0.232
2019	0.275	0.231	NA	0.084
2020	0.205	0.159	NA	0.059
2021	0.186	0.143	NA	0.071

**Table 15.6.17. Demersal elasmobranchs in the North Sea, Skagerrak, Kattegat and eastern Channel. Time-series of exploitable biomass index ( $\text{kg}\cdot\text{h}^{-1}$  for individuals  $\geq 50$  cm L<sub>T</sub>) for 'common skate complex'. Information obtained from IBTS-Q1, IBTS-Q3 (roundfish areas 1–7) and BTS survey in the period 1987–2020. Data extracted from DATRAS. Time-series updated in 2021.**

Year	IBTS-Q1	IBTS-Q3	BTS-TRI-Q3
1987	0.000	NA	NA
1988	0.029	NA	NA
1989	0.000	NA	NA
1990	0.000	NA	NA
1991	0.113	0.010	NA
1992	0.000	0.000	NA
1993	0.042	0.000	NA
1994	0.000	0.000	NA
1995	0.000	0.000	NA
1996	0.025	0.000	0.000
1997	0.000	0.000	0.000
1998	0.016	0.028	0.000
1999	0.021	0.000	0.000
2000	0.000	0.000	0.000
2001	0.000	0.000	0.000
2002	0.015	0.025	0.000
2003	0.000	0.000	0.000
2004	0.000	0.000	0.000
2005	0.014	0.041	0.000
2006	0.000	0.009	0.000
2007	0.055	0.000	0.000
2008	0.000	0.059	0.000
2009	0.000	0.000	0.000
2010	0.011	0.000	0.000
2011	0.215	0.010	0.000
2012	0.000	0.229	0.130
2013	0.237	0.041	0.000
2014	0.170	0.109	0.000
2015	0.101	0.011	0.215
2016	0.249	0.151	0.000
2017	0.412	0.271	3.140
2018	0.636	0.040	0.000
2019	0.675	0.195 <sup>^</sup>	0.000
2020	1.098	0.665	0.038
2021	0.331	0.000	0.000

<sup>^</sup>Data revised in 2022

**Table 15.6.18. Demersal elasmobranchs in the North Sea, Skagerrak, Kattegat and eastern Channel. Time-series of exploitable biomass index (individuals  $\geq 50$  cm  $L_T$ ) for *Raja clavata*. Information obtained from IBTS-Q1, IBTS-Q3 (roundfish areas 1–7), several BTS surveys, and eastern Channel CGFS Q4 in the period 1987–2020. Data extracted from DATRAS, except for BTS-BEL-Q3 (extracted from National database). Estimates are in  $\text{kg}\cdot\text{h}^{-1}$  for all surveys except CGFS-Q4 where  $\text{kg}\cdot\text{km}^{-2}$  are used. Time-series updated in 2021.**

Year	IBTS-Q1	IBTS-Q3	BTS-ISI-Q3	BTS-ENG-Q3	BTS-TRI-Q3	BTS-GFR-Q3	BTS-BEL-Q3	CGFS-Q4
1987	1.458	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
1988	0.183	NA	0.000	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
1989	0.734	NA	0.277	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
1990	0.525	NA	0.601	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
1991	3.043	0.394	0.000	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
1992	0.634	0.202	0.610	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
1993	0.240	0.221	0.000	0.589	NA	0.000	NA	17.828
1994	0.098	0.031	0.000	0.563	NA	0.000	NA	44.307
1995	0.069	0.053	0.000	0.562	NA	0.000	NA	31.055
1996	0.145	0.654	0.207	0.804	0.111	NA	NA	4.084
1997	0.368	0.209	0.439	0.702	0.000	0.000	NA	43.043
1998	0.018	0.000	0.000	0.565	0.045	0.000	NA	43.728
1999	0.050	0.130	0.657	1.117	0.000	0.000	NA	33.081
2000	0.131	0.033	0.186	0.908	0.031	NA	NA	43.997
2001	0.131	0.055	0.000	0.874	0.040	0.000	NA	35.328
2002	0.158	0.200	0.086	0.502	0.675	0.000	NA	50.563
2003	0.227	0.031	0.000	1.066	0.256	0.000	NA	32.726
2004	0.097	0.041	0.000	1.508	0.031	0.000	0.459*	31.837
2005	0.272	0.026	0.471	0.601	0.072	0.000	0.125	79.625
2006	0.709	0.202	0.000	0.996	0.130	NA	0.032	63.887
2007	0.129	0.013	0.022	1.357	0.374	0.000	0.000	88.975
2008	1.480	0.279	NA	1.937	0.000	0.000	1.458	86.437
2009	0.779	0.173	0.000	1.409	0.138	0.000	1.348	83.955
2010	0.171	0.104	0.000	2.170	0.146	0.000	1.156*	87.252
2011	0.034	0.176	0.096	1.267	0.028	0.000	0.976	60.191
2012	1.418	0.103	0.084	1.892	0.245	0.000	1.203*	98.224
2013	0.436	0.906	0.000	1.023	0.213	0.000	1.406*	208.965
2014	0.682	1.026	0.129	2.810	0.253	0.000	3.831	245.041
2015	0.853	1.009	0.454	2.719	0.627	0.141	1.663	198.867
2016	0.584	1.075	0.482	1.963	0.188	0.000	2.813	281.260
2017	1.410	0.608	NA	2.284	0.749	0.000	3.432	165.981
2018	0.565	1.402	NA	2.628	0.533	0.027	3.603	290.030
2019	1.168	0.467	NA	3.537	0.147	0.000	2.927	326.159
2020	1.142	0.490	NA	2.630	0.306	0.251	3.659	611.607^
2021	0.914	0.554	NA	2.328	0.828	0.000	1.554	

^CGFS-Q4 data for 2020 here shown but not used for assessment purposes due to reduced survey area.

\*Data revised in 2022.

**Table 15.6.19. Demersal elasmobranchs in the North Sea, Skagerrak, Kattegat and eastern Channel. Time-series of exploitable biomass index (individuals  $\geq 50$  cm  $L_T$ ) for *Raja montagui*. Information obtained from IBTS-Q1, IBTS-Q3 (round-fish areas 1–7), several BTS surveys, and eastern Channel CGFS Q4, in the period 1987–2020. Data extracted from DATRAS, except for BTS-BEL-Q3 (extracted from National database). Estimates are in  $\text{kg}\cdot\text{h}^{-1}$  for all surveys except CGFS-Q4 where  $\text{kg}\cdot\text{km}^{-2}$  are used. Time-series updated in 2021 except for CGFS-Q4 (last update for this species provided in 2019 WGEF).**

Year	IBTS-Q1	IBTS-Q3	BTS-ISI-Q3	BTS-ENG-Q3	BTS-TRI-Q3	BTS-BEL-Q3	CGFS-Q4
1987	0.063	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
1988	0.060	NA	0.000	NA	NA	NA	0.514
1989	0.099	NA	0.049	NA	NA	NA	1.347
1990	0.102	NA	0.000	NA	NA	NA	2.123
1991	0.299	0.090	1.048	NA	NA	NA	0.84
1992	0.185	0.144	0.079	NA	NA	NA	0.205
1993	0.166	0.214	0.261	0.000	NA	NA	1.257
1994	0.163	0.405	0.000	0.106	NA	NA	2.438
1995	0.508	0.090	0.000	0.118	NA	NA	0.748
1996	0.141	0.090	0.284	0.095	0.243	NA	0
1997	0.168	0.000	0.218	0.205	0.000	NA	0.686
1998	0.206	0.014	0.000	0.035	0.383	NA	0.651
1999	0.169	0.406	0.000	0.000	0.548	NA	0
2000	0.100	0.010	0.000	0.065	0.000	NA	0.333
2001	0.110	0.007	0.000	0.044	0.000	NA	0.276
2002	0.152	0.029	0.000	0.187	0.103	NA	0.103
2003	0.221	0.026	0.058	0.000	0.000	NA	0.201
2004	0.168	0.101	0.000	0.028	0.094	0.196*	0
2005	0.209	0.324	0.000	0.079	0.060	0.000	0.669
2006	0.038	0.193	0.000	0.097	0.379	0.000	0.699
2007	0.537	0.624	0.000	0.000	0.183	0.000	0.327
2008	0.808	0.320	NA	0.087	0.058	0.133	0
2009	0.334	0.623	0.000	0.000	0.041	0.257	0
2010	0.624	0.783	0.000	0.027	0.107	0.152*	0
2011	0.457	0.889	0.000	0.110	0.196	0.523	0.796
2012	0.426	1.209	0.000	0.082	0.535	0.236*	0.08
2013	0.782	0.528	0.031	0.168	0.427	0.196*	0.716
2014	0.931	1.280	0.051	0.049	0.447	0.473	0.158
2015	1.260	0.571	0.040	0.104	0.526	0.217	0.279
2016	0.819	0.890	0.049	0.103	0.264	0.372	0
2017	0.760	0.578	NA	0.094	0.310	0.453	1.708
2018	1.056	0.982	NA	0.152	0.172	0.587	0.228
2019	0.871	1.369	NA	0.142	0.386	0.697	NA
2020	1.005	0.274	NA	0.176	0.168	0.097	NA
2021	0.555	0.063	NA	0.141	0.209	0.102	

\*Data revised in 2022

**Table 15.6.20. Demersal elasmobranchs in the North Sea, Skagerrak, Kattegat and eastern Channel. Time-series of exploitable biomass index ( $\text{kg}\cdot\text{h}^{-1}$  for individuals  $\geq 50$  cm  $L_T$ ) for *Raja brachyura* 4.a. Information obtained from IBTS-Q1, IBTS-Q3 (roundfish areas 1–7) surveys in the period 1987–2020. Data extracted from DATRAS. Time-series updated in 2021.**

Year	IBTS-Q1	IBTS-Q3
1987	0.000	NA
1988	0.000	NA
1989	0.072	NA
1990	0.000	NA
1991	0.000	0.000
1992	0.000	0.000
1993	0.073	0.000
1994	0.000	0.000
1995	0.000	0.000
1996	0.000	0.000
1997	0.000	0.000
1998	0.016	0.000
1999	0.000	0.000
2000	0.000	0.000
2001	0.000	0.000
2002	0.000	0.000
2003	0.088	0.000
2004	0.000	0.000
2005	0.000	0.000
2006	0.020	0.000
2007	0.887	0.267
2008	1.076	0.142
2009	0.604	0.904
2010	1.849	0.000
2011	0.669	1.515
2012	0.000	0.000
2013	2.697	0.000
2014	1.913	0.000
2015	0.221	0.000
2016	0.092	0.410
2017	0.000	0.116
2018	0.000	0.000
2019	0.207	0.000
2020	3.184	0.054
2021	0.000	0.000

**Table 15.6.21. Demersal elasmobranchs in the North Sea, Skagerrak, Kattegat and eastern Channel. Time-series of exploitable biomass index (individuals  $\geq 50$  cm L<sub>7</sub>) for *Raja brachyura* 4.c and 7.d. Information obtained from IBTS-Q1, IBTS-Q3 (roundfish areas 1–7), several BTS surveys, and eastern Channel CGFS-Q4 in the period 1989–2020. Data extracted from DATRAS, except for BTS-BEL-Q3 (extracted from National database). Estimates are in kg.h<sup>-1</sup> for all surveys except CGFS-Q4 where kg.km<sup>-2</sup> are used. Time-series updated in 2021.**

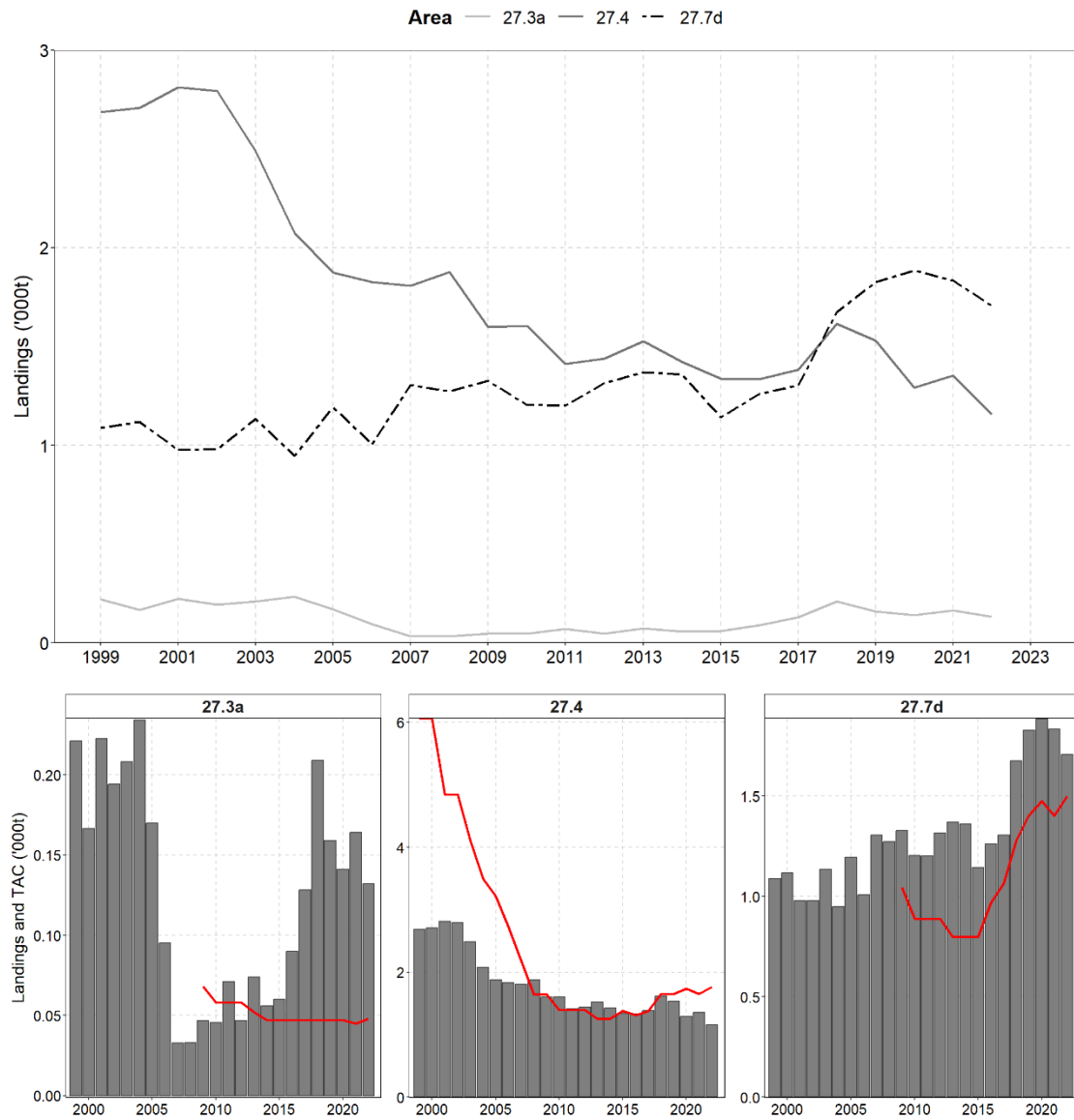
Year	IBTS-Q1	IBTS-Q3	BTS-ISI-Q3	BTS-ENG-Q3	BTS-TRI-Q3	BTS-BEL-Q3	CGFS-Q4
1987	0.000	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
1988	0.000	NA	0.000	NA	NA	NA	0.000
1989	0.000	NA	0.000	NA	NA	NA	0.001
1990	0.000	NA	0.000	NA	NA	NA	0.000
1991	0.000	0.000	0.000	NA	NA	NA	0.000
1992	0.055	0.000	0.000	NA	NA	NA	0.000
1993	0.449	0.000	0.000	0.161	NA	NA	0.000
1994	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	NA	NA	0.000
1995	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	NA	NA	0.003
1996	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	NA	0.000
1997	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	NA	0.002
1998	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	NA	0.004
1999	0.084	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	NA	0.002
2000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	NA	0.000
2001	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.032	0.000	NA	0.003
2002	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.028	0.000	NA	0.003
2003	0.034	0.000	0.000	0.044	0.000	NA	0.006
2004	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	1.316	0.089*	0.001
2005	0.102	0.000	0.000	0.072	0.000	0.047	0.000
2006	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.025	0.198	0.000	0.002
2007	0.352	0.000	0.000	0.259	1.868	0.000	0.008
2008	0.739	0.000	NA	0.000	0.000	0.062	0.000
2009	0.062	0.000	0.000	0.029	0.000	0.080	0.006
2010	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.029*	0.003
2011	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.087	0.000	0.147	0.006
2012	0.740	0.245	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.040	0.019
2013	0.413	0.000	0.000	0.026	0.000	0.022*	0.005
2014	1.162	0.000	0.000	0.037	0.000	0.080	0.021
2015	0.563	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.059	0.017
2016	0.299	0.139	0.000	0.071	0.000	0.000	0.020
2017	0.963	0.590	NA	0.044	0.000	0.027*	0.022
2018	1.709	0.385	NA	0.220	0.439	0.063	0.015
2019	2.150	0.343	NA	0.178	0.677	0.070	0.020
2020	0.471	0.482	NA	0.000	0.808	0.281	0.002 <sup>^</sup>
2021	0.431	2.045	NA	0.493	3.199	0.517	

<sup>^</sup>CGFS-Q4 data for 2020 here shown but not used for assessment purposes due to reduced survey area.

\*Data revised in 2022

**Table 15.7.1: Length-weight parameters (a and b) used to convert length to weight (values taken from Silva *et al.*, 2013).**

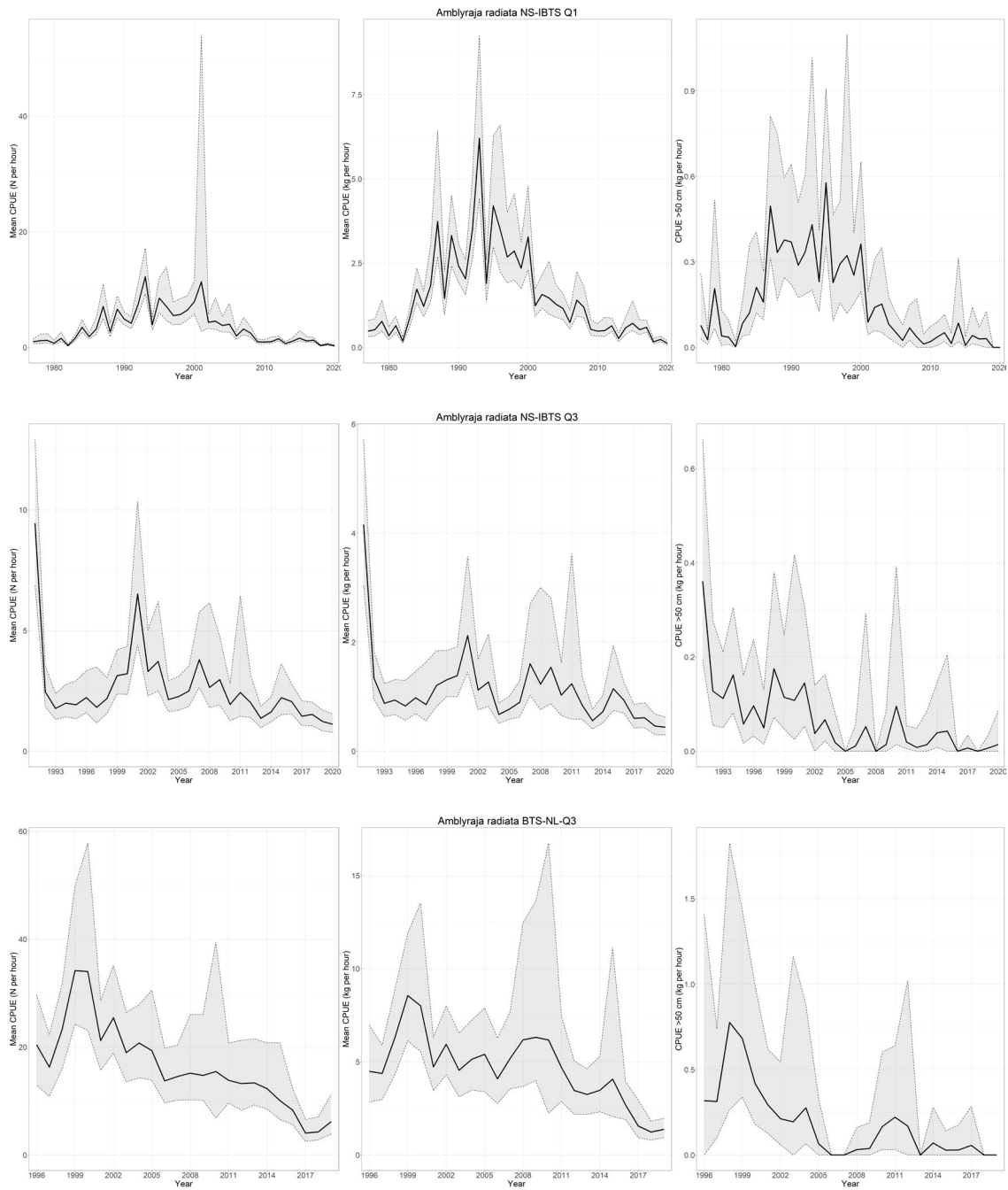
Species	a	b
<i>Leucoraja. Naevus</i>	0.0036	3.1399
<i>Raja brachyura</i>	0.0027	3.2580
<i>Raja clavata</i>	0.0045	3.0961
<i>Raja microocellata</i>	0.0030	3.2250
<i>Raja montagui</i>	0.0041	3.1152
<i>Raja undulata</i>	0.0040	3.1346
<i>Amblyraja radiata</i>	0.0107	2.940
'common skate complex'	0.0038	3.1201
<i>Scyliorhinus canicula</i>	0.0022	3.1194
<i>Mustelus spp</i>	0.003	3.0349



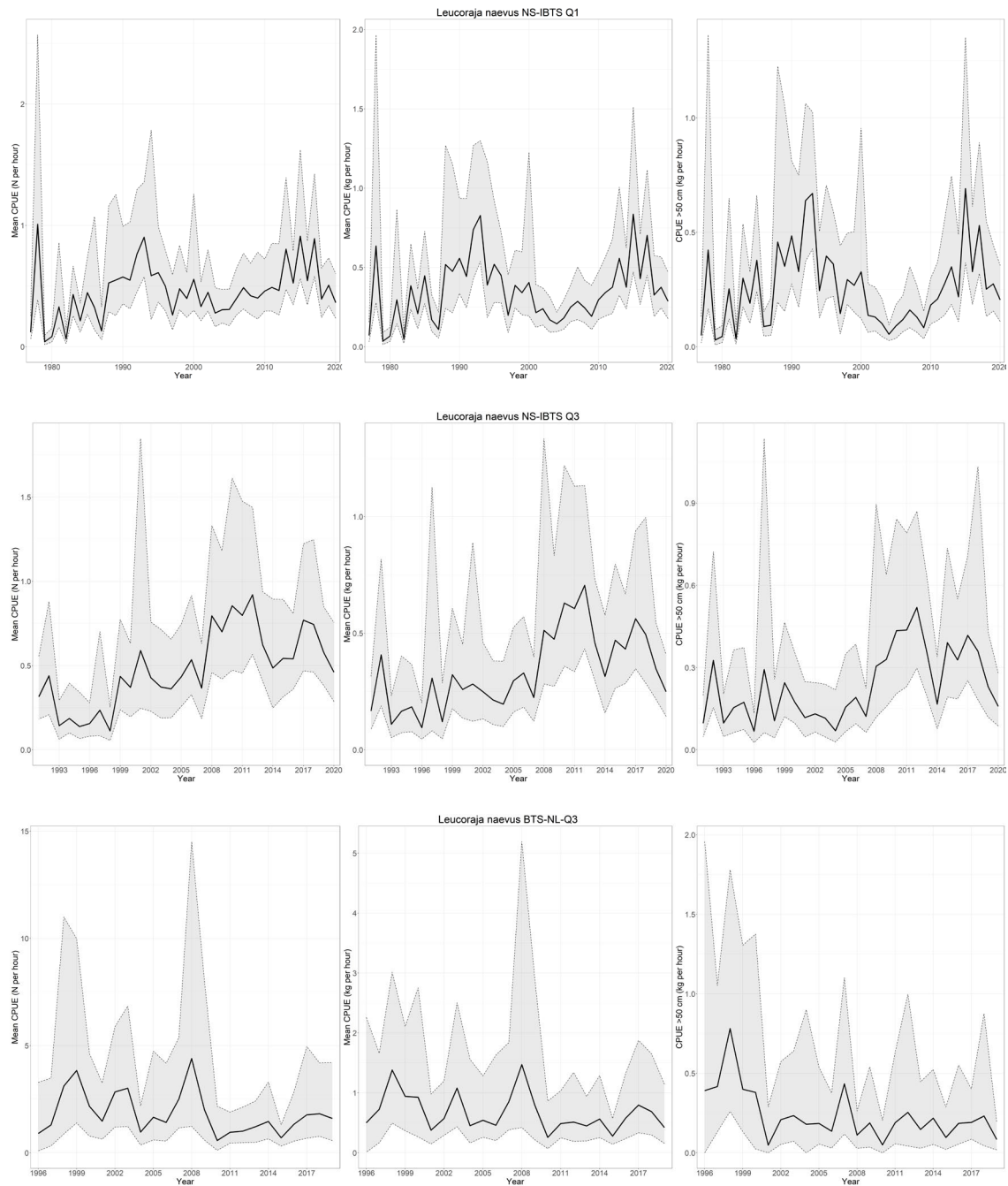
**Figure 15.3.1. Demersal elasmobranchs in the North Sea, Skagerrak, Kattegat and eastern Channel. (top) total international landings of rays and skates in Division 3.a and Subarea 4 and Division 7.d since 1973, based on WG estimates. (bottom) Landings in Division 3.a, Subarea 4 and Division 7.d, including the TACs for the three areas (black lines) since 1999. Note: Different y-axis (bottom panel).**



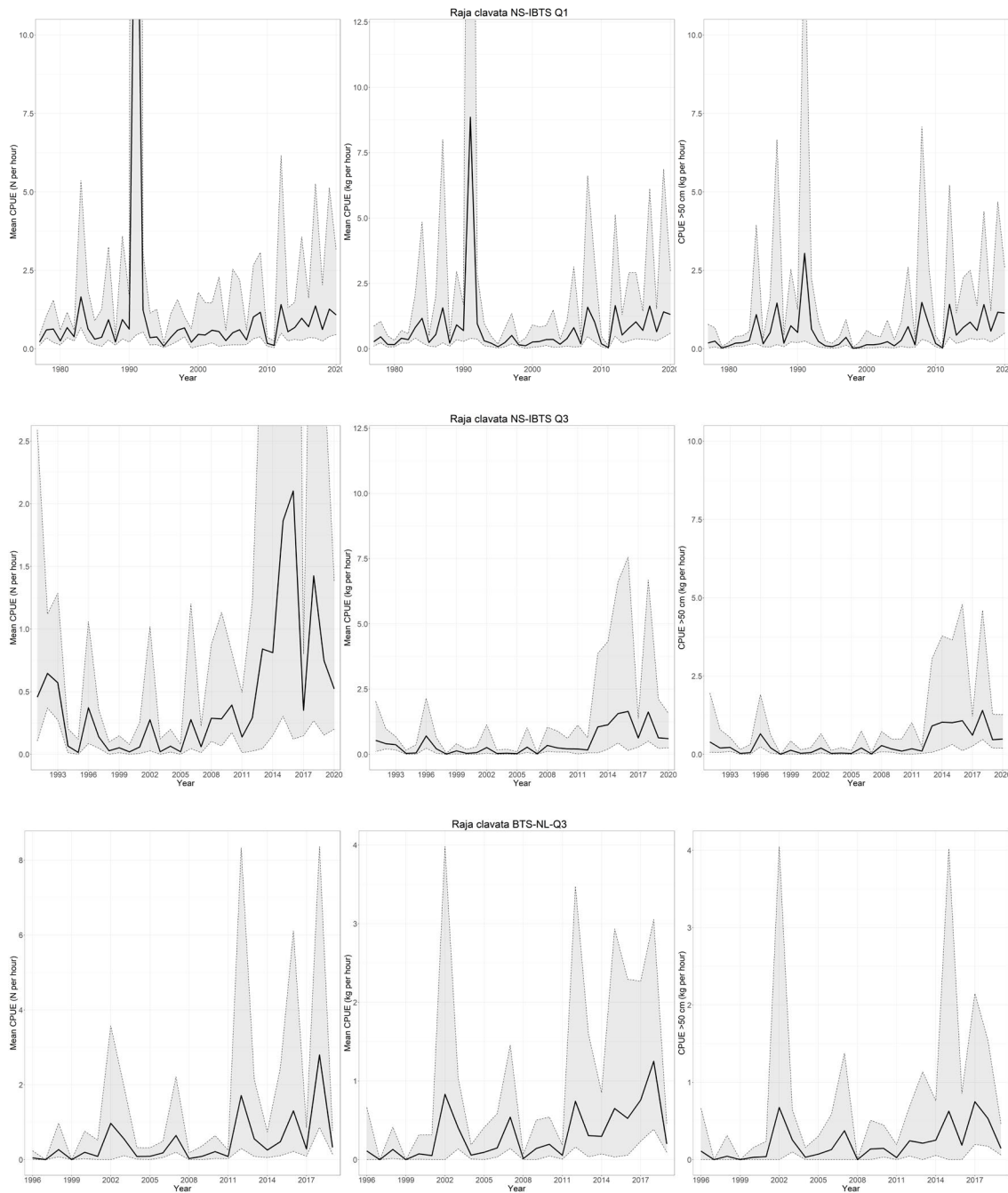




**Figure 15.6.1. Demersal elasmobranchs in the North Sea, Skagerrak, Kattegat and eastern Channel. *Amblyraja radiata*. Abundance index ( $n \cdot h^{-1}$ ), biomass index ( $kg \cdot h^{-1}$ ) and exploitable biomass ( $kg \cdot h^{-1}$ ), with 95% confidence intervals, during the North Sea IBTS (in roundfish areas 1–7) and BTS in the years 1977–2020. Data extracted from the DATRAS database (selected for CPUE per length per haul) on 8 June 2021.**



**Figure 15.6.2.** Demersal elasmobranchs in the North Sea, Skagerrak, Kattegat and eastern Channel. *Leucoraja naevus*. Abundance index ( $n \cdot h^{-1}$ ), biomass index ( $kg \cdot h^{-1}$ ) and exploitable biomass ( $kg \cdot h^{-1}$ ), with 95% confidence intervals, during the North Sea IBTS (in roundfish areas 1–7) and BTS surveys in the years 1977–2020. Data extracted from the DATRAS database (selected for CPUE per length per haul) on 8 June 2021.



**Figure 15.6.3. Demersal elasmobranchs in the North Sea, Skagerrak, Kattegat and eastern Channel. *Raja clavata*. Abundance index ( $n \cdot h^{-1}$ ), biomass index ( $kg \cdot h^{-1}$ ) and exploitable biomass ( $kg \cdot h^{-1}$ ), with 95% confidence intervals, during the North Sea IBTS (in roundfish areas 1–7), BTS, and CGFS-Q4 surveys in the years 1977–2020. Data for BTS-BEL-Q3 extracted from national database. Other data extracted from the DATRAS database, see Section 15.6.4 for details on data source.**

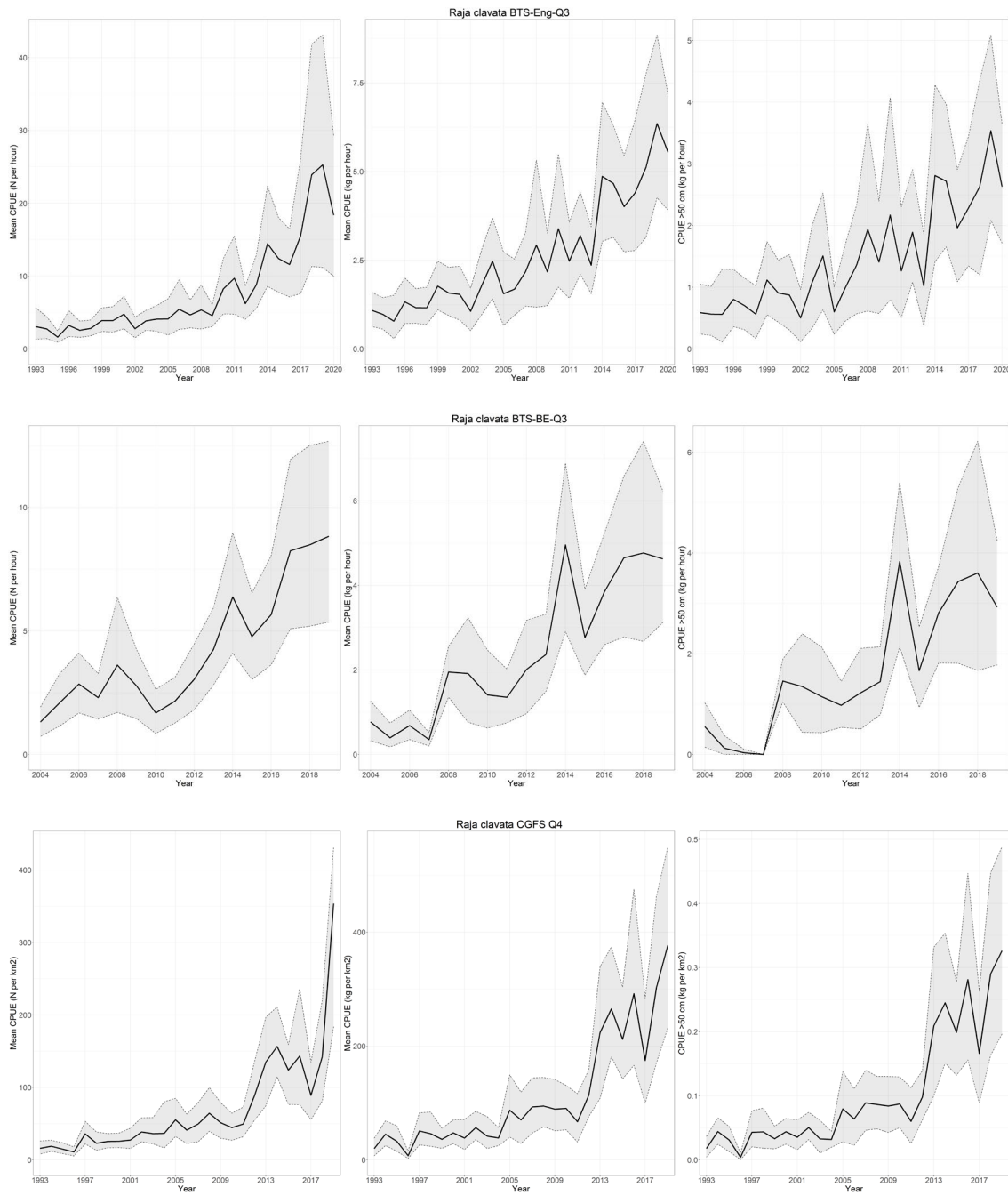
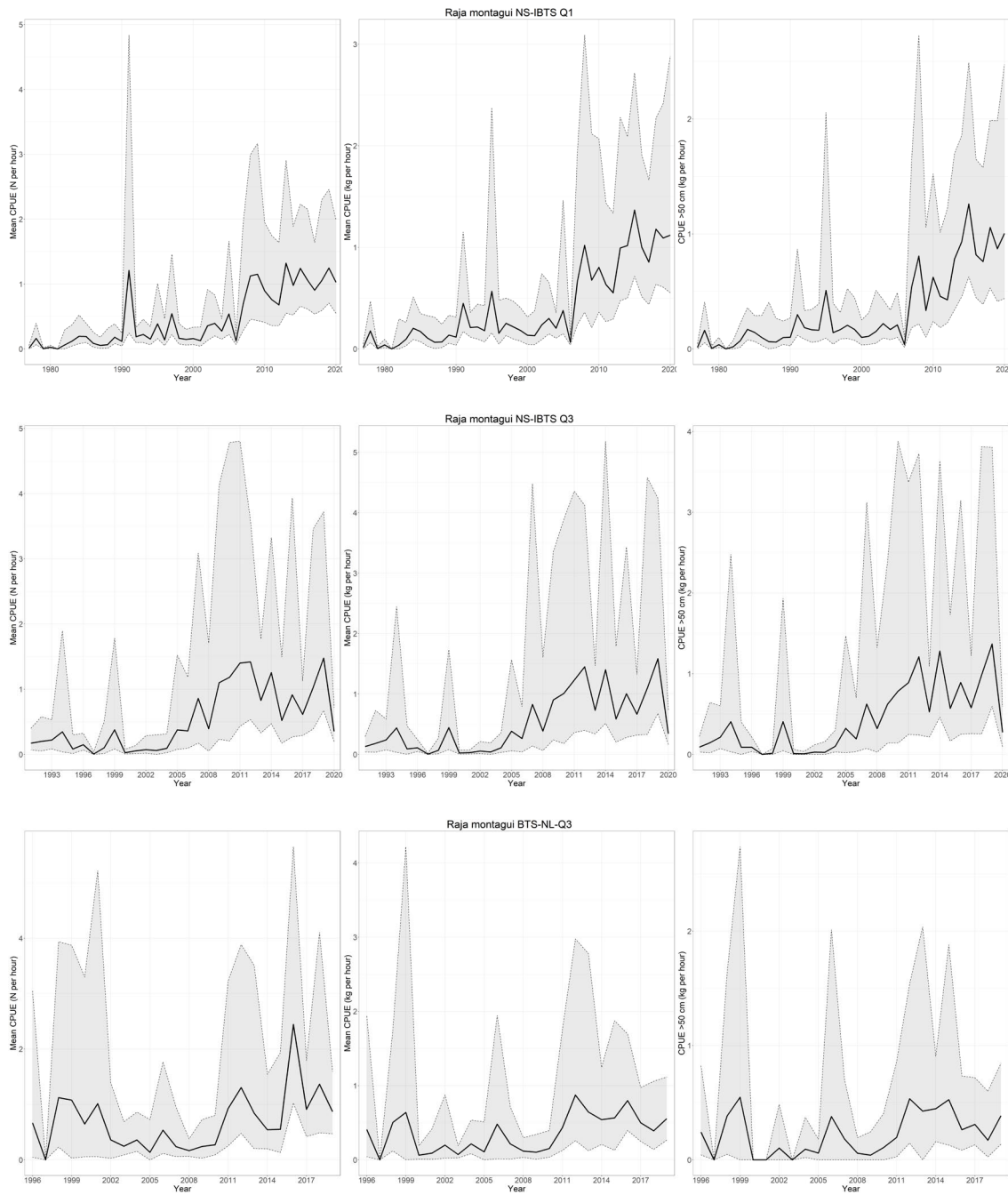
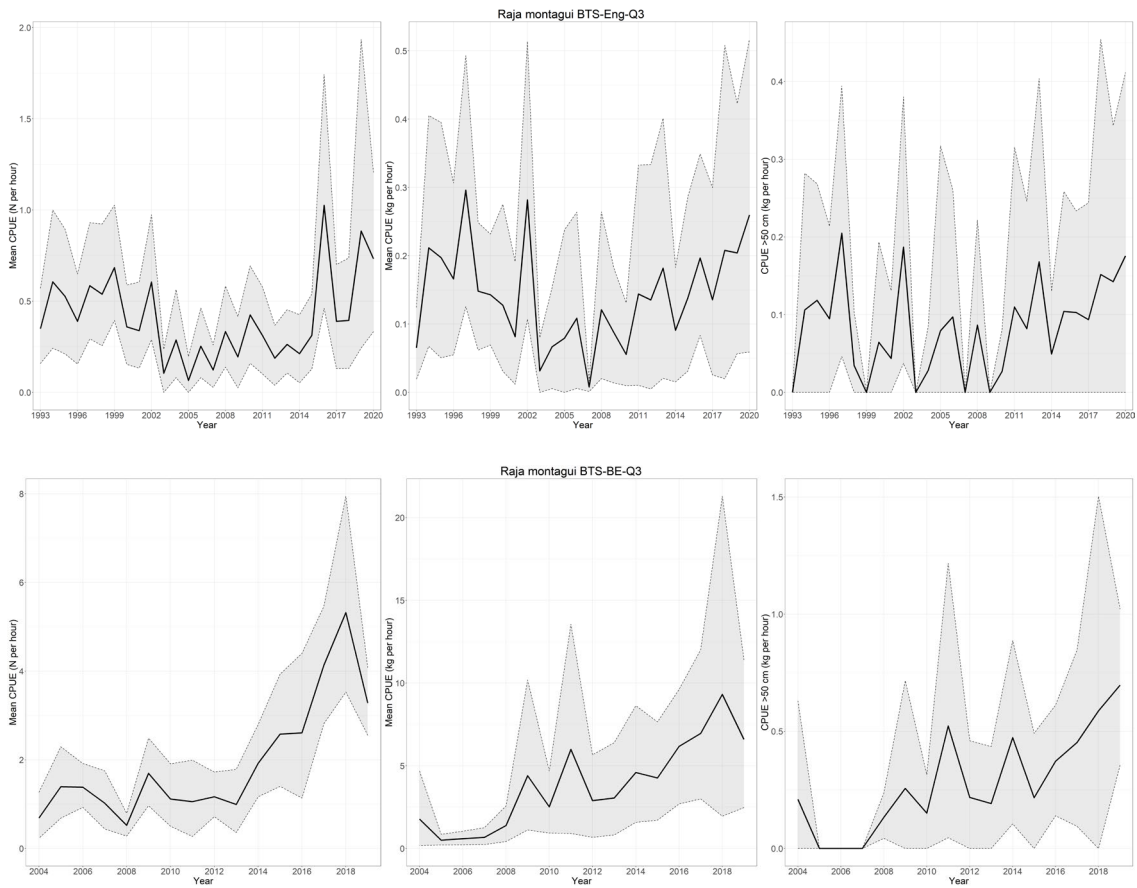


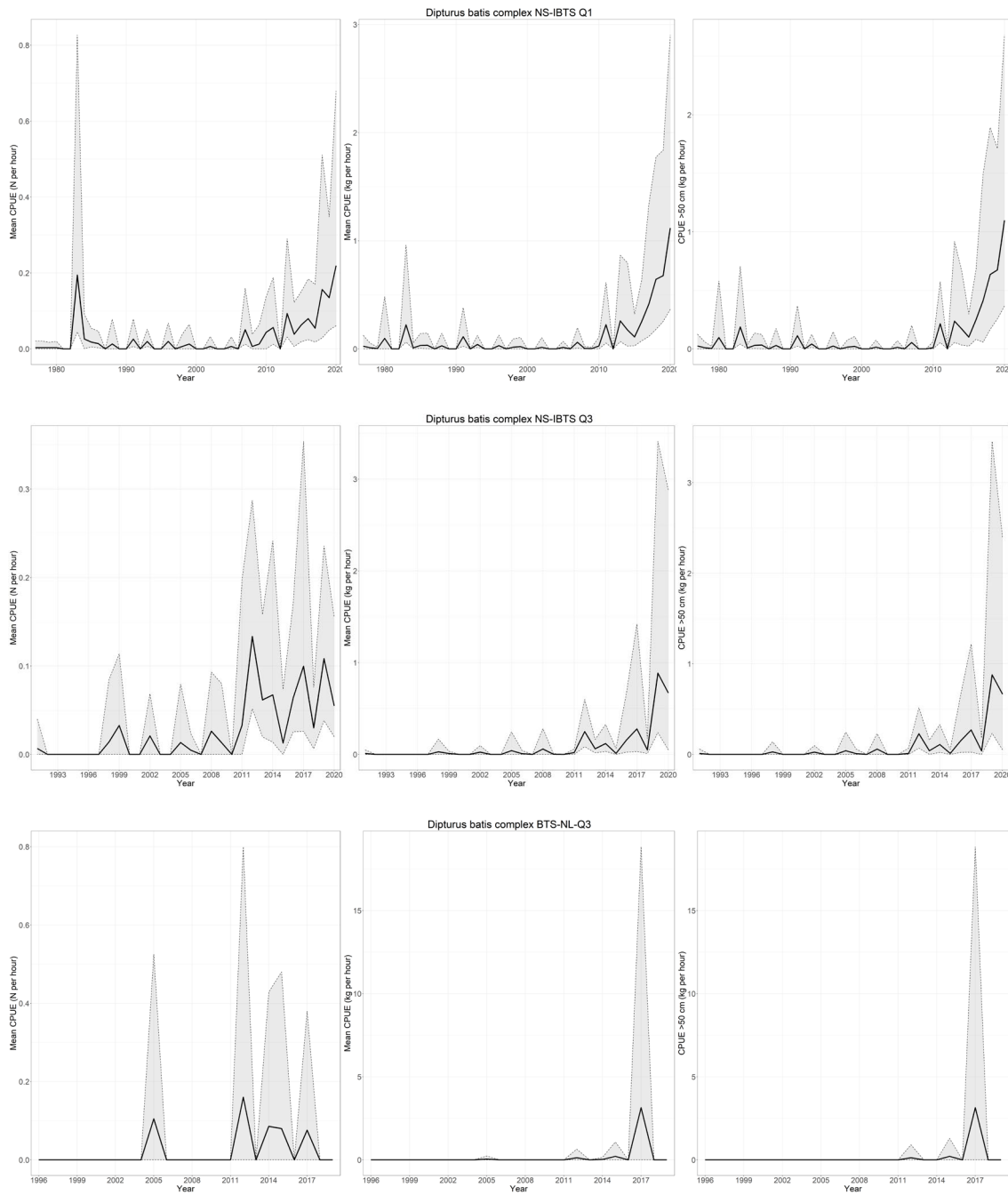
Figure 15.6.3 (continued). Demersal elasmobranchs in the North Sea, Skagerrak, Kattegat and eastern Channel. *Raja clavata*. Abundance index ( $n \cdot h^{-1}$ ), biomass index ( $kg \cdot h^{-1}$ ) and exploitable biomass ( $kg \cdot h^{-1}$ ), with 95% confidence intervals, during the North Sea IBTS (in roundfish areas 1–7), BTS, and CGFS-Q4 surveys in the years 1977–2020. Data for BTS-BEL-Q3 extracted from national database. Other data extracted from the DATRAS database, see Section 15.6.4 for details on data source.



**Figure 15.6.4. Demersal elasmobranchs in the North Sea, Skagerrak, Kattegat and eastern Channel. *Raja montagui*. Abundance index ( $n \cdot h^{-1}$ ), biomass index ( $kg \cdot h^{-1}$ ) and exploitable biomass ( $kg \cdot h^{-1}$ ), with 95% confidence intervals, during the North Sea IBTS (in roundfish areas 1–7) and BTS surveys in the years 1977–2020. Data for BTS-BEL-Q3 extracted from national database. Other data extracted from the DATRAS database, see Section 15.6.4 for details on data source.**

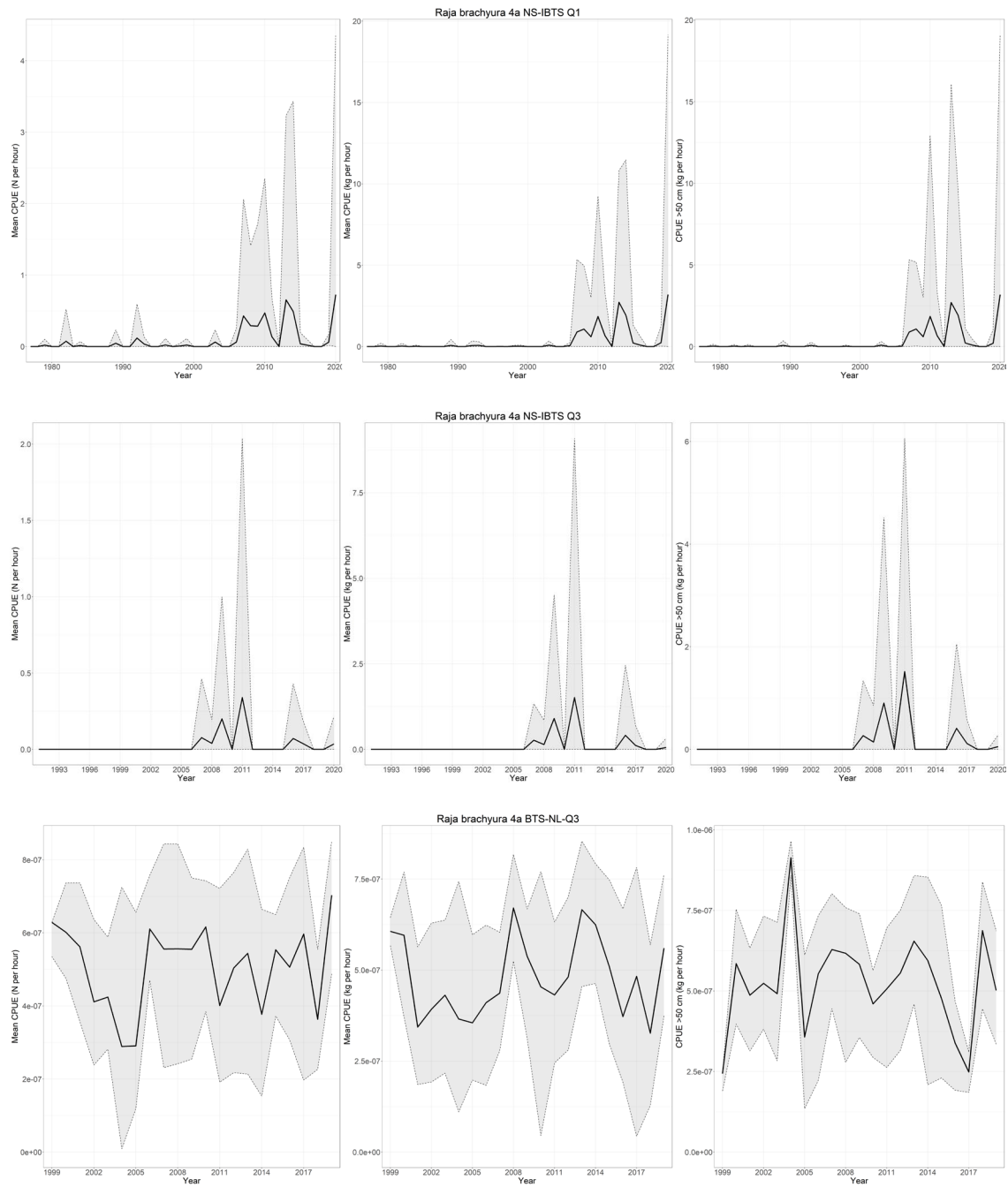


**Figure 15.6.4 (continued).** Demersal elasmobranchs in the North Sea, Skagerrak, Kattegat and eastern Channel. *Raja montagui*. Abundance index ( $n \cdot h^{-1}$ ), biomass index ( $kg \cdot h^{-1}$ ) and exploitable biomass ( $kg \cdot h^{-1}$ ), with 95% confidence intervals, during the North Sea IBTS (in roundfish areas 1–7) and BTS surveys in the years 1977–2020. Data for BTS-BEL-Q3 extracted from national database. Other data extracted from the DATRAS database, see Section 15.6.4 for details on data source.

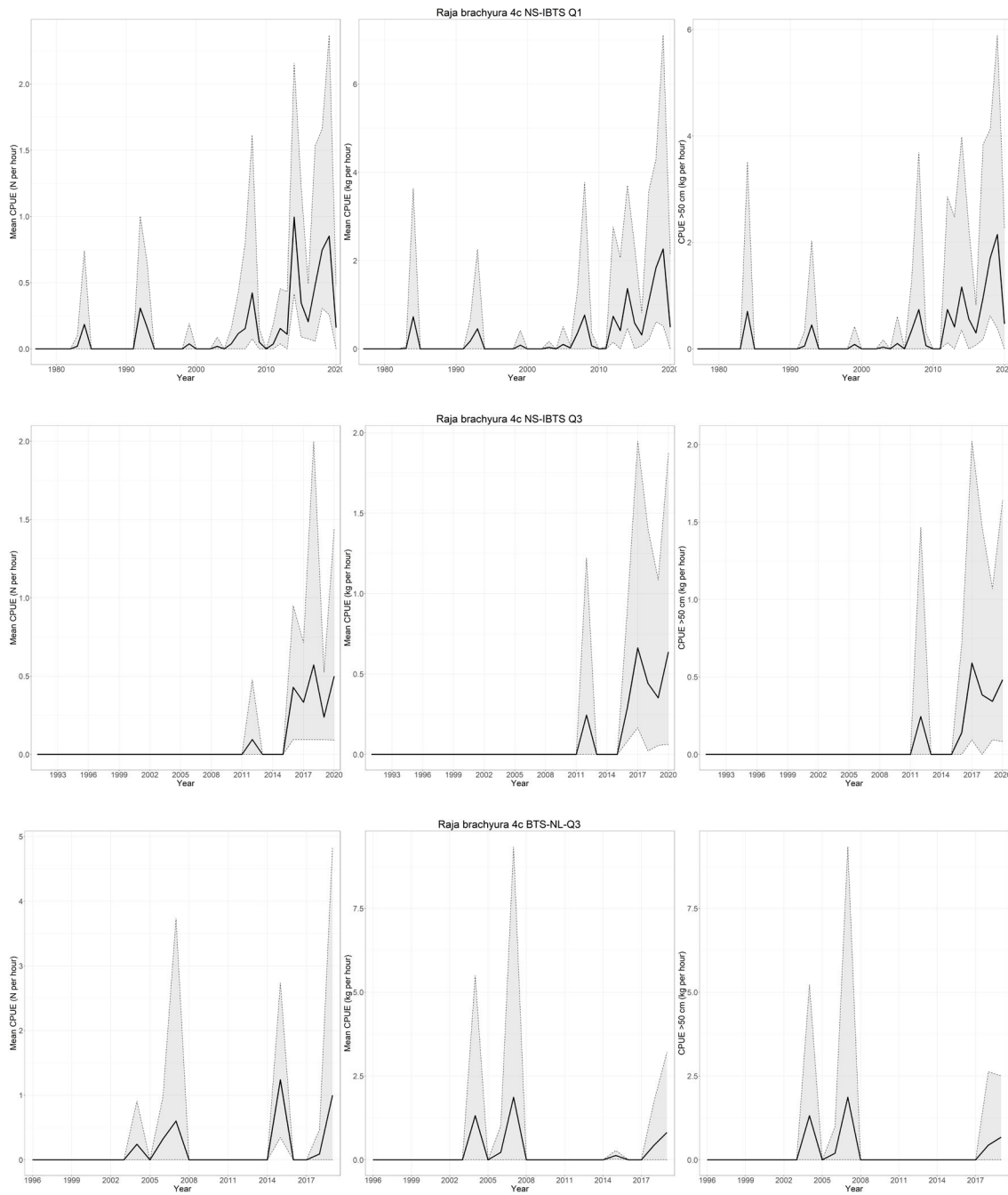


**Figure 15.6.5. Demersal elasmobranchs in the North Sea, Skagerrak, Kattegat and eastern Channel. 'Common skate complex'. Abundance index ( $n \cdot h^{-1}$ ), biomass index ( $kg \cdot h^{-1}$ ) and exploitable biomass ( $kg \cdot h^{-1}$ ), with 95% confidence intervals, during the North Sea IBTS (in roundfish areas 1–7) and BTS surveys in the years 1977–2020. Data extracted from the DATRAS database (selected for CPUE per length per haul) on 8 June 2021.**





**Figure 15.6.6. Demersal elasmobranchs in the North Sea, Skagerrak, Kattegat and eastern Channel. *Raja brachyura* in 4.a. Abundance index ( $n \cdot h^{-1}$ ), biomass index ( $kg \cdot h^{-1}$ ) and exploitable biomass ( $kg \cdot h^{-1}$ ), with 95% confidence intervals, during the North Sea IBTS (in roundfish areas 1–7) and BTS surveys in the years 1977–2020. Data extracted from the DATRAS database (selected for CPUE per length per haul) on 8 June 2021.**



**Figure 15.6.7. Demersal elasmobranchs in the North Sea, Skagerrak, Kattegat and eastern Channel. *Raja brachyura* 4.c. Abundance index ( $n \cdot h^{-1}$ ), biomass index ( $kg \cdot h^{-1}$ ) and exploitable biomass ( $kg \cdot h^{-1}$ ), with 95% confidence intervals, during the North Sea IBTS (in roundfish areas 1–7), BTS, and CGFS-Q4 surveys in the years 1977–2020. Data for BTS-BEL-Q3 extracted from national database. Other data extracted from the DATRAS database, see Section 15.6.4 for details on data source.**

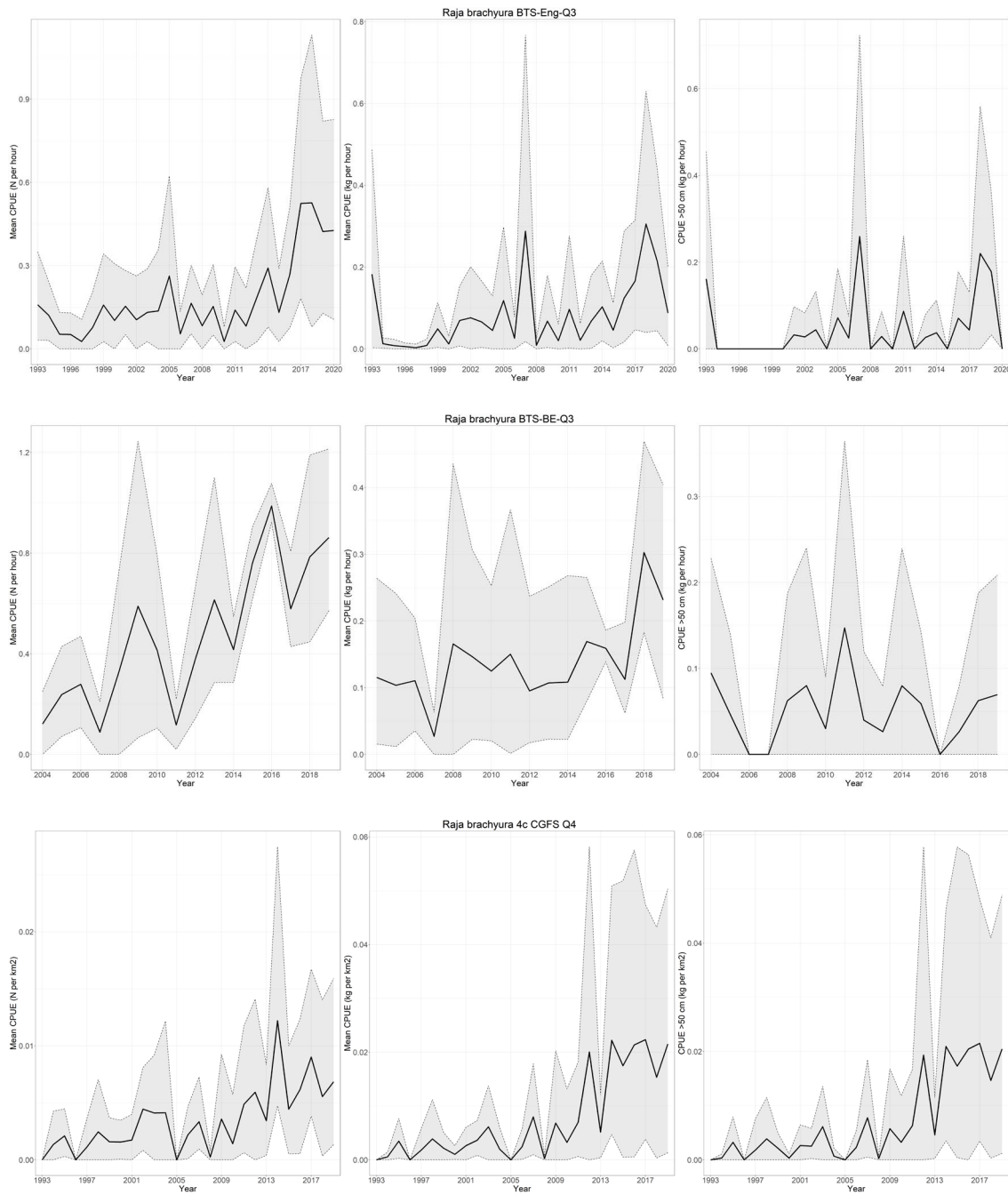


Figure 15.6.7 (continued). Demersal elasmobranchs in the North Sea, Skagerrak, Kattegat and eastern Channel. *Raja brachyura* 4.c. Abundance index ( $n \cdot h^{-1}$ ), biomass index ( $kg \cdot h^{-1}$ ) and exploitable biomass ( $kg \cdot h^{-1}$ ), with 95% confidence intervals, during the North Sea IBTS (in roundfish areas 1–7), BTS, and CGFS-Q4 surveys in the years 1977–2020. Data for BTS-BEL-Q3 extracted from national database. Other data extracted from the DATRAS database, see Section 15.6.4 for details on data source.

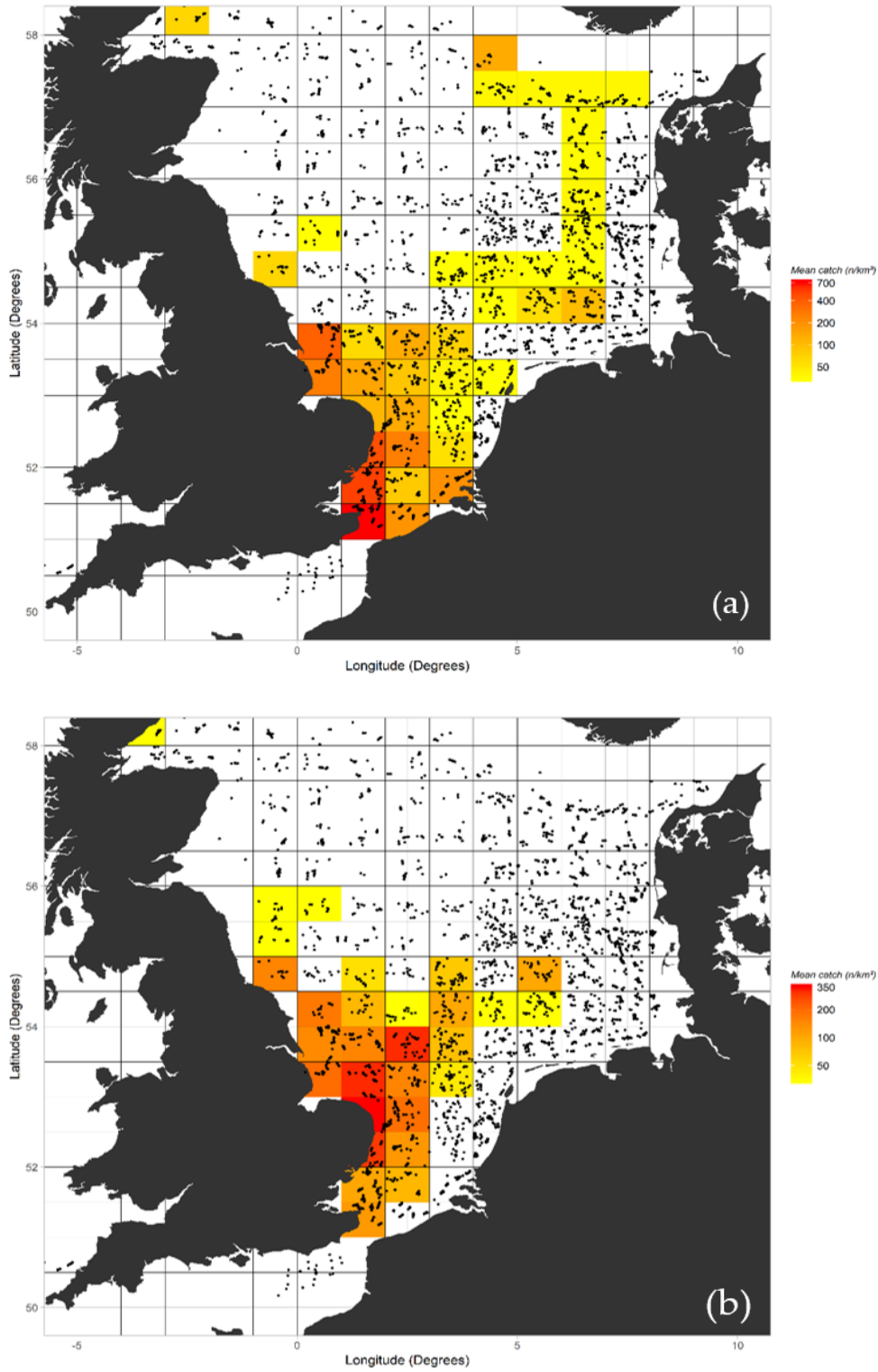
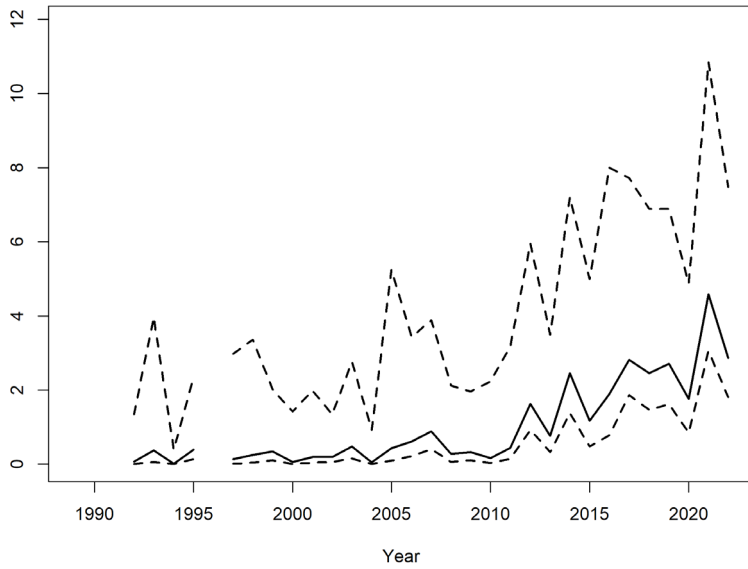
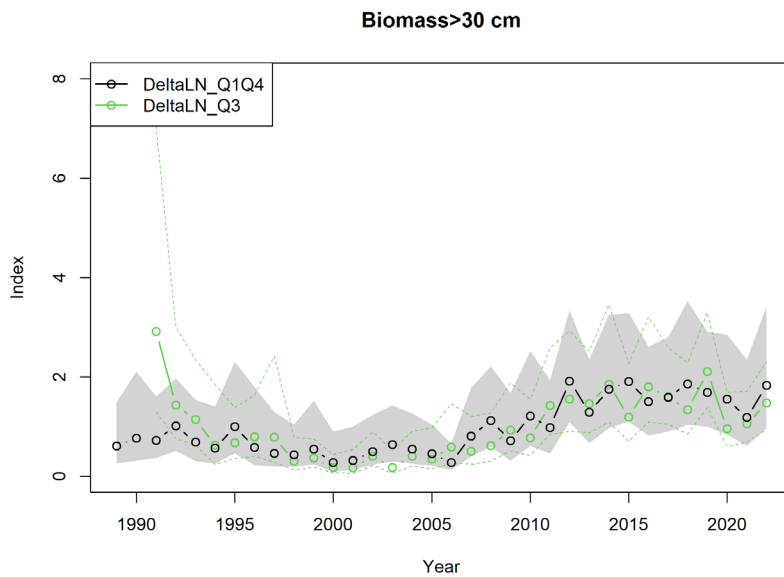


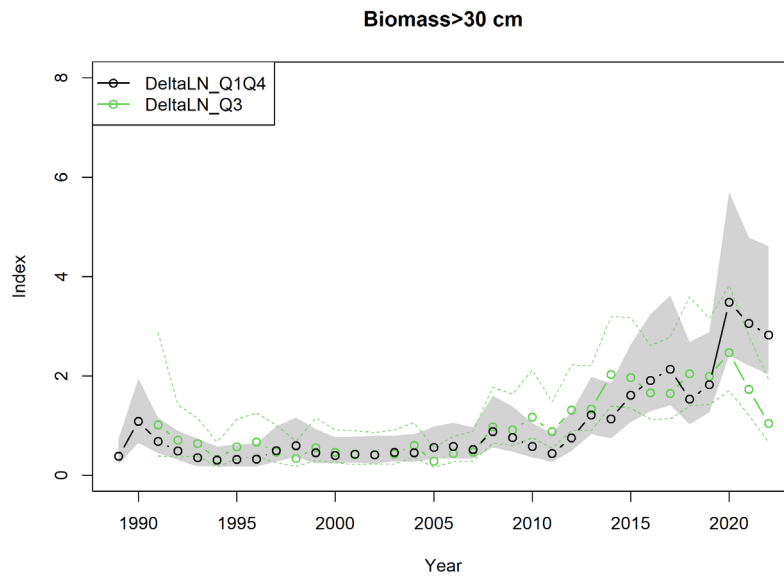
Figure 15.6.8. Demersal elasmobranchs in the North Sea, Skagerrak, Kattegat and eastern Channel. Average (a) thornback ray and (b) spotted ray catches (n.km<sup>2</sup>) from all BTS surveys (German, Dutch and Belgian) in the central-southern North Sea (ICES Areas 27.4.b and 27.4.c) for the period 2004–2018. Black dots show the different shooting positions from the survey hauls over the entire period. Data extracted from DATRAS, except for the Belgian data between 2004 and 2009 which were provided from the national database at ILVO.



**Figure 15.9.1. Blonde ray relative exploitable biomass (individuals  $\geq 50$  cm) index with 95% confidence intervals for NS-IBTS-Q1, NS-IBTS-Q3 and FR-CGFS-Q4 combined.**



**Figure 15.9.2. Spotted ray relative biomass (individuals  $\geq 30$  cm) indices with 95% confidence intervals for NS-IBTS-Q1 and FR-CGFS-Q4 combined (black line) and NS-IBTS-Q3, BTS-Eng-Q3, BTS-BEL-Q3, BTS-NL-TRI-Q3 and BTS-NL-ISI-Q3 combined (green line).**



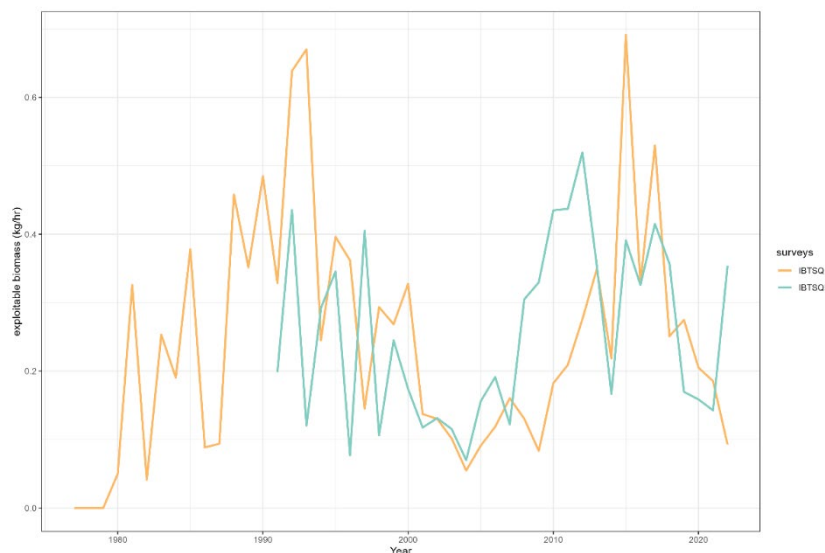
**Figure 15.9.3. Thornback ray relative biomass (individuals  $\geq 30$  cm) indices with 95% confidence intervals for NS-IBTS-Q1 and FR-CGFS-Q4 combined (black line) and NS-IBTS-Q3, BTS-Eng-Q3 and BTS-BEL-Q3 combined (green line).**

## 15.16 Appendix 1 – *rfb* method calculations by stock

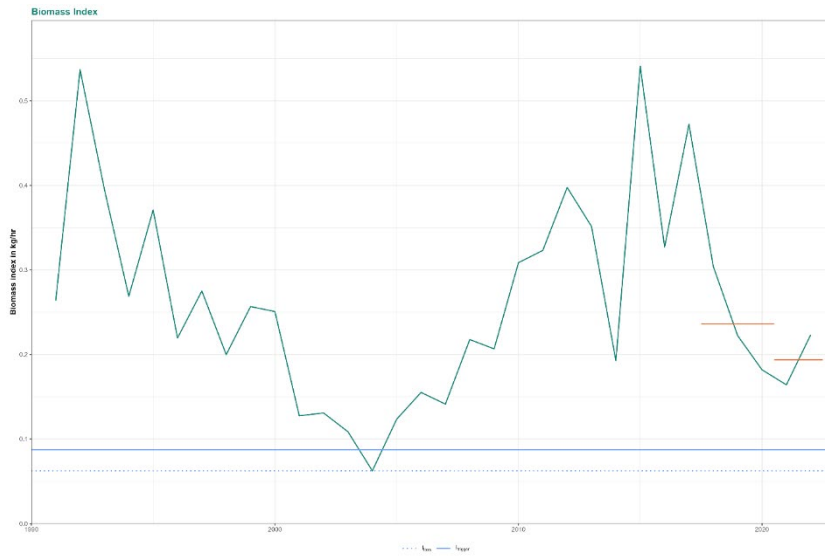
### 15.16.1 Cuckoo ray *Leucoraja naevus* (rjn.27.3a4)

**Table 1** *Leucoraja naevus* in Subarea 4 and Divisions 3.a. Estimates used in the *rfb* rule, with details and comments. All values have been rounded to two decimal places when appropriate. Calculations were done using unrounded values.

Variable	Estimate	Input data	Comments
<b>r</b>	0.82	Stock size indicator of exploitable biomass (individuals $\geq 50$ cm) index ( $\text{kg h}^{-1}$ ) from the combined NS-IBTS-Q1 and NS-IBTS-Q3, for years 1991-2022.	Index A (2021, 2022) = 0.194 Index B (2018-2020) = 0.24
<b>b</b>	1.00	Set to 1.00 at $I_{2022}/I_{\text{trigger}}$	$I_{\text{loss}} = 0.0624$ (2004) $I_{\text{trigger}} = 0.087$ $I_{2022} = 0.22$
<b>m</b>	0.95	Set at 0.95 when a species-specific <i>k</i> parameter is $< 0.20$	$k = 0.16 \text{ year}^{-1}$
<b>f</b>	1.13	Length data collected from commercial discards and landings from 2022  $L_C$ , $L_{\text{mode}}$ and $L_{F=M}$ are calculated based on pooled data from 2020 - 2022	$L_C = 33 \text{ cm}$ $L_{\text{mode}} = 57 \text{ cm}$ $L_{\text{mean}} = 49 \text{ cm}$ $L_{F=M} = 44 \text{ cm}$
<b>A<sub>y</sub></b>	89 tonnes	ICES advice for 2022 and 2023	(ICES, 2021a)
<b>A<sub>y+1</sub></b>	79 tonnes	$A_{y+1} = A_y \times r \times f \times b \times m$	



**Figure 1:** *Leucoraja naevus* in subarea 4 and division 3a. Exploitable biomass (individuals  $\geq 50$ cm) indices of the NS-IBTS-Q1 (orange) and NS-IBTS-Q3 (green) in  $\text{kg h}^{-1}$ .



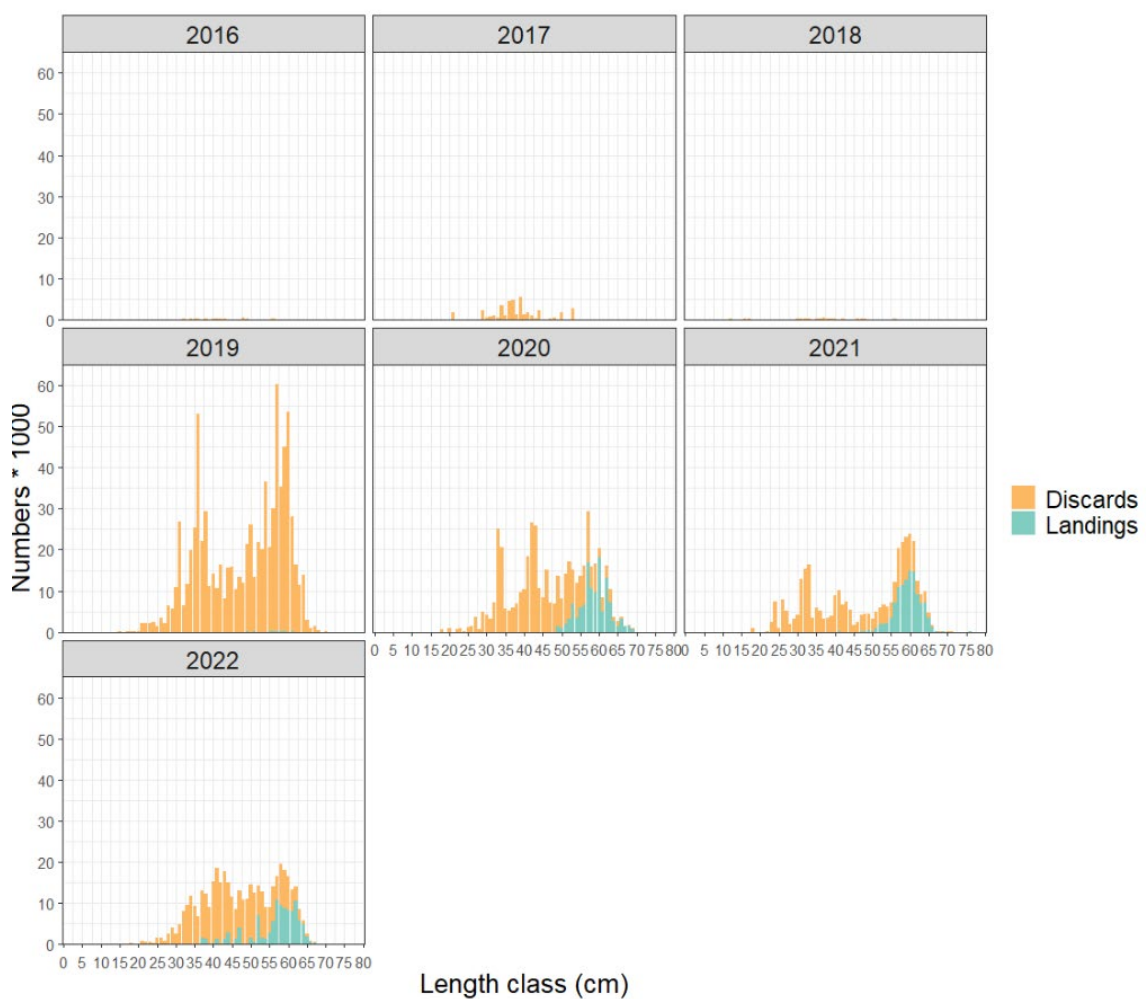
**Figure 2:** *Leucoraja naevus* in subarea 4 and division 3a. Combined exploitable biomass index in kg h<sup>-1</sup> for the period 1991-2022. Red horizontal lines denote the '2 over 3' rule used to calculate *r*, with index A (2021-2022) and index B (2018-2020). The solid and dashed blue lines show the calculated *I*<sub>loss</sub> and *I*<sub>trigger</sub> values, respectively.

**Table 2:** *Leucoraja naevus* in subarea 4 and division 3a. Yearly values for the exploitable biomass survey index (individuals ≥50 cm) in kg h<sup>-1</sup>. Values have been rounded to three decimal places, calculations were done using unrounded values.

Year	NS-IBTS-Q1	NS-IBTS-Q3	Combined index
1991	0.329	0.199	0.264
1992	0.639	0.435	0.537
1993	0.670	0.120	0.395
1994	0.245	0.292	0.269
1995	0.396	0.346	0.371
1996	0.362	0.077	0.219
1997	0.145	0.405	0.275
1998	0.294	0.106	0.200
1999	0.269	0.245	0.257
2000	0.328	0.174	0.251
2001	0.137	0.118	0.127
2002	0.130	0.131	0.131
2003	0.102	0.115	0.109
2004	0.055	0.070	0.062
2005	0.091	0.156	0.123
2006	0.119	0.191	0.155
2007	0.160	0.122	0.141
2008	0.130	0.305	0.218
2009	0.084	0.330	0.207



<b>2010</b>	0.182	0.435	<b>0.309</b>
<b>2011</b>	0.209	0.437	<b>0.323</b>
<b>2012</b>	0.276	0.520	<b>0.398</b>
<b>2013</b>	0.349	0.353	<b>0.351</b>
<b>2014</b>	0.218	0.167	<b>0.193</b>
<b>2015</b>	0.691	0.391	<b>0.541</b>
<b>2016</b>	0.328	0.326	<b>0.327</b>
<b>2017</b>	0.530	0.415	<b>0.472</b>
<b>2018</b>	0.251	0.357	<b>0.304</b>
<b>2019</b>	0.275	0.170	<b>0.222</b>
<b>2020</b>	0.205	0.159	<b>0.182</b>
<b>2021</b>	0.185	0.143	<b>0.164</b>
<b>2022</b>	0.093	0.354	<b>0.223</b>

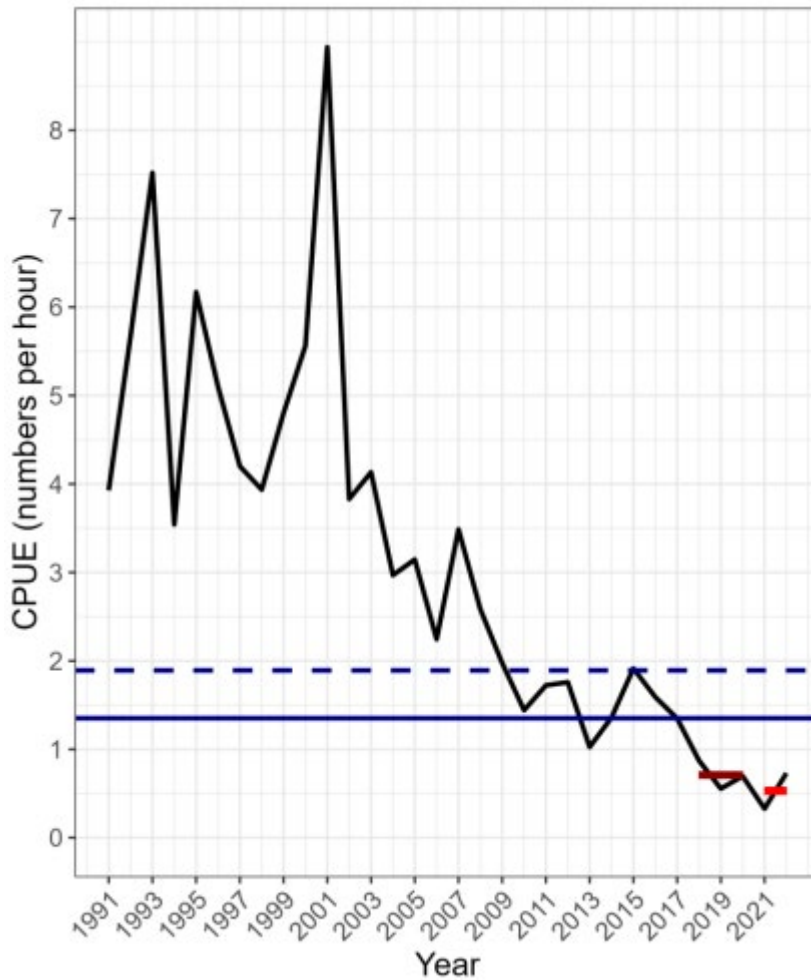


**Figure 3:** *Leucoraja naevus* in subarea 4 and division 3a. Length frequency distributions by year.

### 15.16.2 Starry ray *Amblyraja radiata* (rjr.27.23a4)

**Table 2 *Amblyraja radiata* in Subarea 2 and 4 and Divisions 3.a. Estimates used in the rfb rule, with details and comments. All values have been rounded to two decimal places when appropriate. Calculations were done using unrounded values.**

Variable	Estimate	Input data	Comments
<b>r</b>	0.75	Stock size indicator (combined CPUE (number per hour) index taken from the IBTS Q1 and IBTS Q3 surveys).	Index A (2021, 2022) = 0.53 Index B (2018-2020) = 0.24
<b>b</b>	0.39	Set at $I_{2022}/I_{trigger}$ because $I_{2022}$ is below $I_{trigger}$ . Here $I_{trigger} * I_{loss} * 1.4$ is set at the 20 <sup>th</sup> quantile of the survey index	$I_{loss} = 1.35$ $I_{trigger} = 1.89$ $I_{2022} = 0.73$
<b>m</b>	0.95	Set at 0.95 when a species-specific k parameter is < 0.20	$k = 0.1 \text{ year}^{-1}$
<b>f</b>	0.95	Length data collected from commercial discards from 2022  $L_C$ , $L_{mode}$ and $L_{F=M}$ are calculated based on pooled data from 2019 and 2022	$L_C = 33 \text{ cm}$ $L_{mode} = 40.22 \text{ cm}$ $L_{mean} = 36 \text{ cm}$ $L_{F=M} = 42.48 \text{ cm}$
<b>A<sub>y</sub></b>	0 tonnes	ICES advice in 2022	(ICES, 2021a)
<b>A<sub>y+1</sub></b>	0 tonnes	$A_{y+1} = A_y \times r \times f \times b \times m$	By definition, an advised catch in 2022 of 0, means that product of $[r \times f \times b \times m]$ is multiplied by 0 and will always be equal to 0.

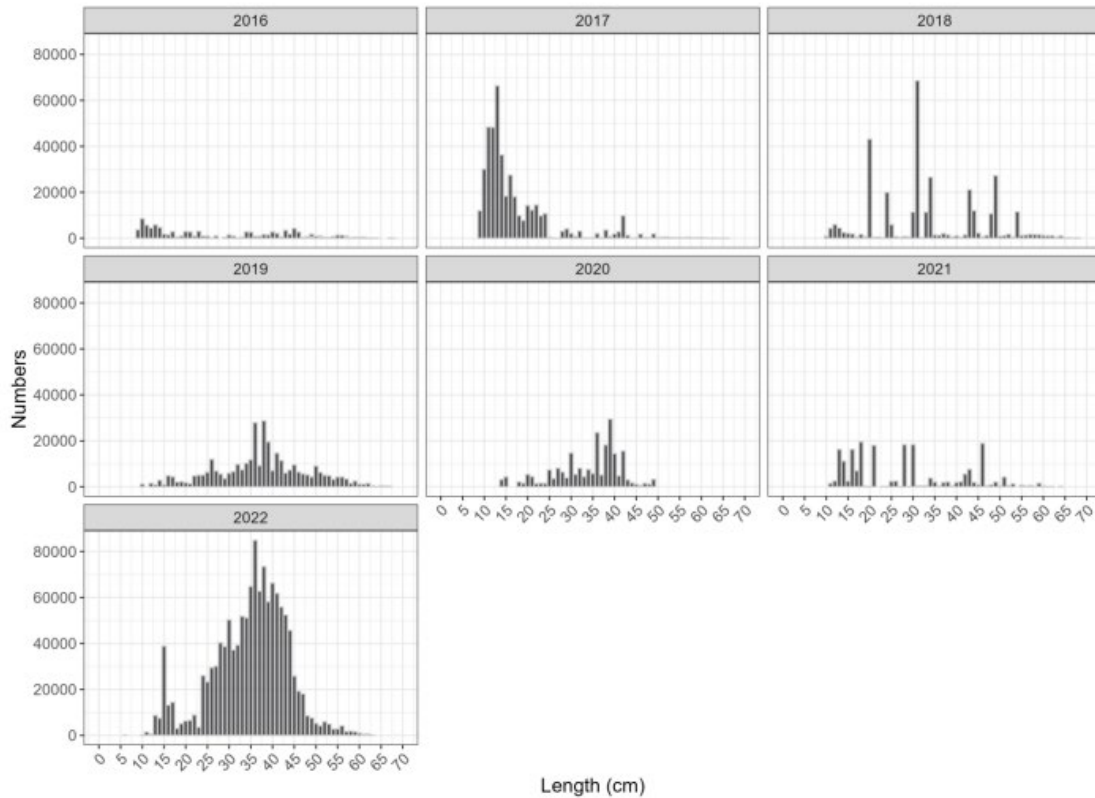


**Figure 1:** *Amblyraja radiata* in subareas 2 and 4 and division 3a. Survey index through time, calculated as the combined CPUE indices from the IBTS Q1 and IBTS Q3 surveys in numbers per year. Red (2021 and 2022) and darkred (2018-2020) lines show the two parts of the '2-over-3' rule used to calculate  $r$ . The solid and dashed blue lines show the calculated  $I_{loss}$  and  $I_{trigger}$  values, respectively.

**Table 2 *Amblyraja radiata* in Subarea 2 and 4 and Divisions 3.a. Yearly values for the abundance survey index (CPUE in numbers per hour) from the IBTS Q1 and IBTS Q3, and the combined index. Values have been round to two decimal places.**

Year	IBTS Q1 (n-h <sup>-1</sup> )	IBTS Q3 (n-h <sup>-1</sup> )	Combined index (n-h <sup>-1</sup> )
1991	4.161	3.696	3.929
1992	7.528	3.816	5.672
1993	12.232	2.804	7.518
1994	3.913	3.173	3.543
1995	8.526	3.812	6.169
1996	7.111	3.091	5.101
1997	5.518	2.882	4.200
1998	5.692	2.180	3.936
1999	6.473	3.134	4.804
2000	7.914	3.215	5.564
2001	11.358	6.520	8.939
2002	4.353	3.307	3.830
2003	4.543	3.722	4.133

2004	3.795	2.143	2.969
2005	4.022	2.270	3.146
2006	1.992	2.499	2.245
2007	3.180	3.794	3.487
2008	2.521	2.646	2.583
2009	0.982	2.967	1.974
2010	0.945	1.939	1.442
2011	1.012	2.435	1.724
2012	1.502	2.014	1.758
2013	0.684	1.367	1.026
2014	1.088	1.630	1.359
2015	1.605	2.223	1.914
2016	1.137	2.046	1.592
2017	1.255	1.444	1.349
2018	0.228	1.519	0.873
2019	0.564	0.546	0.555
2020	0.272	1.119	0.695
2021	0.352	0.306	0.329
2022	0.445	1.017	0.731



**Figure 2:** *Amblyraja radiata* in subareas 2 and 4 and division 3a. Length frequency distributions by year. All length samples are taken from discards.

## 16 Demersal elasmobranchs - Iceland and East Greenland

### 16.1 Ecoregion and stock boundaries

The elasmobranch fauna off Iceland and Greenland is little-studied and comprises 15 skate and 21 shark species (with six species of chimaeroid also present). The number of species decreases as water temperature decreases, and only a few of these species are common in Icelandic and Greenland waters.

An ecosystem overview for the ecoregion of Icelandic waters has been published and is available at the ICES website (ICES, 2022a) the most abundant elasmobranch species in this ecoregion is starry ray (thorny skate) *Amblyraja radiata*.

In Icelandic waters, other skate species commonly occurring are: Common blue skate *Dipturus batis*, Arctic skate *Amblyraja hyperborea*, round skate *Rajella fyllae*, spinytail skate *Bathyrāja spinicauda* and sailray *Rajella lintea* (former *D. linteus*). The remaining seven species are sporadically caught: Jensen's skate *Amblyraja jenseni*, Norwegian skate *Dipturus nidarosienis*, shagreen ray *Leucoraja fullonica*, roughskin skate *Malacoraja spinacidervis*, Krefft's skate, *Malacoraja krefftii*, deep-water ray *Rajella bathyphila* and Bigelow's skate *Rajella bigelowi*, , .

In Greenland waters, the commonly found skates include *R. fyllae*, *B. spinicauda* and *A. hyperborea*, with species such as *R. bathyphila*, *M. spinacidervis*, *R. lintea*, *A. jenseni* and *R. bigelowi* being less frequent (Möller *et al.*, 2010).

Dogfish and sharks in this ecoregion include spurdog *Squalus acanthias* (Section 2); Portuguese dogfish *Centroscymnus coelolepis* and leafscale gulper shark *Centrophorus squamosus* (Section 3); birdbeak dogfish *Deania calcea*, black dogfish *Centroscyllium fabricii*, great lantern shark *Etmopterus princeps*, velvet belly lanternshark *E. spinax*, longnose velvet dogfish *Centroselachus crepidater* and six gill shark *Hexanchus griseus* (Section 5); porbeagle shark *Lamna nasus* (Section 6); basking shark *Cetorhinus maximus* (Section 7); Greenland shark *Somniosus microcephalus* (Section 24); and several scyliorhinid catsharks (Iceland catshark *Apristurus laurussonii*, white ghost catshark *A. apthyodes*, small-eye catshark *A. microps* and mouse catshark *Galeus murinus*).

The distribution of demersal sharks in Icelandic waters is mainly restricted to upper slope and shelf break along the southeast to northwestern waters. The exception is *Squalus acanthias* which is found in shallower waters most commonly in the south and west but with patchy distribution also in other areas.

Chimaeras (rabbitfish *Chimaera monstrosa*, spearnose chimaera *Rhinochimaera atlantica*, large-eyed rabbitfish *Hydrolagus mirabilis*, *H. pallidus*, small-eyed rabbitfish *Hydrolagus affinis*, narrownose chimaera *Harriotta raleighana*) all occur in the area (Jakobsdóttir *et al.* 2020).

Stock boundaries are not known for the species in this area. Neither are the potential movements of species between coastal and offshore areas. Further investigations are necessary to determine potential migrations or interactions of elasmobranch populations within this ecoregion and neighbouring areas.

## 16.2 The fishery

### 16.2.1 History of the fishery

Skates and sharks are mainly a bycatch in fisheries, with Iceland being the main fishing nation operating in the ecoregion. Common skate complex is fished with a variety of fishing gears (Figure 16.1a). They used to be regarded as fairly common in Icelandic waters, but landings may now only be about 10% of what was landed 50 years ago. A large part of the landed catch is for local consumption, as the species within the common skate complex are traditional food in Iceland, particularly at Christmas time. The remaining catch is processed and mainly exported.

*A. radiata* is a bycatch in a variety of fishing gears around Iceland but was usually discarded. Increased landings since the 1990s may be related to an increased retention compensating for a lower abundance of the common skate complex. Landings are reported mainly from the longline fishery (Figure 16.1b). Reported landings have increased from low levels in 1980 to more than 1000 tonnes annually from 1995–2004. Thereafter, landings declined but have increased again to levels exceeding 1700 tonnes in 2012. From 2012 to 2016, landings have gradually reduced to approximately 1250 tonnes in 2016, followed by an abrupt decline in 2017, being ca. 600 tonnes in 2018. In 2019 and 2020, landings slightly increased again, but are not at the same level as observed before 2017. A relatively large proportion of the landings is for local consumption.

### 16.2.2 The fishery in 2022

No new information.

### 16.2.3 ICES advice applicable

ICES does not provide advice on these stocks.

### 16.2.4 Management applicable

There is no TAC for demersal skates in these areas.

## 16.3 Catch data

### 16.3.1 Landings

From 1973–2022, 13 countries reported landings of skates, demersal sharks and chimaeras from Divisions 5.a (Iceland) and 14.a and 14.b (East Greenland). Iceland is the main nation fishing in these areas.

Reported landings of skates from Iceland (Division 5.a) and eastern Greenland (Subarea 14) are given in Table 16.1, with these data comprising national landings data provided to WGEF, landings statistics from the Faroese national database ([www.hagstova.fo](http://www.hagstova.fo)), and data from the ICES database.

Icelandic national data for estimated landings of the common blue skate (1973–2022), *A. radiata* (1977–2022), *R. lintea* (2000–2022) are available. Database entries for all species with national landings for the years 2001–2022 are available.

Prior to 1992, all skates (except *A. radiata* and common skate complex) were reported as 'Raja rays nei'. Since 1992, when skates have been reported to the species level, *A. radiata* and *Dipturus*

*batis*-complex have accounted for about 98% of the annual skate landings. Only small quantities of *L. fullonica*, *R. lintea* and *B. spinicauda* have been reported. Fishers do not usually distinguish between *L. fullonica* and *R. lintea* in Icelandic waters, and so landings of *R. lintea* are likely to be underestimated and landings of *L. fullonica* overestimated (as landings of the latter species, which is relatively rare in Icelandic waters, includes some *R. lintea*). Landings reported as *D. batis*-complex could also sometimes be *R. lintea*. Therefore, official landings on *L. fullonica* will be reported as *Raja rays nei* until this issue is locally resolved.

Reported skate landings peaked at 2500 t in 1951. Since then, the landings of the *D. batis*-complex have decreased but landings of *A. radiata* have increased in later years. Landings of *A. radiata* were under 1000 t but after 2005 increased to about 1800 t in 2012 contributing the bulk of landings of elasmobranchs in this ecoregion (Table 16.1; figures 16.2–16.3). Overall, over 95% of the skate landings came from Division 5.a. The share taken by Iceland from this area increased from <50% in the 1970s to nearly 100% from 1999 onwards.

Information on elasmobranch bycatch in East Greenland waters is unavailable, but several species are probably taken and discarded in fisheries for cod, shrimp and Greenland halibut *Reinhardtius hippoglossoides*.

### 16.3.2 Discards

No discard data were available.

### 16.3.3 Quality of catch data

The main skates landing nations in this ecoregion now provide species-specific information, but species identification needs improvement.

### 16.3.4 Discard survival

No data available to WGEF for the fisheries in this ecoregion.

## 16.4 Commercial catch composition

No data on the length distribution or sex ratio in commercial landings were available.

## 16.5 Commercial catch and effort data

No data available.

## 16.6 Fishery-independent surveys

### 16.6.1 Surveys in Greenland waters

Since 1998, the Greenland surveys (GR-GHXIVB) have covered the area between 61°45'–67°N at depths of 400–1500 m, although the area between 63–64°N was not covered by the surveys, as the bottom topography was too steep and rough. The surveys are aimed at Greenland halibut, although all fish species are recorded. The surveys use an ALFREDO III trawl (wingspread ≈ 21 m; headline height ≈ 5.8 m; mesh size (cod end) = 30 mm) with rock-hopper ground gear. These data were presented to WGEF in a working paper by Jørgensen (2006) and are summarized

in Table 16.2. Another source of survey data in Greenland waters is the German Greenland groundfish survey (GER (GRL)-GFS-Q4), and these data need to be examined.

### 16.6.2 Surveys in Icelandic waters

The Icelandic spring groundfish survey (IS-SMB) is the main source of fishery-independent data for starry ray *Amblyraja radiata* and blue skate *Dipturus batis*. The survey indices from that survey are used for an assessment of starry ray (MFRI Advice 2023).

The Icelandic autumn groundfish survey (IS-SMH) is the main source of other fishery-independent data for demersal elasmobranchs in Icelandic waters (Jakobsdóttir *et al.*, 2022). Further, data can be compiled for some species from other surveys e.g. spring groundfish survey (IS-SMB), shrimp and flatfish surveys undertaken by MFRI.

The IS-SMB survey covers the Icelandic shelf at depths of 20–500 m. The IS-SMH survey covers the Icelandic shelf and upper slope at depths of 20–1500 m. Both surveys are stratified systematic surveys with standardized fishing methods. Small-meshed bottom trawls (40 mm in the cod-end) with a rock-hopper ground gear (See Björnsson *et al.*, 2007 for a detailed description of methodology).

Catch data and frequency of occurrence for skates from IS-SMH is summarised in Table 16.3. Catch data (number of individuals per survey) of all demersal elasmobranchs, for the years 1996–2022, can be found in Jakobsdóttir *et al.* (2022).

## 16.7 Life-history information

Published information on life history of skates and rays in Icelandic waters is scarce.

*Amblyraja radiata* is by far the most abundant elasmobranch species in Icelandic waters. It has a widespread distribution over the Icelandic shelf and upper slope (Figure 16.4 and 16.6). Seasonal differences in distributional patterns have been noted, with *A. radiata* much less abundant on the shelf during autumn surveys (IS-SMH) than in spring survey (IS-SMB), and the bulk of catches in IS-SMH is taken on shelf break/slope north and east of Iceland (Figure 16.4 a and b, see also MFRI Assessment reports, 2023).

Anecdotal information suggests that *A. radiata* undertakes seasonal migrations in relation to egg-laying activity, but this is unconfirmed. Trawl survey data may provide useful information on catches of viable skate egg cases and/or on nursery grounds.

Length–frequency distributions of *A. radiata* in IS-SMH (Figure 16.5) indicate the majority of specimens are <60 cm  $L_T$ . Data on maturity derive from autumn survey allowing for calculations of maturity ogives. Length-at-50%-maturity ( $L_{50}$ ) is 42.9 cm and 41.0 cm (MFRI, Assessment reports, 2022)  $L_T$  for males and females respectively ( $L_{95}$  for males is 51.1 cm and 50 cm for females). These values are lower in comparison to adjacent waters to the NW Atlantic stock (Templeman, 1987), but larger than observed in the North Sea, where  $L_{50}$  is 36.2 and 38.4 cm  $L_T$  for males and females, respectively (McCully *et al.*, 2012).

## 16.8 Exploratory assessment models

Total biomass, biomass trends and probability of capture can be estimated for 5 skate species and 8 shark species frequently occurring in the Icelandic groundfish surveys using conventional standardized swept-area biomass indices. The spring survey IS-SMB provides estimates for common blue skate and starry ray. Estimates for the other skates and sharks are derived from the



Icelandic autumn survey (IS-SMH). Remaining skate and shark species from the region are only infrequently/sporadically caught in these two surveys.

#### Skates

*Amblyraja radiata* is the most widely distributed and by far the highest in biomass, the mean annual spring survey biomass estimated around 16000 t. The stock biomass in the last decade is around half that observed in the beginning of the time series (Figure 16.6). Abundance indices and biomass estimates for *A. radiata* in Icelandic waters (Va) have been calculated based on IS-SMB and IS-SMH, with a decreasing trend in large skates (>50 cm) observed (Björnsson *et al.*, 2007). Preliminary survey results indicate stable trends in major size groups in recent years after a period of decline (MFRI, Assessment reports, 2023).

In Icelandic waters *Dipturus batis* is the second most abundant skate species and its distribution is mainly within the warmer waters off South and West Iceland. The mean biomass in annual spring survey is estimated around 600 tonnes. Index shows increasing trend since 2010 with exception of this year's index (Figure 16.6).

Arctic skate *Amblyraja hyperborea* is the second most abundant skate in the IS-SMH survey. The distribution is limited to the upper shelf and slope off N and East Iceland. The mean biomass estimate is one tenth that of *Amblyraja radiata*, being around 660 t. Stock size has been relatively stable in the past two decades (Figure 16.6).

Spinytail skate (*Bathyraja spinicauda*) and round skate (*Rajella fyllae*) are reported in the autumn survey every year with mean estimated survey biomass of 396 t and 253 t respectively. *Bathyraja spinicauda* is most commonly found in deeper waters northwest and southeast of the island, *Rajella fyllae* being confined to the outer shelf and slope from southeast to northwestern waters. The stock size of round skate is estimated at historical low (Fig. 16.6).

#### Sharks

Of the 12 shark species that occur in IS-SMH *Centroscyllium fabricii* has by far the highest survey biomass estimates of 12.000 t. Interannual variability is quite high, the abundance in the last decade being higher than the first decade of this century (Figure 16.7).

Of those shark species that persistently are recorded in the autumn survey, 2 species show a decline in abundance: *Cenytoscymnus coelolepis* (mean biomass estimates of 591 t) and *Deania calcea* (mean biomass estimates of 763 t) (Figure 16.7). Another 3 species, *Etmopterus spinax* (mean biomass estimates of 1799 t), *Galeus murinus* (mean biomass estimates of 648t) and *Apristurus laurussonii* (mean biomass estimates of 622 t) show no trend in biomass over the last two decades. 3 species, *Etmopterus princeps* (mean biomass estimates of 2747 t), *Centroscymnus crepidater* (mean biomass estimates of 1927 t) and *Centrophorus squamosus* (mean biomass estimates of 535 t) show an increase in biomass (Figure 16.7).

## 16.9 Stock assessment

In 2020 MFRI started to publish advice for starry ray in Icelandic waters based on precautionary approach for category 3 stocks (MFRI Advice, 2022). In 2023 the first attempt was made to perform an analytical assessment of starry ray in Icelandic waters, based recommendations from ICES (2022b, MFRI Advice, 2023). The starry ray is considered a data limited stock and follows the ICES framework for such (category 3.1, ICES 2021). A stochastic surplus production model in continuous time (SPiCT; Pedersen and Berg, 2017) is one of the official assessment methods for stocks in this category. The model quantifies observation and process errors and estimates stock status and reference levels with associated confidence intervals. SPiCT estimates MSY

based reference levels, which can be used to calculate quantities relevant for fisheries management and ICES recommends using the 35<sup>th</sup> percentile for all quantities (Mildenberger et al., 2022). However, starry ray is not subject to management such as TAC limitations. Only explorative assessments have been undertaken for other skates and sharks in this ecoregion.

## 16.10 Quality of assessments

The IS-SMB covers the main fishing grounds of starry ray. Starry ray is an abundant species in IS-SMB and the index is considered representative of stock trends.

The majority of commercial landings data are being taken by gears other than bottom trawl (Figure 16.1) and this should be considered.

## 16.11 Reference points

Analytical assessment has only been performed of starry ray Icelandic waters. SPiCT provides relative fishing mortality (F/FMSY) and relative biomass (B/BMSY) reference points. FMSY and BMSY are estimated directly from the SPiCT assessment model and, therefore, change when the assessment is updated. For the MSY approach, the reference points are FMSY and  $B_{trigger} = 0.5 BMSY$  (ICES, 2021). For the precautionary approach, the reference points are  $F_{lim} = 1.7 \times FMSY$  and  $B_{lim} = 0.5 BMSY$  (ICES, 2021).

## 16.12 Conservation considerations

The common skate complex has been found to be vulnerable to exploitation and has been near-extirpated from coastal areas elsewhere in their range (e.g. parts of the Irish and North Seas). Preliminary investigation of the common skate complex in Icelandic waters indicated that the dominant species currently found in Icelandic waters is the smaller *D. batis* now currently referred to as the common blue skate (Last et al., 2016)

## 16.13 Management considerations

The elasmobranch fauna off Iceland and Greenland is little studied and comprises relatively few species (21 sharks, 15 skates and six chimaeras). Most of the landings of skates are now reported to species.

The most abundant demersal elasmobranch in the area is *A. radiata*, which is widespread and abundant in this and adjacent waters. Negative survey trends for large size starry rays have been observed (Björnsson et al., 2007). Preliminary results of more recent data indicate that after a period of decline, stock trends have been stable for a few years.

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## **16.15 Tables and Figures**

**Table 16.1. Demersal elasmobranchs - Iceland and East Greenland. Reported landings of skates from Iceland (Division 5.a) and East Greenland (Subarea 14). Data were updated with landings from ICES historic nominal landings database (ICES, 2016) and national landings data provided to the WG (June 2021). Faroese landings 1990–2015 were extracted from Faroes national statistics database available on [www.hagstova.fo](http://www.hagstova.fo) \*1990–2015: Total catch (live weight). \*\* Prior to 1992 all skates nei are assumed to belong to common skate complex (see earlier reports).**

Scientific name	Nation	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986
common skate complex	Iceland	364	275	188	333	442	424	403	196	229	245	185	178	120	108
<i>Amblyraja radiata</i>	Iceland	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	12	46	15	44
<i>Raja rays nei</i> **	Belgium	59	51	62	36	41	23	27	36	28	11	15	15	19	18
	Faeroe Islands	80	56	43	35	75	27	37	21	25	23	73	24	21	0
	Germany	76	41	49	41	37	10	2	1	2	2	4	3	2	1
	Norway	1	0	63	4	2	3	2	3	6	1	10	3	5	0
	UK - England & Wales	385	187	195	106	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	UK - Scotland	5	8	14	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>		<b>970</b>	<b>618</b>	<b>614</b>	<b>563</b>	<b>602</b>	<b>487</b>	<b>471</b>	<b>257</b>	<b>290</b>	<b>291</b>	<b>299</b>	<b>269</b>	<b>182</b>	<b>171</b>

		1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
common skate complex	Iceland	130	152	152	222	304	363	274	299	245	181	118	108	80	94
	Norway	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
<i>Amblyraja radiata</i>	Iceland	125	39	100	163	286	317	294	1206	1749	1493	1430	1252	996	1076
<i>Leucoraja fullonica</i>	Iceland	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	12	24	19	16	12	21	27
<i>Raja rays nei</i> **	Belgium	22	20	22	6	9	6	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Faeroe Islands*	8	2	2	16	5	2	3	3	9	2	2	7	5	0
	Germany	0	0	0	1	3	1	2	0	9	0	0	1	0	7
	Norway	0	0	0	0	0	25	8	8	7	10	2	19	8	3
	Portugal	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
	UK - Eng+Wales+N.Irl.	0	0	0	0	0	1	2		4	0	0	1	2	0
<b>Total</b>		<b>285</b>	<b>213</b>	<b>276</b>	<b>408</b>	<b>607</b>	<b>715</b>	<b>588</b>	<b>1529</b>	<b>2047</b>	<b>1705</b>	<b>1569</b>	<b>1400</b>	<b>1112</b>	<b>1210</b>

**Table 16.1. (continued). Demersal elasmobranchs - Iceland and East Greenland. Reported landings of skates from Iceland (Division 5.a) and East Greenland (Subarea 14). Data were updated with landings from ICES historic nominal landings database (ICES, 2016a) and national landings data provided to the WG. \*Faroese landings 1990–2017 were extracted from Faroes national statistics database available on [www.hagstova.fo](http://www.hagstova.fo). Total catch (live weight). \*\* Official reports on *L. fullonica* are likely misidentification and thus, from 2005, these numbers are reported to WG as rays nei.**

Scientific name	Nation	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
common skate complex	Iceland	82	59	120	145	166	136	123	126	128	117	125	145	153	141	165	143	147	124	194	160	158	116
	Norway	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Amblyraja radiata</i>	Iceland	1211	1781	1491	1013	657	530	496	634	866	1026	1416	1978	1847	1625	1397	1273	652	604	963	804	760	249
<i>Rajella lintea</i>	Iceland	0	0	10	8	1	8	7	0	8	12	9	9	7	4	11	3	5	4	5	4	10	7
** <i>Leucoraja fullonica</i>	Iceland	37	32	17	23													0					
<i>Raja rays nei</i>	Faeroe Islands*	2	1	0	8	9	16	7	11	6	5	14	5	6	4	0	8	3	3				
	Germany	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0					
	France												0	0	0	0	0	0					
	Iceland	0	0	0	0	16	16	17	4	33	19	17	21	37	14	15	13	10	12	31	17	23	7
	Norway	6	5	1	0	0	7	0	1	2	4	4	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	4			1
	Portugal	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0				
	Russian Federation	0	0	0	2	6	3	0	0	na	na	0	0	na	na	na	0	0	NA				
	Spain	0	0	15	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			0	0	0	0	0	0				
	UK	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0				
	<i>Raja clavata</i>	France								0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			
<b>Total</b>		<b>1340</b>	<b>1878</b>	<b>1655</b>	<b>1200</b>	<b>855</b>	<b>726</b>	<b>650</b>	<b>786</b>	<b>1043</b>	<b>1183</b>	<b>1520</b>	<b>2039</b>	<b>1917</b>	<b>1788</b>	<b>1595</b>	<b>1433</b>	<b>817</b>	<b>761</b>	<b>1197</b>	<b>985</b>	<b>951</b>	<b>380</b>

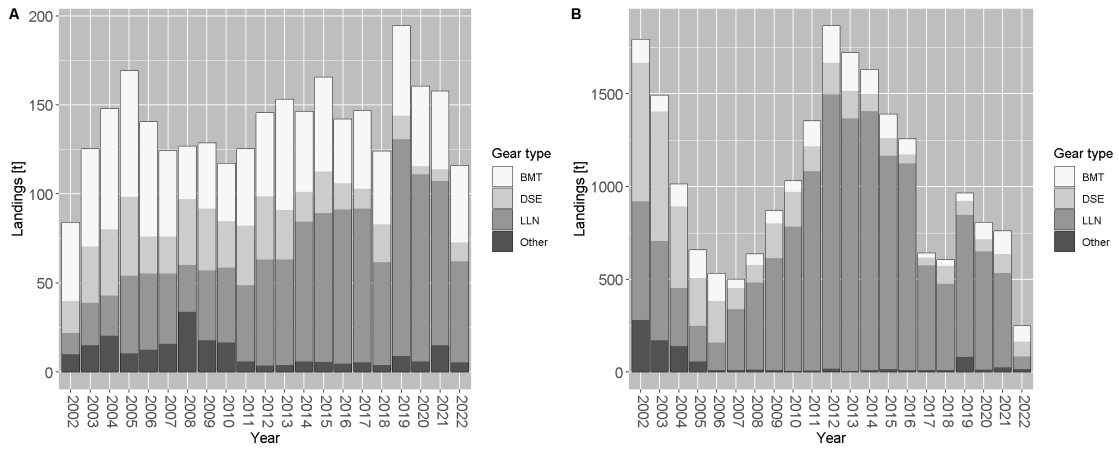
**Table 16.2. Demersal elasmobranchs - Iceland and East Greenland. Demersal elasmobranch species captured during groundfish surveys at East Greenland (1998–2005) giving the total number, observed maximum weight (kg), depth range (m) and bottom temperature range °C and most northern position (decimal degrees). Source: Jørgensen (2006).**

Species	N	Max wt (kg)	Depth range (m)	Temp range (°C)	Maximum latitude
<i>Bathyraja spinicauda</i>	82	61.5	548–1455	0.5–5.6	65.46°N
<i>Rajella bathyphila</i>	57	45.3	476–1493	0.3–4.1	65.44°N
<i>Rajella fyllae</i>	117	4.8	411–1449	0.8–5.9	65.46°N
<i>Amblyraja hyperborea</i>	12	23.4	520–1481	0.5–5.4	65.47°N
<i>Amblyraja radiata</i>	483	22.1	411–1281	0.8–6.6	66.21°N
<i>Malacoraja spinacidermis</i>	3	3.1	1282–1450	2.3–2.7	62.25°N
<i>Apristurus laurussoni</i>	3	0.7	836–1255	1.7–4.3	65.22°N
<i>Centroscyllium fabricii</i>	812	128	415–1492	0.6–5.1	65.40°N
<i>Somniosus microcephalus</i>	9	500	512–1112	1.4–4.9	65.35°N

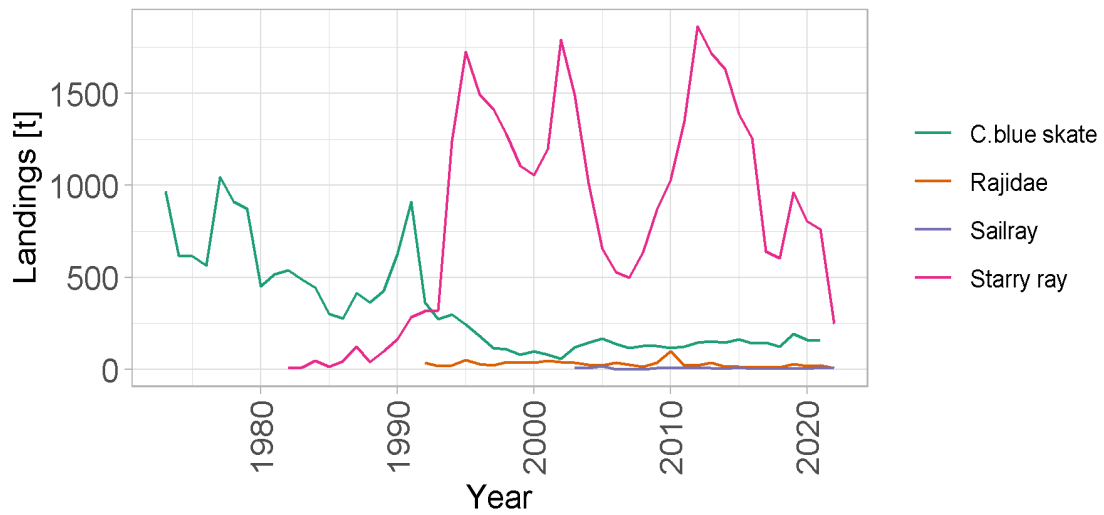
**Table 16.3. Demersal elasmobranchs - Iceland and East Greenland. Catch data of skates and rays in MRI annual autumn groundfish survey at Iceland (Division 5.a), giving the number of individuals caught (N) and the frequency of occurrence (percentage of stations where species was collected, %O). 2011 survey (noted with asterisk) was discontinued and therefore data are incomplete.**

	2000		2001		2002		2003		2004		2005		2006		2007		2008		2009		2010			
	N	%O	N	%O	N	%O	N	%O	N	%O	N	%O	N	%O	N	%O	N	%O	N	%O	N	%O		
common skate complex	6	<1	1	<1	3	<1	3	<1	1	<1	4	<1	6	1	7	1	7	1	9	1	4	<1		
<i>Amblyraja radiata</i>	1589	48	1413	45	1442	49	1379	49	1957	51	1678	53	1716	52	1474	52	1569	48	1590	39	1399	46		
<i>Rajella lintea</i>	2	<1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	<1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		
<i>Amblyraja hyperborea</i>	110	9	160	9	80	8	88	8	97	9	104	8	120	10	59	10	90	9	103	9	86	10		
<i>Rajella fyllae</i>	24	4	54	8	53	8	77	6	37	6	53	7	81	8	44	8	106	5	48	10	70	7		
<i>Bathyraja spinicauda</i>	7	2	11	2	10	2	25	1	12	2	16	2	21	2	7	2	18	2	11	2	1	2		
<i>Rajella bathyphila</i>	1	<1	0	0	0	0	1	<1	0	0	1	<1	0	0	0	0	2	<1	0	0	0	0		
<i>Rajella bigelowi</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	<1	0	0	0	0		
	2011*		2012		2013		2014		2015		2016		2017		2018		2019		2020		2021		2022	
	N	%O	N	%O	N	%O	N	%O	N	%O	N	%O	N	%O	N	%O	N	%O	N	%O	N	%O	N	%O
common skate complex	1	1	0	<1	0	0	5	1	17	2	0	0	4	<1	10	1	4	1	4	<1	1	<1	0	0
<i>Amblyraja radiata</i>	295	42	918	34	1142	41	1289	52	1066	49	1268	48	1026	45	1218	42	159	43	919	48	774	44	725	46.6
<i>Rajella lintea</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	-	0	2	<1	1	<1	0	-	
<i>Amblyraja hyperborea</i>	27	8	73	7	63	8	95	9	68	5	79	8	43	5	54	6	21	6	66	7	44	5.8	45	6.4
<i>Rajella fyllae</i>	36	5	24	17	35	4	71	10	30	6	46	6	33	9	41	7	26	7	36	7	19	4.7	39	5.3
<i>Bathyraja spinicauda</i>	2	0	11	1	4	2	11	2	5	1	4	1	5	1	7	1	0	0	2	1	4	1.1	0	-
<i>Rajella bathyphila</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	<1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	<1	0	-
<i>Rajella bigelowi</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	<1	0	0	1	<1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Malacoraja kreffti</i>									2	<1	3	<1	3	<1	0	0	1	<1	2	<1	0	0	0	0

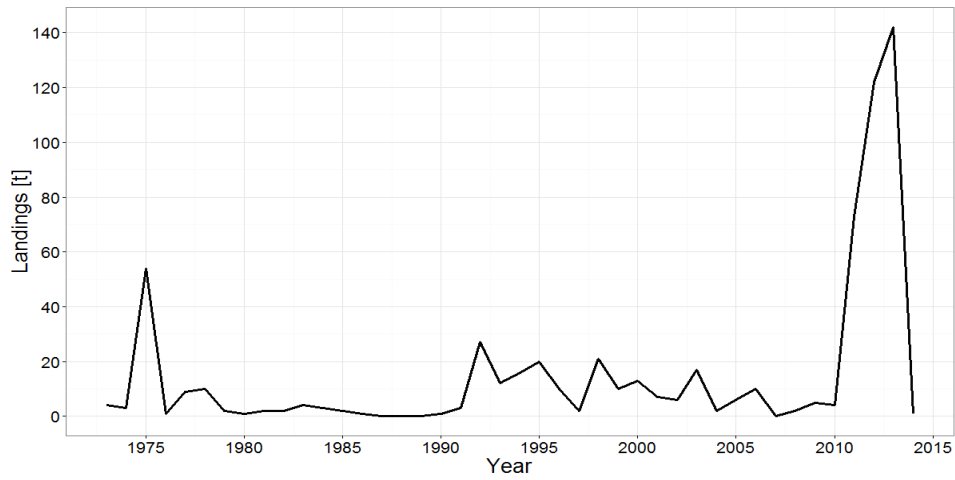




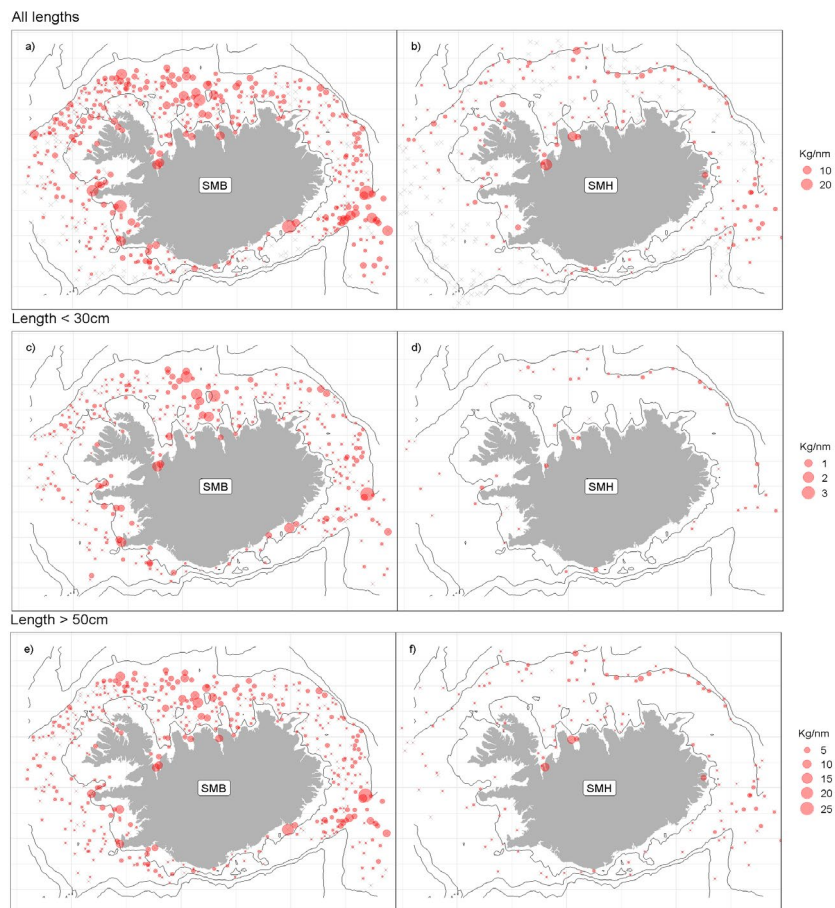
**Figure 16.1. Demersal elasmobranchs - Iceland and East Greenland. Icelandic landings of (a) common blue skate and (b) starry ray *A. radiata* by fishing gear). Note different scales at the y-axis.**



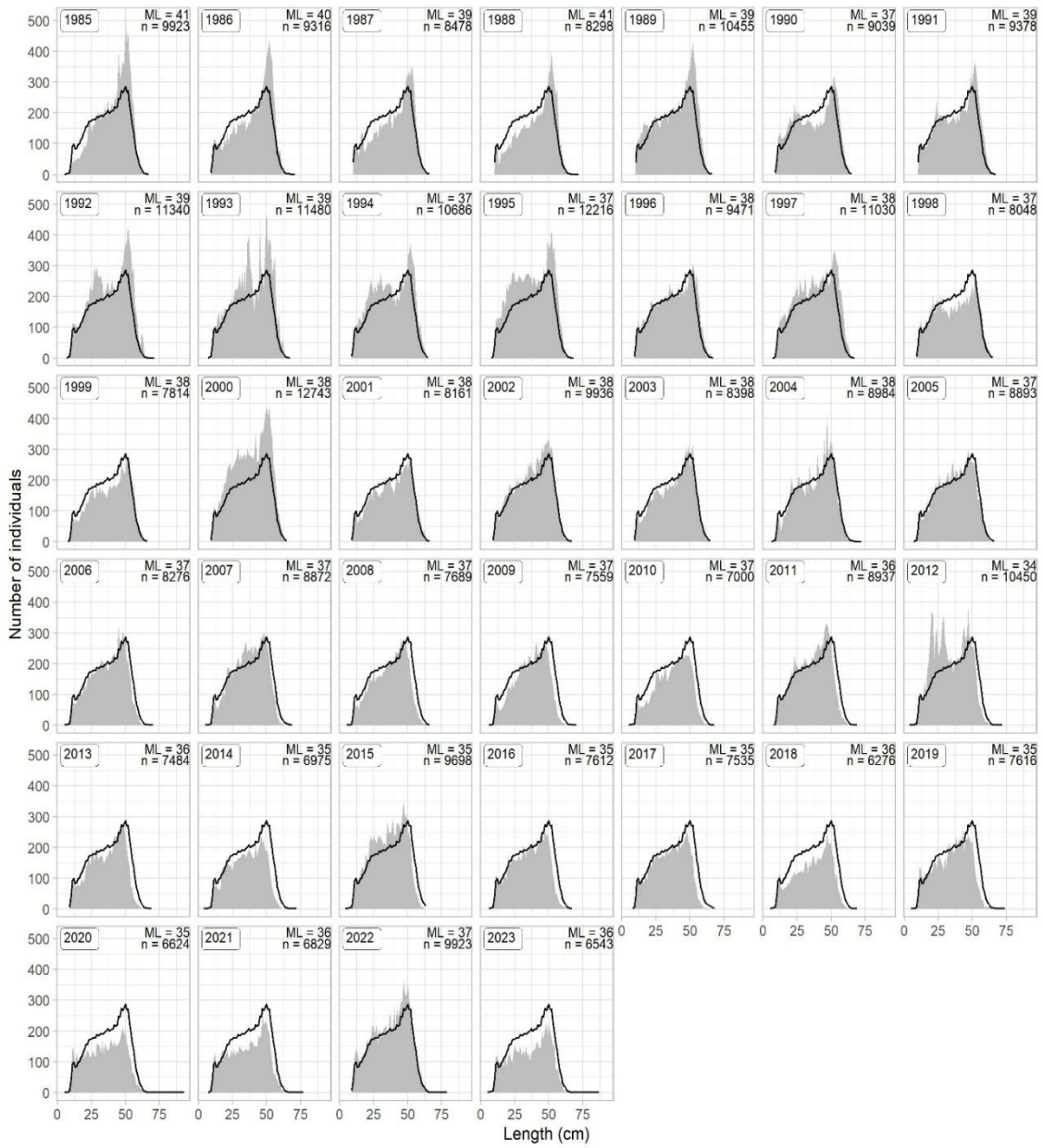
**Figure 16.2. Demersal elasmobranchs - Iceland and East Greenland. Landings of skates in division 5.a. Prior to 1992, all skates nei are assumed to belong to common skate complex (see earlier reports). Data were updated with nominal landings from ICES database (ICES, 2021) for years 2006–2019 and also contain national landings data provided to the WG.**



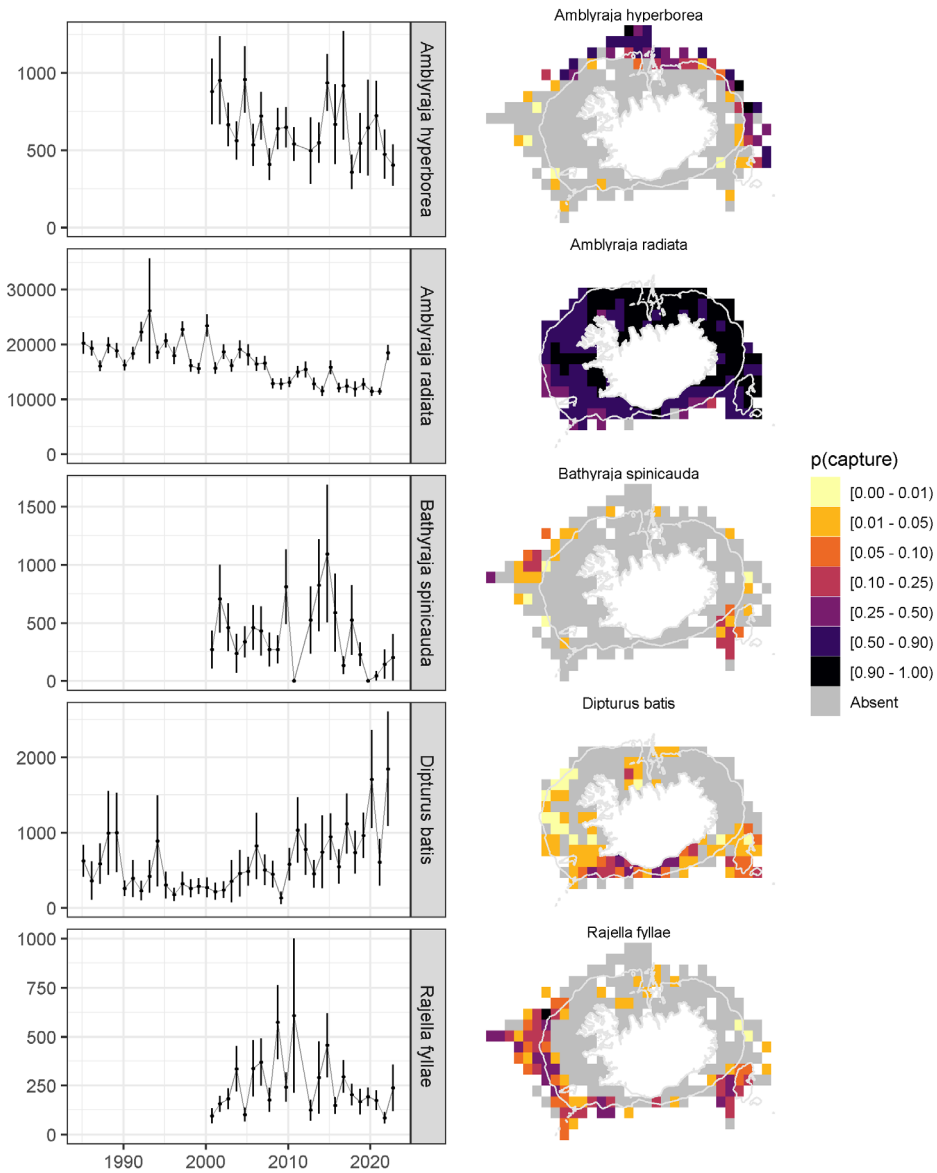
**Figure 16.3. Demersal elasmobranchs - Iceland and East Greenland. Combined landings of rays and skates from East Greenland (Subarea 14). The peak landings in 2011–2013 originate from *Amblyraja radiata* (FAO Code RJR). Data from ICES (2016a, b).**



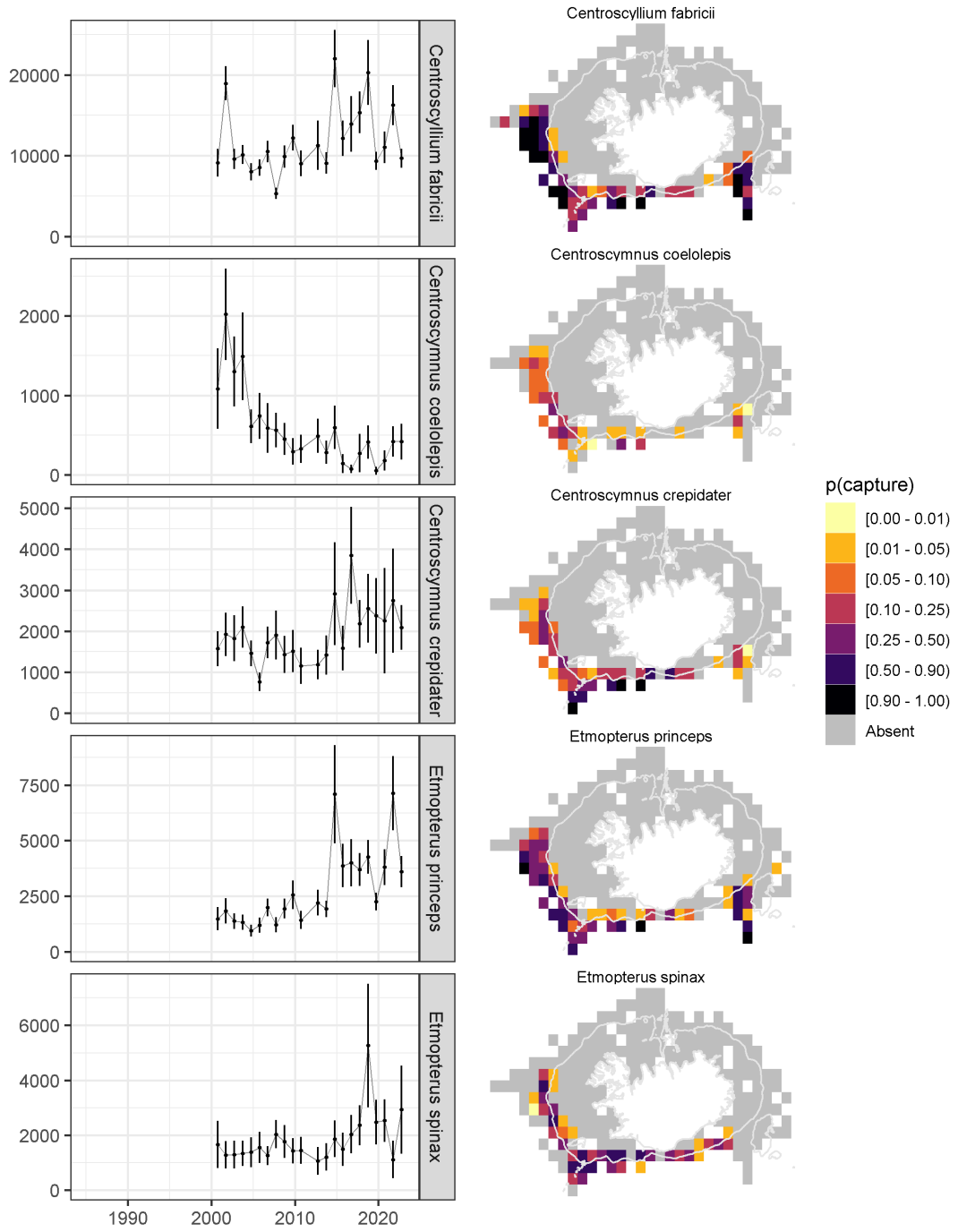
**Figure 16.4. Demersal Elasmobranchs - Iceland and East Greenland. Spatial distribution of starry ray *A. radiata* in Icelandic waters (Division 5.a). Spatial distribution in IS-SMB 2023 (a, c, e) and in IS-SMH 2022 (b,d,f). The top panel shows all data, the middle panel shows individuals <30 cm, and the bottom panel shows larger individuals (>50cm). See also *MFRI Assessment reports 2023*.**

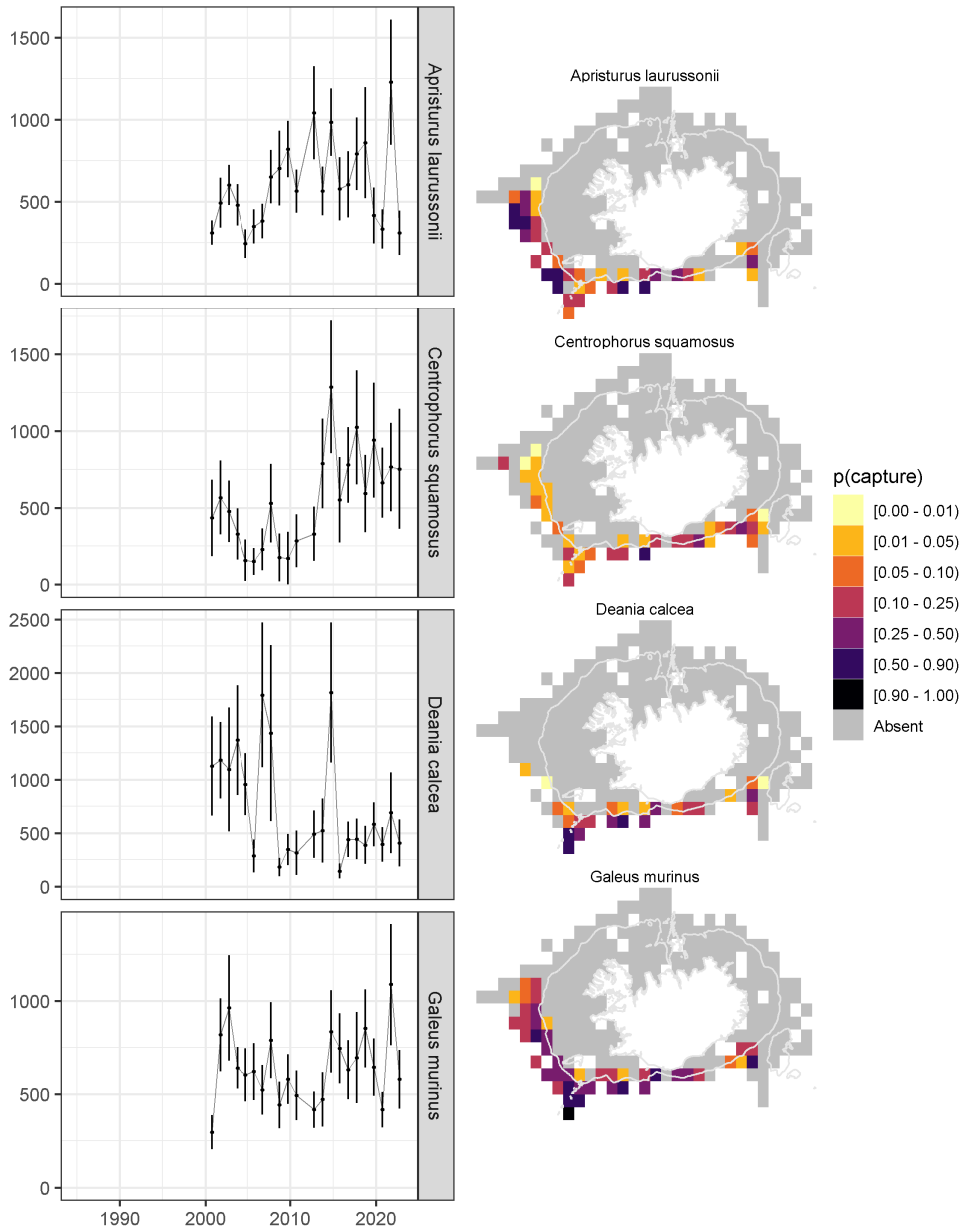


**Figure 16.5. Demersal elasmobranchs - Iceland and East Greenland. Length distribution of starry ray *A. radiata* in Icelandic waters (Division 5.a) each year as observed in the annual spring survey (IS-SMB). Broken line denotes average value. Mean length each year is denoted in the upper right corner of each panel. (see also *MFRI Assessment reports 2023*)**



**Figure 16.6. Demersal elasmobranchs - Iceland and East Greenland. Skates in Icelandic waters. Biomass estimates and probability of capture for *Amblyraja radiata* and *Dipturus batis* derived from IS-SMB survey 1985–2022. Biomass estimates for *Amblyraja hyperborea*, *Bathyraja spinicauda* and *Rajella fyllae* derived from IS-SMH survey 2000–2022.**





**Figure 16.7. Demersal elasmobranchs - Iceland and East Greenland. Sharks in Icelandic waters. Biomass estimates and probability of capture based on annual autumn survey IS-SMH 2000–2022.**

## 17 Demersal elasmobranchs at the Faroe Islands

### 17.1 Ecoregion and stock boundaries

The elasmobranch fauna off the Faroe Islands (ICES divisions 5.b1 and 5.b2) is little studied, though it is likely to be similar to that occurring in the northern North Sea and off NW Scotland and Iceland.

Skates recorded in the area include Arctic skate *Amblyraja hyperborea*, starry ray (thorny skate) *Amblyraja radiata*, common skate complex, long-nosed skate *Dipturus oxyrinchus*, sandy ray *Leucoraja circularis*, shagreen ray *Leucoraja fullonica*, cuckoo ray *Leucoraja naevus*, spotted ray *Raja montagui*, thornback ray *Raja clavata*, round skate *Rajella fyllae* and sailray *Rajella lintea* (formerly *Dipturus linteus*).

Demersal sharks include spurdog *Squalus acanthias* (Section 2), several deep-water species (leaf-scale gulper shark *Centrophorus squamosus*, black dogfish *Centroscyllium fabricii*, birdbeak dogfish *Deania calcea*, longnose velvet dogfish *Centroselachus crepidater*, smallmouth velvet dogfish *Scymnodon obscurus* (sections 2 and 5), Greenland shark *Somniosus microcephalus* (Section 24) and various scyliorhinids, such as mouse catshark *Galeus murinus* and black-mouth catshark *Galeus melastomus* (Section 25).

Several chimaeras also occur in the area: rabbitfish *Chimaera monstrosa*, large-eyed rabbitfish *Hydrolagus mirabilis*, narrownose chimaera *Harriotta raleighana* and spearnose chimaera *Rhinochimaera atlantica*.

Stock boundaries are not known for the species in this area. Neither are the potential movements of species between the coastal and offshore areas. Further investigations are necessary to determine potential migrations or interactions of elasmobranch populations within this ecoregion and neighbouring areas.

### 17.2 The fishery

#### 17.2.1 History of the fishery

Since 1973, seven countries have reported landings of demersal elasmobranch from Division 5.b, relating mostly to skates. Scottish vessels reported the largest portion of landings in earlier years, but Faroese vessels have reported the greatest quantities since the 1980s. These include trawlers and, to a lesser extent, longliners and gillnetters. Norwegian longliners fishing in this area target ling, tusk and cod. UK vessels include a small number of larger Scottish trawlers that occasionally obtain quota to fish in Faroese waters, and target gadoids and deeper water species. French vessels fishing in this area are probably from the same fleet that execute the mixed deep-water and shelf fishery west of the British Isles. Demersal elasmobranchs likely represent a minor to moderate bycatch in these fisheries.

In 2007, a Russian longliner fished for deep-water sharks in the Faroese Fishing Zone (FFZ) and on the Reykjanes Ridge. The total catch of the elasmobranchs in those and other NEA areas amounted to 483 t (Vinnichenko, 2008; summarised in ICES, 2010).

#### 17.2.2 The fishery in 2022

No new information.

### 17.2.3 ICES advice applicable

ICES does not provide advice on the skate stocks in this area.

### 17.2.4 Management applicable

The majority of the area is managed by the Faroes through fishing effort-based system which restricts fishing days for demersal gadoids. Some EU vessels have been able to gain access to the Faroes EEZ where they have been managed under individual quotas for the main target species.

## 17.3 Catch data

### 17.3.1 Landings

Landings of skates, not usually identified to species level, are summarised in Table 17.1. French reported landings of common skate complex are unlikely to represent the entire catch, as an unknown quantity is included in the category of unidentified skates and rays. Total skate landings are shown in Figure 17.1.

### 17.3.2 Discards

The amounts of skates and demersal sharks discarded has not been estimated.

### 17.3.3 Quality of catch data

Species-specific information for commercial catches is incomplete.

### 17.3.4 Discard survival

No data available for the elasmobranchs taken in commercial fisheries in this area.

## 17.4 Commercial catch composition

All skates in Division 5.b, with the exception of French landings, were reported as '*Raja rays nei*' before 2008 (see Table 17.1). There were no port sampling data available to estimate species composition. It is likely that catches include common skate complex, *L. fullonica*, *R. clavata* and *A. radiata*. No data regarding size composition or sex ratio from commercial landings were available.

## 17.5 Commercial catch and effort data

No information available to WGEF.

## 17.6 Fishery-independent surveys

No survey data were available. Magnussen (2002) summarized the demersal fish assemblages from the Faroe Bank, based on the analysis of routine survey data collected by the RV *Magnus Heinason* since 1983. Data on elasmobranchs taken in these surveys are summarized in Table 17.2.



A more detailed analysis of the demersal elasmobranchs taken in Faroese surveys is still to be undertaken.

## **17.7 Life-history information**

No new information. Trawl survey data may provide useful information on catches of viable skate egg cases and/or on nursery grounds.

## **17.8 Exploratory assessments**

No exploratory assessments have been undertaken.

## **17.9 Stock assessment**

No assessments have been conducted due to insufficient data. Analyses of survey data may allow the general status of the more frequent species to be evaluated.

### **17.10 Quality of assessments**

No assessments have been conducted.

### **17.11 Reference points**

No reference points have been proposed for any of these species.

### **17.12 Conservation considerations**

See sections 15.12 and 18.12.

### **17.13 Management considerations**

Total international reported landings of skates declined from 1973–2003 but increased to above the average of the time-series in 2004–2006. Since then, landings declined below the long-term average again and are continuing to decrease in the most recent years. Without detailed information on the fisheries, including better separation of species, quantities discarded, sizes caught, etc., it is not possible to provide information on exploitation patterns or the status of stocks.

The elasmobranch fauna off the Faroe Islands is little studied, though it is likely to be somewhat similar to that occurring in the northern North Sea and off Iceland. Further studies to describe the demersal elasmobranch fauna of this region and to conduct preliminary analyses of fishery-independent survey data are required.

The common skate complex has been demonstrated to be vulnerable to exploitation and has been near-extirpated in the Irish and North Seas, further investigation on the common skate complex and other skates in the Faroe Islands is required, including the data analysis from fishery-independent sources.

## 17.14 References

- ICES. 2010. Report of the Working Group on Elasmobranch Fishes (WGEF), 22–29 June 2010, Horta, Portugal. ICES CM 2010/ACOM:19. 558 pp.
- ICES. 2012. Report of the Working Group on Elasmobranch Fishes (WGEF), 19–26 June 2012, Lisbon, Portugal. ICES CM 2011/ACOM:19. 551 pp.
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- <http://www.hagstova.fo> Accessed 23<sup>th</sup> June 2020.

## 17.15 Tables and Figures

**Table 17.1. Demersal elasmobranchs at the Faroe Islands. Reported landings of skates from the Faroes area (Division 5.b). Data were updated with nominal landings from ICES database (ICES, 2021) for years 2006–2019 and also contain national landings data provided to the WG. Faroese landings for 1990–2018 were extracted from Faroese national statistics database available on [www.hagstova.fo](http://www.hagstova.fo). \*Total catch (live weight).**

Species	Country	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985
<i>Raja rays nei</i>	Faroe Islands*	150	95	107	136	164	201	202	198	135	221	211	281	277
	France	0	0	30	57	159	7	3	0	4	2	0	0	0
	Germany	47	33	36	15	23	55	14	7	1	3	3	3	1
	Netherlands	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Norway	29	27	37	42	46	64	37	18	21	13	32	35	14
	UK	384	238	250	276	174	104	108	68	11	32	20	1	1
Common skate complex	France	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Leucoraja naevus</i>	France	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Raja clavata</i>	France	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	0	0	1	6	23	38
	Total	610	393	461	527	566	436	375	291	172	272	272	343	331

Table 17.1 (continued). Demersal elasmobranchs at the Faroe Islands. Reported landings of skates from the Faroes area (Division 5.b). Data were updated with nominal landings from ICES database (ICES, 2021) for years 2006–2021 and also contain national landings data provided to the WG. Faroese landings for 1990–2018 were extracted from Faroese national statistics database available on [www.hagstova.fo](http://www.hagstova.fo). \*Total catch (live weight).

Species	Country	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	
<i>Raja rays nei</i>	Denmark	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
	Faroe Islands*	258	171	92	136	144	207	256	203	167	220	165	185	144	
	France	1	6	5	8	5	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	0	
	Germany	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	3	0	0	0	0
	Norway	22	11	29	84	96	81	37	75	20	14	60	14	45	
	UK	0	2	0	1	2	1	5	13	8	7	4	11	7	
Common skate complex	France	5	6	7	13	12	5	1	0	0	1	2	3	0	
<i>Leucoraja naevus</i>	France	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
<i>Dipturus oxyrinchus</i>	France	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
<i>Raja clavata</i>	France	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
<i>Raja montagui</i>	France	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
<i>Dasyatis pastinaca</i>	France	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
<i>Leucoraja circularis</i>	France	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
<i>Leucoraja fullonica</i>	France	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
	Total	287	200	135	242	259	295	300	292	198	243	232	215	196	

**Table 17.1 (continued). Demersal elasmobranchs at the Faroe Islands. Reported landings of skates from the Faroes area (Division 5.b). Data were updated with nominal landings from ICES database (ICES, 2021) for years 2006–2021 and also contain national landings data provided to the WG. Faroese landings for 1990–2018 were extracted from Faroese national statistics database available on [www.hagstova.fo](http://www.hagstova.fo). \*Total catch (live weight).**

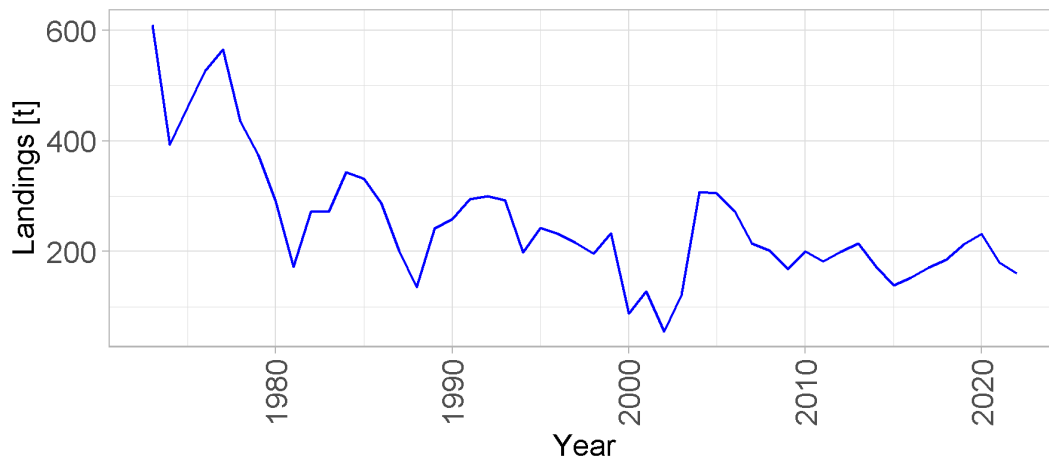
Species	Country	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
<i>Raja rays nei</i>	Faroe Islands*	175	0	75	25	98	272	274	238	185	179	150	177	182	198	209
	France	2	0	0	1	5	10	9	20	10	7	6	0	0	0	0
	Germany	1	1	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Norway	45	50	21	15	5	0	12	10	16	9	4	11	0	0	0
	UK	6	35	27	12	8	20	8	2	2	2	1	3	0	0	0
Common skate complex	Norway	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0
	France	4	2	2	2	3	5	2	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
	UK	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	5	0	0	0
<i>Leucoraja naevus</i>	France	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
	UK	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
<i>Dipturus oxyrinchus</i>	France	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Raja clavata</i>	France	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
	UK	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
<i>Raja montagui</i>	France	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
<i>Dasyatis pastinaca</i>	France	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Leucoraja circularis</i>	France	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Leucoraja fullonica</i>	France	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	UK	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	0
<i>Rostroraja alba</i>	France	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	UK	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total		233	88	128	55	121	308	305	273	214	201	168	200	182	199	214

**Table 17.1 (continued). Demersal elasmobranchs at the Faroe Islands. Reported landings of skates from the Faroes area (Division 5.b). Data were updated with nominal landings from ICES database (ICES, 2021) for years 2006–2022 and also contain national landings data provided to the WG. Faroese landings for 1990–2018 were extracted from Faroese national statistics database available on [www.hagstova.fo](http://www.hagstova.fo). \*Total catch (live weight). + : <0.5 tonnes. Data for 2022 are preliminary.**

Species	Country	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
<i>Raja rays nei</i>	Faroe Islands*	150	114	126	139	138	170	182	156	151
	France	0	5	0	2	6	5	8	+	
	Germany	0	0	0						
	Norway	19	13	23	22	40	30	41	24	9
	UK	0	0	0						
Common skate complex	Norway	0	0	0						
	France	0	0	0	+	+		+		
	UK	0	1	1	5	1	1			
<i>Leucoraja naevus</i>	France	0	0	0	+		+	+		
	UK	0		3	2				+	
<i>Raja clavata</i>	France	1	0	0	+		+	+		
	UK	0	1	1	+					
<i>Raja montagui</i>	France	3	5	0	1		+			
	UK				+					
<i>Dasyatis pastinaca</i>	France	0	0	0						
<i>Leucoraja circularis</i>	France	0	0	0						
<i>Leucoraja fullonica</i>	France	0	0	0	+	+	+	+		
	UK	0	0	0						
<i>Rostroraja alba</i>	France	0	0	0			+			
	Norway						7	1		
	Total	173	139	153	171	185	213	232	180	160

**Table 17.2. Demersal elasmobranchs at the Faroe Islands. Elasmobranchs caught on the Faroe Bank during bottom-trawl surveys (1983–1996) by depth band. Symbols indicate frequency of occurrence in hauls (\*\*\*: 60–100% of hauls, \*\*: 10–60% of hauls, \*: 3–10% of hauls, + : <3% of hauls). Adapted from Magnussen (2002).**

Species	Depth						Total
	<100 m	100–200 m	200–300 m	300–400 m	400–500 m	>500 m	
<i>Galeus melastomus</i>	–	+	*	*	**	**	*
<i>Galeorhinus galeus</i>	–	+	–	–	–	*	+
<i>Squalus acanthias</i>	–	*	*	**	*	**	*
<i>Etmopterus spinax</i>	–	+	–	–	*	**	*
<i>Centroscyllium fabricii</i>	–	–	–	–	*	–	+
<i>Amblyraja radiata</i>	–	–	–	–	–	**	+
Common skate complex	–	*	*	–	–	**	*
<i>Leucoraja fullonica</i>	–	+	+	–	–	*	+
<i>Leucoraja circularis</i>	–	–	*	–	–	–	+
<i>Rajella fyllae</i>	–	+	–	–	–	–	+
<i>Rajella lintea</i>	*	+	–	–	–	–	+
<i>Raja clavata</i>	–	+	–	–	–	–	+
<i>Chimaera monstrosa</i>	*	*	**	***	***	***	**



**Figure 17.1. Demersal elasmobranchs at the Faroe Islands (Subarea 5.b). Reported landings of skates (1973–2022) based on ICES database (ICES, 2021) national landings data provided to the WG and Faroese national statistics database ([www.hagstova.fo](http://www.hagstova.fo)).**

# 18 Skates and rays in the Celtic Seas (ICES subareas 6 and 7 (except Division 7.d))

Advice for skate and ray stocks in this ecoregion was last provided in 2022 and will next be provided in 2024. Therefore, this chapter only contains minor edits and updates to landings tables and figures. The advice for 2023 and 2024 is reproduced in Section 18.2.3.

## 18.1 Ecoregion and stock boundaries

See Stock Annex.

## 18.2 The fishery

### 18.2.1 History of the fishery

See Stock Annex.

### 18.2.2 The fishery in 2022

No new information available.

### 18.2.3 ICES advice applicable

ICES provided advice for several species/stocks in this region in 2022 as summarized in Table below.

Stock	Stock code	Assessment category	Advice basis	Advised Landings in 2023 and 2024
Blonde ray <i>Raja brachyura</i> Divisions 7.a and 7.f-g	rjh.27.7afg	5.	Precautionary approach	573 t
Blonde ray <i>Raja brachyura</i> Division 7.e	rjh.27.7e	5.	MSY approach	213 t
Thornback ray <i>Raja clavata</i> Subarea 6	rjc.27.6	3	MSY approach	96 t
Thornback ray <i>Raja clavata</i> Divisions 7.a and 7.f-g	rjc.27.7afg	3	MSY approach	1883 t
Thornback ray <i>Raja clavata</i> Division 7.e	rjc.27.7e	5	Precautionary approach	170 t
Small-eyed ray <i>Raja microocellata</i> Bristol Channel (Divisions 7.f-g)	rje.27.7fg	3	MSY approach	86 t
Small-eyed ray <i>Raja microocellata</i> English Channel (Divisions 7.d-e)	rje.27.7de	5	Precautionary approach	32 t
Spotted ray <i>Raja montagui</i> Subarea 6 and Divisions 7.b and 7.j	rjm.27.67bj	3	Precautionary approach	36 t



Stock	Stock code	Assessment category	Advice basis	Advised Landings in 2023 and 2024
Spotted ray <i>Raja montagui</i> Divisions 7.a and 7.e-h	rjm.27.7ae-h	3	MSY approach	814 t
Cuckoo ray <i>Leucoraja naevus</i> Subareas 6–7 and Divisions 8.a-b and 8.d	rjn.27.678abd	2	MSY approach	7826 t (2023) 8064 t (2024)
Sandy ray <i>Leucoraja circularis</i> Celtic Seas and adjacent areas	rji.27.67	5	Precautionary approach	27 t
Shagreen ray <i>Leucoraja fullonica</i> Celtic Seas and adjacent areas	rjf.27.67	5	Precautionary approach	134 t
Undulate ray <i>Raja undulata</i> Divisions 7.b and 7.j	rju.27.7bj	6	Precautionary approach	zero
Undulate ray <i>Raja undulata</i> Divisions 7.d-e (English Channel)	rju.27.7de	2	MSY approach	4836 t (2023) 4675 t (2024)
Common skate <i>Dipturus batis</i> -complex (flapper skate <i>Dipturus intermedius</i> and blue skate <i>Dipturus batis</i> ) Subarea 6 and Divisions 7.a–c and 7.e–j	rjb.27.67a-ce-k	6	Precautionary approach.	zero
White skate <i>Rostroraja alba</i> in the north-east Atlantic*	rja.27.nea	6	Precautionary approach	zero
Other rays and skates (Rajiformes) in Sub-area 6 and divisions 7.a–c and 7.e–k (Rockall, West of Scotland, Celtic Sea and western English Channel)	raj.27.67a-ce-k	6	Insufficient data to provide advice	NA

\* Advice revised in 2023

## 18.2.4 Management applicable

A TAC for skates in Subarea 6 and divisions 7.a–c and 7.e–k was first established for 2009 and set at 15 748 t. Since then, the TAC has been reduced by approximately 15% (in 2010), 15% (in 2011), 13% (in 2012), 10% (in 2013) and a further 10% (in 2014). In 2017, the TAC was increased by 5%, (including separate TAC for *R. microocellata*), and in 2018, this was increased by a further 15% (including separate TAC for *R. microocellata* and *R. undulata*). In 2020, the TAC was set and reset because of negotiations between the UK and the EU. In April 2021, the TAC was set at 3882 tonnes, excluding an as yet to-be-determined UK quota. In June 2021, an agreement was reached between the EU and UK. The figures below refer to this agreement.

The history of the regulations are as follows:

Year	TAC for EC waters of 6a-b and 7a–c, and 7.e–k	Other measures	Regulation
2009	15 748 t	1,2	Council Regulation (EC) No. 43/2009 of 16 January 2009
2010	13 387 t	1,2,3	Council Regulation (EU) No. 23/2010 of 14 January 2010
2011	11 379 t	1,2,3	Council Regulation (EU) No. 57/2011 of 18 January 2011
2012	9915 t	1,2,3	Council Regulation (EU) No. 43/2012 of 17 January 2012
2013	8924 t	1,2,3	Council Regulation (EU) No. 39/2013 of 21 January 2013
2014	8032 t	1,3,4	Council Regulation (EU) No. 43/2014 of 20 January 2014
2015	8032 t	1,3,5	Council Regulation (EU) No. 2015/104 of 19 January 2015, and amended in Council Regulation (EU) No. 2015/523 of 25 March 2015

Year	TAC for EC waters of 6a-b and 7a-c, and 7.e-k	Other measures	Regulation
2016	8032 t	1,3,6,7	Council Regulation (EU) No 2016/72 of 22 January 2016, and amended in Council Regulation (EU) No. 2016/458 of 30 March 2016
2017	8434 t	1,3,6,8	Council Regulation (EU) No 2017/127 of 20 January 2017,
2018	9699 t	1,3,6,8,9	Council Regulation (EU) No 2018/120 of 23 January 2018,
2019	10 184 t	1,3,6,7,10,11	Council Regulation (EU) No 2019/124 of 30 January 2019,
2020	10 184 t	1,3,6,7,10,11	Council Regulation (EU) No 2020/123 of 27 January 2020
2021	9675 t	1,3,6,7,10,11,12,13	Council Regulation (EU) No 2021/703 of 26 April 2021, amending Council Regulations 2021/91 and 2021/92 and Written record of fisheries consultations between the United Kingdom and the European Union for 2021
2022	9482 t	1,3,6,7,14,15,16	COUNCIL REGULATION (EU) 2022/515 of 31 March 2022 amending Regulation (EU) 2022/109 fixing for 2022 the fishing opportunities for certain fish stocks and groups of fish stocks applicable in Union waters and for Union fishing vessels in certain non-Union waters.
2023	9797 t	1, 17, 18, 19	COUNCIL REGULATION (EU) 2023/194 of 30 January 2023 fixing for 2023 the fishing opportunities for certain fish stocks, applicable in Union waters and, for Union fishing vessels, in certain non-Union waters, as well as fixing for 2023 and 2024 such fishing opportunities for certain deep-sea fish stocks

[1] Catches of cuckoo ray *L. naevus*, thornback ray *R. clavata*, blonde ray *R. brachyura*, spotted ray *R. montagui*, small-eyed ray *R. microocellata* sandy ray *L. circularis*, shagreen ray *L. fullonica* should be reported separately.

[2] Does not apply to undulate ray *R. undulata*, common skate *D. batis*, Norwegian skate *D. nidarosiensis* and white skate *Rostroraja alba*. Catches of these species may not be retained on board and shall be promptly released unharmed to the extent practicable. Fishers shall be encouraged to develop and use techniques and equipment to facilitate the rapid and safe release of the species.

[3] Of which up to 5% may be fished in EU waters of Division 7.d.

[4] Shall not apply to undulate ray *R. undulata*, common skate *D. batis* complex, Norwegian skate *D. nidarosiensis* and white skate *Rostroraja alba*. When accidentally caught, these species shall not be harmed. Specimens shall be promptly released. Fishermen shall be encouraged to develop and use techniques and equipment to facilitate the rapid and safe release of the species.

[5] Shall not apply to undulate ray *Raja undulata*. This species shall not be targeted in the areas covered by this TAC. Bycatch of undulate ray in area 7.e exclusively may be landed provided that it does not comprise more than 20 kg live weight per fishing trip and remain under the quotas shown [TAC = 100 t]. This provision shall not apply for catches subject to the landing obligation.

[6] Shall not apply to small-eyed ray *R. microocellata*, except in Union waters of 7.f and 7.g. When accidentally caught, this species shall not be harmed. Specimens shall be promptly released. Fishermen shall be encouraged to develop and use techniques and equipment to facilitate the rapid and safe release of the species. Within the limits of the abovementioned quotas, no more than the quantities of small-eyed ray in Union waters of 7.f and 7.g provided below may be taken [TAC = 188 t]

[7] Shall not apply to undulate ray *R. undulata*. This species shall not be targeted in the areas covered by this TAC. In cases where it is not subject to the landing obligation, bycatch of undulate ray in area 7.e may only be landed whole or gutted, and provided that it does not comprise more than 40 kilograms live weight per fishing trip. The catches shall remain under the quotas shown [TAC = 100 t]. Bycatch of undulate ray shall be reported separately under the following code: RJU/67AKXD.

[8] Shall not apply to undulate ray *R. undulata*. This species shall not be targeted in the areas covered by this TAC. In cases where it is not subject to the landing obligation, bycatch of undulate ray in area 7.e may only be landed whole or gutted. The catches shall remain under the quotas shown [TAC = 161 t]. Bycatch of undulate ray shall be reported separately under the following code: RJU/67AKXD (2017) RJU/07E (2018).

[9] Shall not apply to small-eyed ray (*Raja microocellata*), except in Union waters of 7f and 7g. When accidentally caught, this species shall not be harmed. Specimens shall be promptly released. Fishermen shall be encouraged to develop and use techniques and equipment to facilitate the rapid and safe release of the species. Within the limits of the abovementioned quotas, no more than the quantities of small-eyed ray in Union waters of 7f and 7g (RJE/7FG.) provided below may be taken [TAC = 154 t].

[10] Shall not apply to small-eyed ray (*Raja microocellata*), except in Union waters of 7f and 7g. When accidentally caught, this species shall not be harmed. Specimens shall be promptly released. Fishermen shall be encouraged to develop and use techniques and equipment to facilitate the rapid and safe release of the species. Within the limits of the abovementioned quotas, no more than the quantities of small-eyed ray in Union waters of 7f and 7g (RJE/7FG.) provided below may be taken [TAC = 192 t].

[11] Shall not apply to undulate ray (*Raja undulata*).

**[12]** Shall not apply to small-eyed ray (*Raja microocellata*), except in Union waters of 7f and 7g. When accidentally caught, this species shall not be harmed. Specimens shall be promptly released. Fishermen shall be encouraged to develop and use techniques and equipment to facilitate the rapid and safe release of the species. Within the limits of the abovementioned quotas, no more than the quantities of small-eyed ray in Union waters of 7f and 7g (RJE/7FG.) provided below may be taken [TAC = 123 t].

**[13]** Special condition: of which up to 5 % may be fished in Union waters of 7d (SRX/\*07D.), without prejudice to the prohibitions set out in Articles 20 and 57 of the EU TAC and Quota Regulation 2021 and relevant prohibitions in UK law for the areas specified therein. Catches of cuckoo ray (*Leucoraja naevus*) (RJN/\*07D.), thornback ray (*Raja clavata*) (RJC/\*07D.), blonde ray (*Raja brachyura*) (RJH/\*07D.), spotted ray (*Raja montagui*) (RJM/\*07D.), sandy ray (*Raja circularis*) (RJI/\*07D.) and shagreen ray (*Raja fullonica*) (RJF/\*07D.) shall be reported separately. This special condition shall not apply to small-eyed ray (*Raja microocellata*) and undulate ray (*Raja undulata*).

**[14]** Shall not apply to small-eyed ray (*Raja microocellata*), except in Union waters of 7f and 7g. When accidentally caught, this species shall not be harmed. Specimens shall be promptly released. Fishermen shall be encouraged to develop and use techniques and equipment to facilitate the rapid and safe release of the species. Within the limits of the abovementioned quotas, no more than the quantities of small-eyed ray in Union waters of 7f and 7g (RJE/7FG.) provided below may be taken [TAC = 123 t].

**[15]** Shall not apply to undulate ray (*Raja undulata*). [TAC= 234t].

**[16]** Special condition: of which up to 5 % may be fished in 7d and reported under the following code: (RJE/\*07D.). This special condition is without prejudice to the prohibitions set out in Articles 18 and 56 of this Regulation and in the relevant provisions of the United Kingdom law for the areas specified therein.

**[17]** Special condition: of which up to 5 % may be fished in 7d (SRX/\*07D.), without prejudice to the prohibitions set out in Articles 17 and 50 of this Regulation for the areas specified therein. Catches of cuckoo ray (*Leucoraja naevus*) (RJN/\*07D.), thornback ray (*Raja clavata*) (RJC/\*07D.), blonde ray (*Raja brachyura*) (RJH/\*07D.), spotted ray (*Raja montagui*) (RJM/\*07D.), sandy ray (*Leucoraja circularis*) (RJI/\*07D.) and shagreen ray (*Leucoraja fullonica*) (RJF/\*07D.) shall be reported separately. This special condition shall not apply to small-eyed ray (*Raja microocellata*) and undulate ray (*Raja undulata*).

**[18]** Shall not apply to undulate ray (*Raja undulata*). Catches of this species in 7e shall be counted against the quantities provided for in that separate TAC (RJU/7DE). When accidentally caught in 6a, 6b, 7a-c and 7f-k, this species shall not be harmed. Specimens shall be promptly released. Fishermen shall be encouraged to develop and use techniques and equipment to facilitate the rapid and safe release of the species.

**[19]** Shall not apply to small-eyed ray (*Raja microocellata*), except in 7f and 7g. When accidentally caught, this species shall not be harmed. Specimens shall be promptly released. Fishers shall be encouraged to develop and use techniques and equipment to facilitate the rapid and safe release of the species. Within the limits of these quotas, no more than the quantities of small-eyed ray in areas 7f and 7g (RJE/7FG.) provided below may be taken:

*Raja microocellata* in Union waters of Subarea 6 and divisions 7.a–c and 7.e–k were initially subject to strict restrictions at the start of 2016, with Council Regulation (EU) 2016/72 of 22 January 2016 stating that: “When accidentally caught, this species shall not be harmed. Specimens shall be promptly released. Fishermen shall be encouraged to develop and use techniques and equipment to facilitate the rapid and safe release of the species”. However, this was subsequently updated in Council Regulation (EU) 2016/458 of 30 March 2016, whereby the prohibition in landings was revoked for Union waters of 7.f–g, with a precautionary TAC of 188 t being set for this species, within the total skate and ray quota. This sub-TAC has shown an overall reduction in subsequent years (2017–2018: 154 t; 2019–2020: 192 t; 2021–2022: 1232 t; 2023: 86 t).

The previous interdiction to retain skates and rays caught on the Porcupine Bank from 1 May–31 May was not continued in after 2019.

There are also mesh-size regulations for target fisheries, the EC action plan for the conservation and management of sharks (EC, 2009), and some local bylaws and initiatives, which were detailed in ICES (2010).

## 18.2.5 Other management issues

The requirement for EU negotiations with the UK for the first time in 2020/2021 meant that final TAC agreements were not complete at the time by mid-June 2021. A draft agreement was completed in January 2021. In 2022, initial TACs for the first part of the year were proposed, with final TACs not being agreed until April.

A high-survivability exemption to the Landings Obligation was provided for skates and rays in the Celtic Seas ecoregion until 31 December 2021, with *L. naevus* only exempted until 31 December 2019. An extension to the exemption would only be possible with additional supporting information being provided by the NWWAC. This particularly applies to *L. naevus*, which had a shorter deadline for the provision of evidence of high-survivability than the other species. Several meetings have been held by the NWWAC to discuss and advance this. Best practice guides and measures have been circulated to NWWAC members (2020). The *L. naevus* exemption has been extended to 21 December 2022.

Alternatives to the current TAC system are being explored by the European Commission. A meeting to set Terms of Reference for an STECF request to propose alternatives was held in May 2017. This follows on from proposals by the NWWAC.

Fishermen off North Devon have a voluntary seasonal closed area over what they consider to be a nursery ground.

There are several French measures designed to regulate fishing for *R. undulata* in the English Channel (7.d and 7.e). These measures include: trip limits, closed seasons, restricted licensing of vessels and in 2017 a minimum size of 78 cm (described in Gadenne, 2017, WD).

The French regulation stipulates a minimum landing size of 45 cm for all Rajiformes and 78 cm for undulate ray.

There was a change in Belgian fisheries with the introduction of a Producer Organisation (PO) measure from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2021 to exclude landings of other species than thornback ray, blonde ray and spotted ray. This measure may have affected some stocks where Belgium is one of the main contributors in terms of a reduction in landings such as *R. microocellata* in 7.d-e and in 7.f-g. Meanwhile, landings for other stocks may have increased with fishing opportunities focusing on other species such as *R. montagui* in 7.ae-h.

## 18.3 Catch data

A data call in 2017 followed the procedures recommended by WKSHARK2 (ICES, 2016). This meeting had recommended that recent landings of all elasmobranch species be resubmitted by all ICES members. These landings would be re-evaluated, and declared landings from unlikely locations or species be reassessed or reassigned as required. Decision trees on how to treat problematic records were provided in the workshop report. The ICES data call was issued following this meeting requesting all elasmobranch landings from 2005–2015. The 2017 data call requested a resubmission of final 2015 and preliminary 2016 landings data.

These data were examined by WGEF prior to and during WGEF 2016. Tables 18.1 and 18.2 provides the re-assessed landings by stock for this ecoregion. Some data were resubmitted in 2017, therefore there may be slight differences in landings figures between this and previous reports.

The 2018 and 2019 data calls followed the procedures above.

In 2020, data were provided by means of the ICES InterCatch system for the first time. Further details can be found in Section 1. Intercatch has been used from 2020 onwards.

### 18.3.1 Landings

Landings data for skates (Rajidae) were supplied by all nations fishing in shelf waters within this ecoregion. Data for 2021 are considered provisional. Landings data prior to 2005 are considered variable and uncertain.

Landings by nation are given in Table 18.1. Landings for the entire time-series are shown in Figure 18.1a–c. Where species-specific landings have been provided they have also been included in the total for the relevant year. Although historically there have been around 15 nations involved in the skate fisheries in this ecoregion, five nations (France, United Kingdom, Belgium, Ireland, and Spain) have accounted for most landings in recent years.

### 18.3.2 Skate landing categories

Historically, most skate landings were reported under a generic landing category. There has been a legal requirement to report most skate landings to species-level throughout this ecoregion since 2009. On average, 99% of the 2019 landings were reported to species level, with a continuous decline in landings declared in generic categories since 2011. Earlier reports have highlighted various issues regarding the quality of these data (ICES, 2010; 2011; 2012), and this is further discussed in Section 18.4.3.

A study by Silva *et al.* (2012) examined the species-specific data recorded by the UK (England and Wales). Although there were some erroneous or potentially erroneous records, the regional species composition was broadly comparable to that recorded by scientific observers on commercial vessels, and data quality seemed to be improving. Comparable studies to critically evaluate other national data and identify potential errors are still required, to better identify where improved training and/or market sampling may improve data quality.

### 18.3.3 Discards

WKSHARK3 met in Nantes in February 2017 (ICES, 2017). The objective of the meeting was to examine national discard data and to assess their suitability for use by WGEF.

It was decided that combining national data together to estimate international discards is not suitable. However, if discard data are first raised at national level, it may be possible to combine estimates. However, there are differences in raising methodologies e.g. by fleet, métier, etc., and these must be fully reported and accounted for.

For elasmobranchs, discards are not equivalent to dead catch, as there is some survival, which is probably high for some stocks and fleets. However, survival rates are not accurately known for most species.

Discard data for WGEF were included in the 2018–2021 data calls. Most countries provided raised discards. Raising methodology was considerably different, both between countries and within countries. Raised discard estimates varied by over 200% in some cases, depending on whether they were raised by vessel, fleet or landings. Therefore, discard estimates have not been calculated for most skate and ray stocks in this ecoregion.

COVID-19 affected the placing of discard observers on board commercial fishing vessels in 2020 and 2021. Social distancing regulations meant that observers could not be placed on many vessels, particularly small ones. Therefore, the number of discard samples is likely down on previous years. Fishing activity may also have decreased. In Ireland, a self-sampling scheme was put in place, where discard samples were brought ashore for analysis.

See Stock Annex for historic discard discussions.

### 18.3.4 Discard survival

There are several recent and ongoing studies on discard survival, e.g. SUMARiS, BIM.

Cuckoo ray has shown high post-capture condition by otter-trawls in the Celtic Sea (BIM, 2019), with 84% showing 'Excellent' condition. This may indicate high survivability post-release.

Although the European project INTERREG 2 Seas SUMARiS (Sustainable Management of Rays and Skates) focused mainly on the North Sea and English Channel, results from this project may be applicable to three species with stock units straddling Division 7.d (rju.27.7de, rje.27.7de and rjn.27.678abd). SUMARiS project showed preliminary high survival rates for all species, however the final report is not yet available.

The RAYWATCH project is examining beam trawl-caught species for discard survivability in the Celtic Sea from 2020–2022.

See Stock Annex for further information on discard survivability.

### 18.3.5 Quality of catch data

Although so far unquantified, COVID-19 is expected to have affected fishing activity in 2020 and 2021, with national or local restrictions on fishing activity reducing fishing effort for at least some of the year. Discard sampling was likely affected in most countries.

See Stock Annex.

## 18.4 Commercial catch composition

### 18.4.1 Size composition

The ICES rfb rule was applied to several stock assessments from this ecoregion in 2022. See individual stock sections for further details.

### 18.4.2 Quality of data

See Stock Annex.

## 18.5 Commercial catch and effort data

A case study using French on-board observer data is provided in the Stock Annex discussing several stocks. The trend for *L. fullonica* is used as supporting information in the advice in 2020, therefore it is retained here. For all others, refer to the Stock Annex.

**Shagreen ray: *Leucoraja fullonica***

**rjf.27.67** (Figure 18.2): The species was caught in a relatively high proportion of OTT\_DEF. The indicator suggested stability.

## 18.6 Fishery-independent surveys

Groundfish surveys provide valuable information on the spatial and temporal patterns in the species composition, size composition, sex ratio and relative abundance of various demersal elasmobranchs. Several fishery-independent surveys operate in the Celtic Seas ecoregion. It is noted that these surveys were not designed primarily to inform on the populations of demersal elasmobranchs, and so the gears used, timing of the surveys and distribution of sampling stations may not be optimal for informing on some species and/or life-history stages. However, these surveys provide the longest time-series of species-specific information for skates for many parts

of the ecoregion. The distribution of selected skate species caught in surveys coordinated by the IBTS group (see Table 18.4 in the Stock Annex), are shown in the annual IBTS reports.

Descriptions of existing, previous and short-time-series surveys are provided in the Stock Annex.

Updated survey analyses were provided for five surveys in 2022: French EVHOE Groundfish Survey (EVHOE-WIBTS-Q4; Figures 18.3a–d and 18.4f), Irish groundfish survey (IGFS-WIBTS-Q4; Table 18.4a–b; Figures 18.4a, b and f), Spanish Porcupine Groundfish Survey (SpPGFS-WIBTS-Q4; Figures 18.4f and 18.5a–i), the UK (England) beam trawl survey (EngW-BTS-Q3; Figures 18.4c–e and 18.6a–e), the UK (England) Q1 Southwest ecosystem beam trawl survey (Q1SWECOS previously described as Q1SWBeam<sup>1</sup>; Figures 18.4f and 18.7a–e) and the UK (Scotland) West CGFS survey (IGFS-WIBTS-Q1-Q4, Figure 18.4f).

The list of fishery-independent surveys undertaken in this area include (with additional details and information on the history provided in the Stock Annex):

- French EVHOE Groundfish Survey (EVHOE-WIBTS-Q4): 1995–present in Celtic Sea (survey did not take place in 2017).
- Irish Groundfish Survey (IGFS-WIBTS-Q4): 2003–present.
- Spanish Porcupine Groundfish Survey (SpPGFS-WIBTS-Q4): 2001–present.
- UK (Northern Ireland) Groundfish Survey – October (NIGFS-WIBTS-Q4): 1992–present.
- UK (Northern Ireland) Groundfish Survey – March (NIGFS-WIBTS-Q1).
- Scottish West Coast Groundfish Survey Q4 (ScoGFS-WIBTS-Q4): 1990–present.
- Rockall survey (Rock-IBTS-Q3): 1991–present.

Three beam trawl surveys currently operate in this ecoregion (see Stock Annex), surveying the Irish Sea, Bristol Channel, western English Channel and the West of Ireland (additional details and information on the history are provided in the Stock Annex):

- UK (England and Wales) Irish Sea and Bristol Channel beam trawl survey (EngW-BTS-Q3 or UK(E&W)-BTS-Q3): 1993–present. The 2020 survey data were not used in most assessments, excluding *R. microocellata* in 7.f–g, as survey coverage was limited to the Bristol Channel (divisions 7.f–g) with the Irish Sea (Division 7.a) not being sampled (Silva, 2022a). Survey index estimates provided to WGEF 2022 have been revised for the entire time-series, with these now based on ICES DATRAS (contrary to previous meetings, when indices were estimated using data held on a national database) (Silva, 2022a).
- UK (England) beam trawl in western English Channel (Q1SWECOS – previously named Q1SWBeam<sup>2</sup>): 2006–present. This survey extended from the western English Channel (Division 7.e) to the wider Celtic Sea (Divisions 7.f–j) in 2013, however data from those Divisions used as supporting information on species spatial distribution only relates to data from 2014 onwards (Silva *et al.*, 2020). It should be noted that in 2020 the survey occurred in June instead of Q1 and only covered the western Channel survey area due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Silva, 2022b).
- Irish monkfish beam trawl survey – IRL-IAMS surveys: 2016 onwards. This beam trawl survey for monkfish and megrim takes place in Q1 and Q2, to the west and northwest of Ireland. Elasmobranchs are caught during this survey, and in future may provide additional indices once a suitable time series is available.

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<sup>1</sup> In other ICES documents also referred as 'UK-Q1-SWBeam', 'Eng-WEC-BTS-Q1' or 'BTS-UK-Q1'.

<sup>2</sup> See footnote above.

Historical surveys which have been undertaken in the area and can provide past data on elasmobranchs include (with additional details and information on the history provided in the Stock Annex):

- UK (England and Wales) Western Groundfish Survey (EngW-WIBTS-Q4): 2004–2011.
- UK (England) beam trawl in Start Bay, Division 7.e (Eng-WEC-BTS-Q4): 1989–2010.
- Irish maturity survey for commercially important demersal fish: spring 2004–2009.
- Irish deep-water (500–1800 m) trawl survey to the west of Ireland: 2006–2009
- UK Celtic Sea groundfish survey using a Portuguese high headline trawl in Q1: 1982–2003.

### 18.6.1 Temporal trends in catch rates

The statuses of skates in this ecoregion are based primarily on the evaluation of fishery-independent trawl surveys. The available survey data have been used to evaluate the status of the stocks in 2022 under the ICES approach to data-limited stocks (Section 18.9).

### 18.6.2 Quality of data

#### 18.6.2.1 Species identification in surveys

There are identification problems with certain skate species that may increase uncertainty in the quality of survey data. *Raja montagui* and *R. brachyura* may be confounded occasionally, and the identification of neonatal specimens of *R. clavata*, *R. brachyura* and *R. montagui* can also be problematic. Recent data are considered more reliable.

Many recent surveys in the ecoregion have attempted to ensure that data collected for the common skate complex be differentiated. In many cases national experts have confirmed which species have been caught in recent years. However, for some past data recorded as *Dipturus batis*, it is uncertain which of the two species (*D. batis* and *D. intermedius*) was caught. It is yet unclear how to clarify for which years and surveys records as *D. batis* refer to the actual species or to the complex.

Several skate species, including some coastal species, occur sporadically in the Celtic Seas ecoregion and may have certain sites where they are locally abundant (e.g. *Raja brachyura*). These may be under-represented in existing surveys (see Stock Annex).

### 18.6.3 New data

No additional data were provided in 2022. See previous reports for details of ongoing projects.

## 18.7 Life-history information

See Stock Annex.

### 18.7.1 Ecologically important habitats

See Stock Annex.



## 18.8 Exploratory assessment models

### 18.8.1 Productivity-Susceptibility Analysis

See Stock Annex

### 18.8.2 Previous assessments

See Stock Annex

## 18.9 Stock assessment

The following stocks were assessed in 2022. For Category 5 and 6 stocks there were no changes to the assessment methods. Category 3 stocks were assessed using the new ICES framework (rfb rule, method 2.1, ICES, 2022a).

Following the new rfb methodology also means that average comparisons in indices has changed from the mean values of the previous two years over the preceding five year (2/5 rule) to the mean values of the previous two years to the over the preceding three years (2/3 rule).

As most of these stocks have not been reassessed in 2023, updated survey indices are not supplied.

### 18.9.1 Blonde ray *Raja brachyura* in Subarea 6 and Division 4.a

*Raja brachyura* has a patchy distribution in Subarea 6. It is not encountered in sufficient numbers in surveys to derive trends in abundance/biomass. The stock is considered to extend to the north western North Sea (Division 4.a) and is assessed in 2023. It may also extend along the west coast of Ireland. This Subarea 6 and Division 4.a stock is assessed in North Sea biennial advice years (2021, 2023 etc.) and was last assessed as a Category 5 stock, using landings data only. WSKATE (ICES, 2021) examined this stock as a case-study and determined that there was no suitable survey or combination of surveys that could be used in a Category 3 assessment.

### 18.9.2 Blonde ray *Raja brachyura* in Divisions 7.a and 7.f-g

*Raja brachyura* has a patchy distribution, and can be locally abundant in some parts of the Irish Sea and Bristol Channel, including off southeast Ireland. Mean catch rates in the Irish Sea and Bristol Channel (e.g. as observed in the UK beam trawl survey) are low and variable. While there was a decrease in abundance in 2015, the stock has been showing an overall increasing trend in the survey (Silva, 2022a). However, it is important to note that this survey does not sample this species effectively, and the survey is not used to provide advice for the stock.

With no reliable survey trend for this stock, it has been assessed since 2016 as a Category 5 stock using landings data. Landings were relatively stable at 1000–1200 t between 2011–2018, however there was a marked increase thereafter to 1600–1700 t (probably related to improvement in landings data quality) until 2021, when it decreased slightly to 1465 t.

### 18.9.3 Blonde ray *Raja brachyura* in Division 7.e

*Raja brachyura* has a patchy distribution in the western English Channel, and is locally abundant on certain grounds, such as sandbank habitats in and around the Channel Islands, Normano-Breton Gulf and Lyme Bay. The trawl-survey length–frequency data examined for this stock showed a peak for juvenile fish (< 25 cm  $L_T$ ), with no fish recorded between 24–31 cm  $L_T$  and occasional records of larger specimens > 70 cm  $L_T$  (Silva *et al.* 2020 WD).

Mean catch rates in a previous beam trawl survey in Great West Bay (Burt *et al.*, 2013) were low, as *R. brachyura* was caught in a relatively low proportion of tows (See Stock Annex).

With no reliable survey trend for this stock, it has been assessed since 2016 as a Category 5 stock using landings data. These reached a peak in 2015 (708 t), dropped to around 500 t per year in 2016 and 2017, but are now at over 800 t per year.

### 18.9.4 Thornback ray *Raja clavata* in Subarea 6

This stock was assessed using the new ICES rfb rules in 2022. Following an examination of length-data provided by member states using Accessions and Intercatch it was determined that insufficient length-samples to be useful on their own were collected in 2020 and 2021. It is presumed that this is related to lower sampling levels due to COVID-19. Therefore, length data from 2019–2021 were combined.

Full details of the rfb method are provided in Appendix 1. of this chapter. The stock index has decreased by 51% (2/3 rule).

### 18.9.5 Thornback ray *Raja clavata* in Divisions 7.a and 7.f-g

This stock was assessed using the new ICES rfb rules in 2022. Following an examination of length-data provided by member states using Accessions and Intercatch it was determined that insufficient length-samples to be useful on their own were collected in 2020 and 2021. It is presumed that this is related to lower sampling levels due to COVID-19. Therefore, length data from 2019–2021 were combined.

Full details of the rfb method are provided in Appendix 1 of this chapter. The stock has increased by 15% (2/3 rule, excluding the 2020 survey).

### 18.9.6 Thornback ray *Raja clavata* in Division 7.e

The UK beam trawl survey of the western English Channel (Q1SWECOS or UK-Q1-SWBeam, 2006-present) has shown most *R. clavata* to be captured in Lyme Bay with fewer records elsewhere (Figure 18.7a). Length–frequency showed a peak in the captures of presumably 0-group fish  $\leq 20$  cm (Silva *et al.*, 2020 WD). Although this survey could provide some preliminary estimates of total biomass for Division 7.e, these should be viewed only as ‘qualitative assessments’. It shows an increasing trend over the longer time-series, with a recent decrease in 2018 following a peak in abundance during 2014–2017 and, thereafter showing a sharp increase (Figure 18.7a). These analyses were consistent with the survey random stratified design and did not consider the potential effects of catchability and selectivity towards the outputs. Therefore, exploratory analyses were conducted to better evaluate and quantify the uncertainty and risks if to use this survey for future quantitative assessment and advice (Silva, 2022b). Such analyses provided an alternative estimate for the exploitable biomass based on the approach described in Berg *et al.* (2014) using ‘surveyIndex’ R package (Berg, 2022). However, they were not considered in the advice process in 2022, with further work to be undertaken and reviewed during a dedicated

workshop on surveys in the Celtic Seas ecoregion following similar process of WSKATE in 2020.

This stock is currently assessed as a Category 5 stock, using landings data. Landings increased steadily since 2009, peaking at 423 t in 2016, followed by a decrease to 372 t in 2017. In recent years, landings have been above the observed in 2016 and were at their highest level of 538 t in 2021.

### **18.9.7 Small-eyed ray *Raja microocellata* in the Bristol Channel (Divisions 7.f-g)**

Although occasional specimens of *R. microocellata* are caught in Division 7.a, the main concentration of this species is in Division 7.f, with larger individuals occurring slightly further offshore (Division 7.g). The youngest size class is not often taken in surveys, as 0-group fish tend to occur in very shallow water. This species may also occur in some inshore areas of southern and south-western Ireland, although data are limited for these areas.

The UK (England and Wales) beam trawl survey in the Bristol Channel (only those data from stations in 7.f–g were used) has previously indicated stable catch rates. Estimates are currently at low levels compared to earlier years, due to a decline in biomass of individuals  $\geq 50$  cm  $L_T$  (Figure 18.4e and Figure 18.6d). Although the index used in the assessment is based on biomass ( $\text{kg}\cdot\text{hr}^{-1}$ ), it is worth noting that this decline is also reflected on the decrease in numbers of individuals  $\geq 50$  cm  $L_T$  (Silva, 2022a WD). The stock index has decreased by 72% (2/3 rule). This index was updated in 2022, with estimates now based on data held within DATRAS contrary to previous assessments where estimates were calculated using data held on a national database (Silva, 2022a).

This stock was assessed using the new ICES rfb rules in 2022, with full details provided in Appendix 1 of this chapter.

Higher than expected numbers of *R. microocellata* were reported from a managed crayfish fishery in 27.7.j. (Marine Institute 2021). This may indicate that the current stock area is not correct. This issue will be further examined as part of future benchmark process.

### **18.9.8 Small-eyed ray *Raja microocellata* in the English Channel (Divisions 7.d-e)**

There are also localized concentrations of *R. microocellata* in the English Channel, including around the Channel Islands (Ellis *et al.*, 2011) and Baie of Dournanenez, Brittany (Rousset, 1990), with small numbers taken elsewhere.

Preliminary analyses of data from beam trawl surveys in the western English Channel (particularly in the Great West Bay area) were provided in 2012 (See Stock Annex). The low catch rates are probably related to the patchy distribution of the species in this area. Similarly, Silva *et al.* (2020 WD) identified only a few records of this species in the western English Channel beam trawl survey, with smaller size groups likely to occur in waters shallower than can be surveyed by the research vessel.

With no adequate survey trends available, this stock is assessed under Category 5, using landings data. Landings showed a stable trend from 2009–2015, followed by a decrease in 2016 (given that they could no longer be retained in Division 7.e) that remained stable for 3 years (ca. 36 t), followed by an increase to around 50 t since 2019. Although changes in Belgian fisheries may have contributed to a decline in landings in 2021 (see Section 18.2.5), these have remained stable with the increase of landings from France relatively to 2020.

### 18.9.9 Spotted ray *Raja montagui* in Subarea 6 and Divisions 7.b and 7.j

This stock was assessed using the new ICES rfb rules in 2022. Following an examination of length-data provided by member states using Accessions and Intercatch it was determined that insufficient length-samples to be useful on their own were collected in 2020 and 2021. It is presumed that this is related to lower sampling levels due to COVID-19. Therefore, length data from 2019–2021 were combined.

Full details of the rfb method are provided in Appendix 1. of this chapter. The stock has decreased by 49% (2/3 rule). This is reflected in the steady downward trend in the index since 2016.

### 18.9.10 Spotted ray *Raja montagui* in Divisions 7.a and 7.e-h

This stock was assessed using the new ICES rfb rules in 2022. Following an examination of length-data provided by member states using Accessions and Intercatch it was determined that insufficient length-samples to be useful on their own were collected in 2020 and 2021. It is presumed that this is related to lower sampling levels due to COVID-19. Therefore, length data from 2019–2021 were combined.

Full details of the rfb method are provided in Appendix 1. of this chapter. The stock has decreased by 17% (2/3 rule, excluding the 2020 survey).

### 18.9.11 Cuckoo ray *Leucoraja naevus* in Subareas 6 and 7 and Divisions 8.a-b and 8.d

*Leucoraja naevus* is a widespread and small-bodied skate that is taken in reasonable numbers in a variety of surveys in the ecoregion, especially on offshore grounds. The stock structure of this species is insufficiently known, which makes the interpretation of catch rates in the various surveys more problematic.

The combined index used in the Category 3 assessments until 2020, used the French EVHOE survey and the Irish Groundfish Survey, and indicates that the stock increased following low stock levels in 2012–2013.

A new index integrating data from six surveys was accepted at the benchmark workshop WKE-LASMO 2022. Swept area indices of the exploited biomass (individuals  $\geq 50$  cm total length) from the six surveys are presented in figure 18.4f, the combined index is presented in figure 18.4g. These indices were calculated by raising swept area fished to the total sampled area, so that indices are provided in absolute values in tonnes.

#### 18.9.11.1 Benchmark assessment

A benchmark assessment of this stock took place in 2022 (WKELASMO, 2022; ICES, 2022b). The results are outlined below and in the Stock Annex. They indicate that the stock is underexploited, with  $F$  well below  $F_{MSY}$ .

The application of the SPiCT model allowed estimation of relative reference points  $F_{2020}/F_{MSY}$  and  $B_{2021}/B_{MSY}$ . The definition of these reference points resulted in the upgrade of the stock to Category 2. Similarly, as for porbeagle in the north-east Atlantic and undulate ray in the English Channel, a more precautionary approach than the ICES default method for catch advice derivation (based on the 35th percentile of the expected catch distribution under  $F_{MSY}$ ) was adopted. The choice of the 15th percentile was justified by the need for a more precautionary management for long-lived species such as elasmobranchs, especially where advised catch are much larger than catch in the previous years.

The assessment, even at its most precautionary, indicates an underexploited stock, with low  $F$  relative to  $F_{MSY}$  and  $B$  much greater than  $B_{MSY}$ . This leads to catch advice ~2.5 times greater than in previous years (7826t in 2023 and 8064t in 2024).

### 18.9.12 Sandy ray *Leucoraja circularis* in the Celtic Seas and adjacent areas

*Leucoraja circularis* is a larger-bodied, offshore species that may be distributed outside some of the areas surveyed during internationally coordinated surveys, and the distribution of what is assumed to be a Celtic Sea stock will extend into the northern North Sea (Division 4.a) and parts of the Bay of Biscay (Subarea 8). This species is taken only infrequently in most surveys, such as the EVHOE survey (Figure 18.3a). Some nominal records are considered unreliable.

Only the Spanish Porcupine Bank survey covers an important part of the habitat of *L. circularis* and catches this species in any quantity (Figure 18.5a). Peak catches were observed in 2007–2008, with a decline following, but catches steadily increased returning to the higher levels observed in this time series, until 2016–2017 when the biomass decreased. Overall, the time-series shows low and variable catch rates, with an increasing trend until 2015, followed by a decrease in recent years (Figure 18.5b). This survey catches a broad size range, with both smaller (< 20 cm  $L_T$ ) and some larger (> 100 cm  $L_T$ ) specimens sampled (Figure 18.5c).

Given that the only survey that samples this species effectively only covers a small proportion of the broader stock range, it is not known whether the survey index would be appropriate for the overall stock. Consequently, this stock is assessed as a Category 5 stock, using landings data. Landings of this species are at a low level and have fluctuated between highs of 77–78 t in 2009, 2016 and 2018 and lows of 36–38 t in 2015, 2019 and 2020.

The landings estimated by WGEF are lower than national estimates, as WGEF consider nominal landings of ‘sandy ray’ from outside their main range to refer to *R. microocellata*.

### 18.9.13 Shagreen ray *L. fullonica* in the Celtic Seas and adjacent areas

*Leucoraja fullonica* is a larger-bodied, offshore species that may be distributed outside some of the areas surveyed during internationally coordinated surveys, and the distribution of what is assumed to be a Celtic Sea stock will extend into the northern North Sea (Division 4.a) and parts of the Bay of Biscay (Subarea 8).

This species is taken in small numbers in the EVHOE survey (Figure 18.3b), with catch rates declining. There is a lack of survey for most other parts of the stock area, although the increase in beam trawl surveys in the Celtic Sea may provide more data in the future.

The lack of appropriate survey coverage across the stock range and low, variable catch rates of this species means that a Category 5 assessment using landings data is currently used. Landings were at their highest of  $\geq 250$  t between 2009–2013 (peaking at 301 t in 2010) subsequently declining to their lowest level of 186 t in 2016, 2020 and 2021.

### 18.9.14 Common skate *Dipturus batis*-complex (flapper skate *Dipturus intermedius* and blue skate *Dipturus batis*) in Subarea 6 and divisions 7.a–c and 7.e–j

Although common skate *D. batis* has long been considered depleted, on the basis of its loss from former habitat and historical decline (Brander, 1981; Rogers and Ellis, 2000), this species has recently been confirmed to comprise two species, and longer-term data to determine the extents to

which the two individual species have declined are lacking. The nomenclature of the common skate complex was stabilised by Last *et al.* (2016). The smaller species (the form described as *D. flossada* by Iglésias *et al.*, 2010) is now named common blue skate, *Dipturus batis* and the larger species flapper skate, *D. intermedius*.

Common blue skate *Dipturus batis* occurs in most parts of the stock range and is the predominant member of the complex in the Celtic Sea (divisions 7.e–k) and in Rockall bank. Flapper skate shows a northern distribution, it occurs primarily in division 6.a and in the northern North Sea (Griffith *et al.*, 2010; Frost *et al.*, 2020; Fernández-Zapico *et al.*, 2021 WD; Ellis and Silva, 2021 WD; Barreau and Iglesias, 2021 WD, Baulier and Rimaud, 2022 WD).

Both species may occur in the intervening areas of divisions 7.a–c, but it is less clear as to which species predominates. In 7.c, *Dipturus batis* seems to predominate at Porcupine Bank, with no records of *D. intermedius* in 2021 (Fernández-Zapico *et al.*, 2022 WD). The documented loss of the common skate complex from parts of their former range (e.g. Division 7.a) suggested the complex to be depleted in the Celtic Sea ecoregion.

From available data, flapper skate seems to have a larger bathymetric range with individuals caught near the coast, the shallower depth being 17 m and up to 1000 m deep in 6.a. Meanwhile, the observed bathymetric range for common blue skate is from 66 m to 630 m (Pinto *et al.*, 2016; Barreau *et al.*, 2016; Barreau and Iglesias, 2021 WD).

Given that much of the data prior to 2010 refer to the species-complex, both species are currently treated together until a suitable time-series of species-specific data are available. Species distinction is improving since 2011 in scientific surveys although misidentifications may still occur (Barreau and Iglesias, 2021 WD). Number of common blue skate and flapper skate caught show an increasing trend since 2010 and some surveys may be able to provide a stock size indicator in the future such as EVHOE [G2917], IE-CGFS [G7212] or SCOROC [G4436] (Barreau and Iglesias, 2021 WD; Baulier and Rimaud, 2022 WD). The UK-Q1SWECOS survey also collects data on these species that may be useful for assessment.

Within the stock range, four species of the genus *Dipturus* can be encountered in landings. Recent prohibitions on landings of *D. batis* complex, and *D. nidarosiensis*, have resulted in increases in reported landings of *D. oxyrinchus*. Landings figures and advice refer to *Dipturus* spp., as landings of these species are believed to be confounded.

Particularly high levels of *D. oxyrinchus* were reported in 2019. It is not known whether these reflect an increase in catches of this species, or whether they are confounded with catches of other *Dipturus* species. A revision of the landings table in the 2020 Working Group noted discard information from Spain in the period 2015–2017 were erroneously included in the landings. In addition, Danish landings data for 2017 and 2018 were updated. As such a noticeable change in the landings presented in the current advice and report (Table 18.1 and 18.2) occurred.

In 2022, ICES was requested to advise of this stock unit, as a complex of two species. Given the lack of robust survey data over the stock range, and lack of landings data (due to their prohibited status), a Category 6 assessment was applied to this stock, and trends in stock size or indicator cannot be evaluated.

### **18.9.15 Undulate ray *Raja undulata* in divisions 7.b and 7.j**

This isolated stock has a very local distribution, mainly in Tralee Bay on the Southwest Irish coast.

There are no trawl surveys that can be used to assess this stock. However, data supplied by Inland Fisheries Ireland (Wögerbauer *et al.*, 2014 WD) shows that tag and recapture rates for *R. undulata* in Tralee Bay (Division 7.j) have significantly declined since the 1970s. Although these data do not allow for potential changes in tagging effort, it suggests that this stock is overexploited (Figure 18.8).

Given the lack of survey data over the coastal habitat for this stock, and a lack of landings data (due to management measures), a Category 6 assessment was applied to this stock, and trends in stock size or indicator cannot be evaluated.

### **18.9.16 Undulate ray *Raja undulata* in Divisions 7.d-e (English Channel)**

ICES considers one stock unit of undulate ray in the English Channel (divisions 7.d–e), with the main part of the range extending from the Isle of Wight to the Normano-Breton Gulf. This stock is sampled by two different beam trawl surveys: the Channel beam trawl survey (see Chapter 15) and the western English Channel beam trawl survey (UK-Q1-SWBeam, Silva *et al.*, 2020 and Silva, 2022b WD), as well as the French Channel Groundfish survey FR-CGFS (see Chapter 15). The FR-CGFS and UK-Q1-SWBeam surveys provide indices of exploitable biomass for undulate ray in divisions 7.d and 7.e respectively (Table 18.4b). Both indices are considered representative for the whole stock. The spatial distribution of *R. undulata* caught in the western English Channel survey is provided in the Stock Annex. Catch rates are generally variable, partly due to the patchy distribution of this species. The surveys with the best coverage of this stock area are the French Channel Groundfish Survey (FR-CGFS) in Division 7d, and UK-Q1-SWBeam in Division 7e. Indices of exploitable biomass from both surveys suggest a rapid increase in stock biomass from the mid-2010s.

The stock of undulate ray in the English Channel is managed under a specific TAC. This precautionary TAC has been increasing since 2016 following the biomass index but it is constraining, resulting in high discard rates (0.94 on average in 2017–2021).

Between 2018 and 2022, the advice was based on catches while it was previously based on landings (see Stock Annex). The benchmark workshop WKELASMO including this stock took place in 2022 (ICES 2022b). It led to the adoption of a surplus production model (SPiCT, Pedersen and Berg, 2017) to assess this stock. This resulted in moving this stock from the ICES stock category 3 to Category 2. The SPiCT-based assessment entailed a great increase of the advice, from 2552 tonnes (total catch) for 2021 and 2022 to 6716 and 6339 tonnes for 2023 and 2024 respectively.

#### **18.9.16.1 Benchmarked assessment following WKELASMO in 2022**

Details of input data and specification of priors on model parameters are provided in the Stock Annex.

The application of the SPiCT model allowed estimation of relative reference points  $F_{2020}/F_{MSY}$  and  $B_{2021}/B_{MSY}$ . The definition of these reference points resulted in the upgrade of the stock to Category 2. Similarly, as for porbeagle in the north-east Atlantic and cuckoo ray in subareas 6 and 7 and divisions 8.a-b and 8.d, a more precautionary approach than the ICES default method for catch advice derivation (based on the 35th percentile of the expected catch distribution under FMSY) was adopted. The choice of the 15th percentile was justified by the need for a more precautionary management for long-lived species such as elasmobranchs, especially where advised catch are much larger than catch in the previous years. The stock was estimated depleted at the beginning of the longer biomass index available (1990) and survey indicators suggest it remained in such a state until the implementation of a landing ban (2009–2014). The stock biomass estimated from SPiCT reflect the same trend (Figure 18.9). The mean estimated  $F$  in 2020, was estimated around

0.010, leading to a diagnosis of under-exploitation since  $F_{2020}/F_{MSY}=0.086$ . The assessment also suggested that the stock has recovered a healthy state, as indicated by the estimated relative stock biomass in January 2021:  $B_{2021}/B_{MSY}=1.697$ .

The SPiCT-based assessment entailed a great increase in the advice, from 2552 t (total catch) for 2021 and 2022 to 4836 and 4675 t of exploitable removals (landings and dead discards  $\geq 50$  cm TL) for 2023 and 2024 respectively. This level of catch is unprecedented since 1990. This is due to the combination to the depleted state of the stock until the 2010s not allowing a comparable level of landings and the fishing ban followed by the very restrictive TAC set since 2015 associated with a high survival rate of discarded fish.

### 18.9.17 Other skates in subareas 6 and 7 (excluding Division 7.d)

This section relates to skates not specified elsewhere in the ICES advice. This includes skates not reported to species level and some other, mainly deep-water species throughout the region. It also applies to those landings of *R. clavata*, *R. brachyura*, and *R. microocellata* outside the current defined stock boundaries (Table 18.3).

No specific assessment can be applied to this species group, and nominal landings have been shown to have declined dramatically to just 178 t in 2021, primarily as a result of improved species-specific reporting of the main commercial skate stocks.

## 18.10 Quality of assessments

Length data for many assessments have insufficient samples in a single year to be used on their own. COVID-19 reduced sampling levels in 2020 and 2021, therefore combined indices (2019–2021) were used in most assessments.

There are several other issues that influence the evaluation of stock status:

1. The stock identity for many species is not accurately known (although there have been some tagging studies and genetic studies to inform on some species, and the stocks of species with patchy distributions can be inferred from the spatial distributions observed from surveys). For inshore, oviparous species, assessments by ICES Division or adjacent divisions may be appropriate, although for species occurring offshore, including *L. naevus*, a better delineation of stock boundaries is required;
2. Age and growth studies have only been undertaken for the more common skate species, although IBTS and beam trawl surveys continue to collect maturity information. Other aspects of their biology, including reproductive output, egg-case hatching success, and natural mortality (including predation on egg-cases) are poorly known;
3. The identification of skate species is considered to be reliable for recent surveys, although there are suspected to be occasional misidentifications;
4. Although fishery-independent surveys are informative for commonly occurring species on the inner continental shelf, biomass indicators provided by these surveys are highly uncertain for lesser abundant stocks or those which distribution is not well covered by surveys as being inter-alia too coastal or having patchy distribution. This applies for example to blonde ray, which none of the three stock has a survey indicator, shagreen ray which is distributed on the offshore shelf but at low density and sandy ray, which occur mostly near the shelf break and at the upper slope.

For the two benchmarked stocks (rju.27.7de and rjn.27.678abd) SPiCT was adopted as assessment model. These new assessments resulted in moving the two stocks from the ICES stock category 3 to Category 2 and in a major increase in advised catch. Increased advice following the stock category change is expected as advice under the precautionary approach (ICES category 3) are



calculated with a method aiming at being precautionary to prevent stock depletion in the lack of sufficient data for a quantitative assessment. For these two stocks, the magnitude of the increase in advised catch is considerable. It is explained by the particularly precautionary previous advice and restrictive TAC adopted for undulate ray in the English Channel and the expected healthy status of cuckoo ray following the long-term increase in biomass indices and one previous study (Marandel *et al.*, 2019). Nevertheless, because of the large advice increase, a precautionary approach, similarly to that adopted for porbeagle in the north-east Atlantic, was adopted where the catch advice was derived of the 15th percentile of the catch distribution instead of the standard 35th percentile. This approach is justified by the magnitude of the change in the advice, which imply that the stock reaction to the forecast catch is uncertain and the relatively short time-series used in these assessments.

## 18.11 Reference points

No reference points have been adopted for any stock that has not been through the benchmark process. The two benchmark stocks have now Fmsy and Bmsy reference point. Proxy reference points are now calculated for Category 3 stocks that use the ICES rfb method.

## 18.12 Conservation considerations

Management measures to account for conservation aspects may exist at a national or regional level (e.g. white skate is a protected species in some UK waters).

Relevant Red List assessments for the main skate and ray species in this ecoregion are given in the table below, showing the current global IUCN assessments (<https://www.iucnredlist.org/>; accessed July 2023), the European Red List of Marine Fisheries (Nieto *et al.*, 2015) and Irish Red List (Clarke *et al.*, 2016). It should be noted that some of the earlier global assessments are due for updated assessments. It should also be recognised that the listings below are on regional scales that may not equate with the various stock units within the Celtic Seas ecoregion, as considered in this chapter.

Species	Red List Category		
	IUCN Global assessment (year of publication)	European Red List (Nieto <i>et al.</i> , 2015)	Irish Red List (Clark <i>et al.</i> , 2016)
<i>Amblyraja radiata</i>	Vulnerable (2020)	Least Concern	-
<i>Dipturus batis</i>	Critically Endangered (2021)	Critically Endangered	Critically Endangered
<i>Dipturus intermedius</i>	Critically Endangered (2021)		Critically Endangered
<i>Dipturus nidarosiensis</i>	Near Threatened (2015)	Near Threatened	Near Threatened
<i>Dipturus oxyrinchus</i>	Near Threatened (2015)	Near Threatened	Vulnerable
<i>Leucoraja circularis</i>	Endangered (2015)	Endangered	Near Threatened
<i>Leucoraja fullonica</i>	Vulnerable (2015)	Vulnerable	Vulnerable
<i>Leucoraja naevus</i>	Least Concern (2015)	Least Concern	Vulnerable
<i>Raja brachyura</i>	Near Threatened (2009)	Near Threatened	Near Threatened
<i>Raja clavata</i>	Near Threatened (2016)	Near Threatened	Least Concern
<i>Raja microocellata</i>	Near Threatened (2009)	Near Threatened	Least Concern
<i>Raja montagui</i>	Least Concern (2007)	Least Concern	Least Concern
<i>Raja undulata</i>	Endangered (2009)	Near Threatened	Endangered

<i>Rajella fyllae</i>	Least Concern (2020)	Least Concern	Least Concern
<i>Rostroraja alba</i>	Endangered (2006)	Critically Endangered	Critically Endangered

## 18.13 Management considerations

A TAC was only introduced in 2009 for the main skate species in this region. Reported landings may be slightly lower than the TAC, but this can be influenced by various issues (e.g. quota allocation and poor weather). There was evidence that quota was restrictive for some nations in some of the years after 2014, with a slight increase in TAC after this time.

Some coastal species, such as *Raja undulata* and *R. microocellata*, have been or still are subject to limited fishing opportunities, which may disproportionately impact on some inshore fleets.

Currently, fishery-independent trawl survey data provide the best time-series of species-specific information. Technical interactions for fisheries in this ecoregion are shown in the Stock Annex.

### Main commercial species

Thornback ray, *Raja clavata*, is one of the most important commercial species in the inshore fishing grounds of the Celtic Seas (e.g. eastern Irish Sea, Bristol Channel). It is thought to have been more abundant in the past, and more accurate longer-term assessments of the status of this species are required.

Blonde ray, *Raja brachyura*, is a commercially valuable species. The patchy distribution of *R. brachyura* means that existing surveys have low and variable catch rates. More detailed investigations of this commercially valuable species are required.

Cuckoo ray, *Leucoraja naevus*, is an important commercial species on offshore grounds in the Celtic Sea. Further studies to better define the stock structure are required to better interpret these contrasting abundance trends.

The main stock of small-eyed ray, *Raja microocellata*, occurs in the Bristol Channel, and is locally important for coastal fisheries. Similarly, the English Channel stock of undulate ray *Raja undulata* is also important for inshore fleets.

Spotted ray, *Raja montagui*, is also commercially important, although a higher proportion of the catch of this small-bodied species is discarded in some fisheries. Commercial data for *R. brachyura* and *R. montagui* are often confounded.

### Other species

Historically, species such as *L. circularis* and *L. fullonica* may have been more widely distributed on the outer continental shelf seas. These species are now encountered only infrequently in some surveys on the continental shelf, though they are still present in deeper waters along the edge of the continental shelf, and on offshore banks. Hence, studies to better examine the current status of these species in subareas 6–7 should be undertaken.

The larger-bodied species in this area are from the genus *Dipturus*, and data are limited for all species. *Dipturus batis*-complex were known to be more widespread in inner shelf seas historically, and whilst locally abundant in certain areas, have undergone a decline in geographical extent.

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## 18.15 Tables and Figures



**Table 18.1. Skates and rays in the Celtic Seas. Regional total landings (ICES estimates, tonnes) of Celtic Seas skate stocks by nation. Some of these stocks extend outside the Celtic Seas ecoregion and data for these divisions are reported in relevant report chapters.**

Country	ICES Stock Code	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
BEL	raj.27.67a-ce-k	1568	1328	1405	413	416	333	227	74	8	1	1	3	3	0	8	7	0	0
	rjb.27.67a-ce-k				0	0	0			0	0				0	0	0		
	rjc.27.7afg			0	328	216	197	302	441	391	240	350	241	212	197	339	314	265	431
	rjc.27.7e				5	2	8	3	4	4	3	9	14	21	14	13	9	37	31
	rje.27.7de						3	5	5	7	7	9	9	12	15	16	15	0	0
	rje.27.7fg						37	117	124	99	83	106	123	116	121	137	94		
	rjf.27.67														0.01				
	rjh.27.4a6					0	0												
	rjh.27.7afg				166	170	210	313	404	406	351	359	313	338	348	520	721	445	514
	rjh.27.7e				7	6	3	5	5	6	3	6	11	9	14	10	23	18	13
	rji.27.67						0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	1	1		
	rjm.27.67bj						0												
	rjm.27.7ae-h				78	63	55	120	70	3	0	1	7	2	16	15	44	125	166
	rjn.27.678abd			0	78	81	70	112	93	97	48	51	27	26	28	25	18	0	
	rju.27.7de												5	24	15	0	0		
BEL Total		1568	1328	1405	1075	953	917	1204	1219	1022	737	893	753	763	768	1084	1246	891	1157
DE	raj.27.67a-ce-k	39	7	26	60	2	4	3	1						0.5				
	rjf.27.67															13		2	2
DE Total		39	7	26	60	2	4	3	1						0.5	13		2	2
DK	rjh.27.4a6											0				0	0	0	0
DK Total												0				0	0	0	0
ES	raj.27.67a-ce-k	2231	2568	2340	1946	206	52	23	15	9	12	45	61	62	357	135	17	20	26

Country	ICES Stock Code	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
	rjb.27.67a-ce-k	24	6	11	28	5	0.2	1	5	23	80	214	232	256		0			
	rjc.27.6					16	2	10	6	23	21	12	12	48	43	69	60	57	28
	rjc.27.7afg											5	6	9	0.1	0.0	0.1	2	4
	rjc.27.7e						0	0											
	rjf.27.67					62	42	29	20	33	20	13	15	22	20	14	14	14	13
	rjh.27.4a6					0													
	rji.27.67	86	74	40	7	30	16	22	8	10	5	3	3	11	9	5	2	2	5
	rjm.27.67bj				7	7	10	5	0	0	0	1				0			1
	rjm.27.7ae-h					0				0	0							0	0
	rjn.27.678abd				1	778	480	387	311	373	300	343	372	305	335	295	192	145	220
ES Total		2341	2648	2392	1986	1103	603	477	365	471	438	635	701	712	763	520	285	241	298
FRA	raj.27.67a-ce-k	2048	1740	1757	1669	548	314	174	160	139	128	123	130	193	126	31	34	22	16
	rjb.27.67a-ce-k	351	295	308	414	68	30	15	23	21	32	33	17	19	25				
	rjc.27.6	64	78	73	82	39	24	19	39	28	10	2	1	1	3	13	17	15	20
	rjc.27.7afg	379	264	238	181	147	131	133	106	95	107	70	121	147	101	117	80	106	100
	rjc.27.7e	95	86	82	64	122	101	114	108	181	224	225	213	176	212	263	264	289	282
	rje.27.7de	21	19	19	22	32	28	28	24	26	24	24	8	8	11	15	14	23	31
	rje.27.7fg	27	23	18	21	29	21	16	30	30	65	31	5	56	69	92	69	42	84
	rjf.27.67	32	25	33	28	144	150	152	147	127	131	151	130	125	129	124	132	138	134
	rjh.27.4a6					1				1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	0
	rjh.27.7afg					36	73	131	87	52	170	218	275	257	172	295	277	264	287
	rjh.27.7e					56	148	205	169	191	281	304	223	242	396	450	538	539	639
	rji.27.67	199	152	185	178	46	35	25	35	26	33	34	37	34	35	25	24	28	40
	rjm.27.67bj	13	7	3	4	2	4	7	5	17	53	43	47	40	23	8	1	1	1
	rjm.27.7ae-h	1080	902	833	870	785	934	1062	1135	899	912	745	819	717	834	814	576	556	294
	rjn.27.678abd	3164	2565	2575	2507	3217	3069	2909	2571	2195	2515	2621	2233	2144	2288	2398	1984	2151	1871

Country	ICES Stock Code	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
	rju.27.7bj					0				0		0	1	1	0	0	0.3		
	rju.27.7de					19	9	20	6	3	10	50	58	79	86	181	159	152	158
<b>FRA Total</b>		<b>7473</b>	<b>6157</b>	<b>6123</b>	<b>6041</b>	<b>5291</b>	<b>5071</b>	<b>5010</b>	<b>4646</b>	<b>4031</b>	<b>4695</b>	<b>4674</b>	<b>4319</b>	<b>4239</b>	<b>4511</b>	<b>4828</b>	<b>4170</b>	<b>4326</b>	<b>3800</b>
<b>GBR</b>	raj.27.67a-ce-k	2773	2454	2398	1478	508	290	168	153	101	77	46	34	34	30	45	56	46	30
	rjb.27.67a-ce-k				96	22	1	19	12	1	63	118	116	113	210	146	5	5	0
	rjc.27.6				1	56	61	57	67	120	120	114	147	114	201	233	167	141	115
	rjc.27.7afg			0	204	300	371	384	483	416	252	309	274	277	324	322	322	449	305
	rjc.27.7e	0	0		3	82	98	98	129	151	151	158	195	173	206	212	189	214	252
	rje.27.7de				4	18	40	28	33	32	36	39	19	15	12	20	24	28	33
	rje.27.7fg			0	91	157	214	189	208	117	79	78	69	30	55	83	67	68	67
	rjf.27.67				13	44	108	97	79	85	55	25	39	21	14	18	17	16	16
	rjh.27.4a6				7	5	7	17	4	0	1	3	2	1	3	1	0.3	1	2
	rjh.27.7afg		0	0	97	138	226	273	261	262	229	245	245	272	328	404	322	405	292
	rjh.27.7e		0		32	159	215	204	175	222	295	396	352	251	323	435	451	434	428
	rji.27.67				0	2	0	0	3	25	22	25	35	23	31	4	9	17	43
	rjm.27.67bj				5	16	27	32	30	27	29	43	49	43	62	58	1	31	16
	rjm.27.7ae-h	0		0	12	38	102	88	85	90	80	70	80	89	93	118	82	95	85
	rjn.27.678abd				225	321	421	402	306	269	262	266	254	260	272	289	186	166	154
	rju.27.7de				2	2			0			5	22	36	43	63	66	52	74
<b>GBR Total</b>		<b>2773</b>	<b>2454</b>	<b>2399</b>	<b>2270</b>	<b>1868</b>	<b>2179</b>	<b>2056</b>	<b>2031</b>	<b>1919</b>	<b>1752</b>	<b>1917</b>	<b>1933</b>	<b>1752</b>	<b>2208</b>	<b>2452</b>	<b>1965</b>	<b>2168</b>	<b>1915</b>
<b>IRL</b>	raj.27.67a-ce-k	2117	1728	1581	1283	1007	547	394	410	243	219	227	230	284	188	148	87	92	69
	rjb.27.67a-ce-k			0		2	4	17	1	0	0	9	7	9	9	7	0	0	
	rjc.27.6				3	33	56	69	71	85	87	99	130	90	101	70	54	69	
	rjc.27.7afg				8	80	126	134	146	191	169	220	232	219	182	192	149	166	
	rjc.27.7e								0		2			2	4	2	1		
	rje.27.7de													2					

Country	ICES Stock Code	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
	rje.27.7fg						0	0	0	0	0	0	0			0		0	1
	rjf.27.67						1	6	7	6	4	2	2	49	63	38	23	15	45
	rjh.27.4a6					0	4	1	1	24	9	9	11	5	23	33	20	14	3
	rjh.27.7afg	3	6			5	402	382	407	377	420	351	171	154	228	396	383	353	247
	rjh.27.7e								0			2		2		0.4	0.7		
	rji.27.67						0	4	0									5	9
	rjm.27.67bj					1	20	18	25	24	43	28	20	12	19	12	3	4	3
	rjm.27.7ae-h					0	19	63	53	40	49	48	41	10	58	64	41	46	57
	rjn.27.678abd					12	55	106	108	93	83	79	69	69	114	103	73	55	36
	rju.27.7bj														3				
IRL Total		2120	1734	1581	1283	1038	1165	1173	1218	1025	1104	1012	871	961	1019	1088	895	786	704
NLD	raj.27.67a-ce-k	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0									
	rjc.27.7afg												0						
	rjc.27.7e					0	2	1	0	2		0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0
	rjh.27.7e								0	0				0		0	1	1	0
	rjm.27.7ae-h					0		0		0			0			0	0.1	0	0
	rjn.27.678abd						0			0	0			0					
NLD Total		0	1	0	0	1	2	1	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	2	0
NOR	raj.27.67a-ce-k	50	86	85	77	96	131	62	107	99	157	272	312	153	30	274	331		2
NOR Total		50	86	85	77	96	131	62	107	99	157	272	312	153	30	274	331		2
Grand Total		16364	14429	14016	12800	10355	10071	9986	9587	8568	8883	9740	9208	8524	9311	10259	8892	8418	8037

**Table 18.2. Skates and rays in the Celtic Seas. Regional total landings (ICES estimates, tonnes) of Celtic Seas skate stocks by stock. Some of these stocks extend outside the Celtic Seas ecoregion and data for these divisions are reported in relevant report chapters.**

ICES Stock Code	Country	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
raj.27.67a-ce-k	BEL	1568	1328	1405	413	416	333	227	74	8	1	1	3	3	0	8	7	0	0
	DE	39	7	26	60	2	4	3	1						1				
	ES	2231	2568	2340	1946	206	52	23	15	9	12	45	61	62	357	135	17	20	26
	FRA	2048	1740	1757	1669	548	314	174	160	139	128	123	130	193	126	31	34	22	16
	GBR	2773	2454	2398	1478	508	290	168	153	101	77	46	34	34	30	45	56	46	30
	IRL	2117	1728	1581	1283	1007	547	394	410	243	219	227	230	284	188	148	87	90	69
	NLD	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0								
	NOR	50	86	85	77	96	131	62	107	99	157	272	312	153	30	274	331		2
	raj.27.67a-ce-k Total		10826	9911	9593	6928	2783	1671	1052	919	600	594	714	770	729	731	641	532	179
rjb.27.67a-ce-k	BEL				0	0	0			0	0				0	0	0	0	
	ES	24	6	11	28	5	0.21	1	5	23	80	214	232	256	0	0	0	0	
	FRA	351	295	308	414	68	30	15	23	21	32	33	17	19	25	0	0	0	
	GBR				96	22	1	19	12	1	63	118	116	113	210	146	5	5	0
	IRL			0		2	4	17	1	0	0	9	7	9	9	7	0	0	
rjb.27.67a-ce-k Total		375	301	319	538	97	35	52	42	45	175	375	373	395	245	153	5	5	0
rjc.27.6	ES					16	2	10	6	23	21	12	12	48	43	69	60	57	28
	FRA	64	78	73	82	39	24	19	39	28	10	2	1	1	3	13	17	15	20
	GBR				1	56	61	57	67	120	120	114	147	113	201	233	167	141	115
	IRL					3	33	56	69	71	85	87	99	130	90	101	70	53	69
rjc.27.6 Total		64	78	73	82	114	120	141	181	241	236	213	260	293	337	416	315	267	232
rjc.27.7afg	BEL			0	328	216	197	302	441	391	240	350	241	212	197	339	314	265	431
	ES											5	6	9	0	0.1	0.1	2	4

ICES Stock Code	Country	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
	FRA	379	264	238	181	147	131	133	106	95	107	70	121	147	101	117	80	106	100
	GBR			0	204	300	371	384	483	416	252	309	274	277	324	322	322	448	305
	IRL					8	80	126	134	146	191	169	220	232	219	182	192	149	166
rjc.27.7afg Total		379	264	238	713	671	780	944	1165	1048	790	903	861	878	840	960	909	971	1005
rjc.27.7e	BEL				5	2	8	3	4	4	3	9	14	21	14	13	9	35	31
	ES						0	0											
	FRA	95	86	82	64	122	101	114	108	181	224	225	213	176	212	263	264	289	282
	GBR	0	0		3	82	98	98	129	151	151	158	195	173	206	212	189	214	252
	IRL									0		2		2	4	2	1		
	NLD					0	2	1	0	2		0	0	0		1	1	1	0
rjc.27.7e Total		95	86	82	71	206	208	216	242	339	379	395	423	372	437	490	464	538	566
rje.27.7de	BEL						3	5	5	7	7	9	9	12	15	16	15	1	1
	FRA	21	19	19	22	32	28	28	24	26	24	24	8	8	11	15	14	23	31
	GBR				4	18	40	28	33	32	36	39	19	15	12	20	24	28	33
	IRL													2					
rje.27.7de Total		21	19	19	26	50	70	61	62	65	67	72	36	36	38	50	53	51	65
rje.27.7fg	BEL						37	117	124	99	83	106	123	116	121	137	94		
	FRA	27	23	18	21	29	21	16	30	30	65	31	5	56	69	92	69	42	84
	GBR			0	91	157	214	189	208	117	79	78	69	30	55	83	67	68	67
	IRL						0	0	0	0	0	0	0			0		0	1
rje.27.7fg Total		27	23	18	112	187	272	323	362	247	227	216	198	201	245	313	230	110	151
rjf.27.67	DE															13	0	2	2
	BEL														0	0	0		
	ES					62	42	29	20	33	20	13	15	22	20	14	14	14	13
	FRA	32	25	33	28	144	150	152	147	127	131	151	130	125	129	124	132	138	134
	GBR				13	44	108	97	79	85	55	25	39	21	14	18	17	16	16

ICES Stock Code	Country	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
	IRL						1	6	7	6	4	2	2	49	63	38	23	15	45
rjf.27.67 Total		32	25	33	41	250	301	283	253	251	211	212	186	217	225	207	185	186	211
rjh.27.4a6	BEL					0	0										0.1	0	
	DE																		0
	DK											0						0	0
	ES					0													
	FRA					1				1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0
	GBR			7	5	7	17	4	0	1	3	2	1	3	1	0.3	1	2	
	IRL					0	4	1	1	24	9	9	11	5	23	34	20	13	3
	NLD																		0
rjh.27.4a6 Total				7	6	10	17	5	24	10	14	14	6	27	35	21	15	5	
rjh.27.7afg	BEL				166	170	210	313	404	406	351	359	313	338	348	520	721	445	514
	FRA				36	73	131	87	52	170	218	275	257	172	295	277	264	287	
	GBR		0	0	97	138	226	273	261	262	229	245	245	272	328	404	322	405	292
	IRL	3	6		5	402	382	407	377	420	351	171	154	228	396	383	353	247	
rjh.27.7afg Total		3	6	0	263	350	910	1099	1160	1097	1170	1172	1004	1020	1077	1616	1703	1467	1342
rjh.27.7e	BEL				7	6	3	5	5	6	3	6	11	9	14	10	23	18	13
	FRA				56	148	205	169	191	281	304	223	240	396	450	538	539	639	
	GBR		0		32	159	215	204	175	222	295	396	352	251	323	435	451	434	428
	IRL							0		2		2		1	1				
	NLD							0	0					0	1	1	1	0	
rjh.27.7e Total			0		39	221	365	414	349	419	579	708	587	504	732	896	1014	992	1080
rji.27.67	BEL							0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	1	1		
	ES	86	74	40	7	30	16	22	8	10	5	3	3	11	9	5	2	2	5
	FRA	199	152	185	178	46	35	25	35	26	33	34	37	34	35	25	24	28	40
	GBR				0	2	0	0	3	25	22	25	35	23	31	4	9	17	43

ICES Stock Code	Country	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
	IRL						0	4	0							0	0	5	9
rji.27.67 Total		285	226	226	185	78	51	51	46	61	61	63	75	69	77	36	36	52	98
rjm.27.67bj	BEL						0												
	ES				7	7	10	5	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0.3	0		1
	FRA	13	7	3	4	2	4	7	5	17	53	43	47	40	23	8	1		1
	GBR				5	16	27	32	30	27	29	43	49	44	62	58	1	31	16
	IRL					1	20	18	25	24	43	28	20	12	19	12	3	3	3
rjm.27.67bj Total		13	7	3	16	27	62	63	61	68	125	114	116	96	104	79	5	37	21
rjm.27.7ae-h	BEL				78	63	55	120	70	3	0	1	7	2	16	15	44	124	166
	ES					0				0	0							0	0
	FRA	1080	902	833	870	785	934	1062	1135	899	912	745	819	717	834	814	576	557	294
	GBR	0		0	12	38	102	88	85	90	80	70	80	89	93	118	82	95	85
	IRL					0	19	63	53	40	49	48	41	10	58	65	41	46	57
	NLD					0		0		0			0			0.2	0.1	1	
rjm.27.7ae-h Total		1080	902	833	960	887	1110	1332	1344	1032	1042	864	947	818	1001	1012	741	821	602
rjn.27.678abd	BEL			0	78	81	70	112	93	97	48	51	26	26	28	25	18	0	0
	ES				1	778	480	387	311	373	300	343	372	305	335	295	192	145	221
	FRA	3164	2565	2575	2507	3217	3069	2909	2571	2195	2515	2621	2233	2144	2288	2398	1984	2151	1872
	GBR				225	321	421	402	306	269	262	266	254	259	272	289	186	166	154
	IRL					12	55	106	108	93	83	79	69	69	114	103	73	55	36
	NLD						0			0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
rjn.27.678abd Total		3164	2565	2575	2811	4408	4096	3916	3388	3028	3209	3360	2955	2804	3037	3111	2453	2517	2282
rju.27.7bj	IRL														2.6	0	0		
	FRA					0				0		0	0.9	1.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	0	
rju.27.7bj Total						0.4				0		0	0.9	1.3	2.8	0.3	0.3	0	



ICES Stock Code	Country	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
rju.27.7de	BEL												5	24	15	0.2	0.1		
	FRA					19	9	20	6	3	10	50	58	79	86	181	159	152	158
	GBR				2	2			0			5	22	36	43	63	66	52	74
rju.27.7de Total					2	21	9	20	6	3	10	55	84	139	143	244	225	204	233
Grand Total		16364	14429	14016	12800	10355	10071	9986	9587	8568	8883	9740	9208	8524	9311	10259	8892	8418	8037

**Table 18.3. Skates and rays in the Celtic Seas. ICES Estimates of landings for other skates and rays in subareas 6–7 (excluding Division 7.d) by species, country, and year (in tonnes). Data revised in 2021.**

Country	Species	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
BEL	<i>Raja brachyura</i>	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.04	0.00	0.39	0.47	1	2					
	<i>Raja clavata</i>	0.01	0.02	0.00	0.03		0.02	1	0.03	0.08					
	<i>Raja undulata</i>								1	0.23					
	Rajiformes (indet)	416	333	227	74	8	0.46	0.03	1	0.30	0.18	8	7	0	0
<b>BEL Total</b>		<b>416</b>	<b>333</b>	<b>227</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0.18</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
DEU	Rajiformes (indet)	2	4	3	1						1				
<b>DEU Total</b>		<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>						<b>1</b>				
ESP	<i>Raja brachyura</i>	1			0.21	1								1	0
	<i>Raja clavata</i>	65	23	13	6	5	10	44	59	62	18	14	16	20	25
	<i>Raja montagui</i>		3												
	Rajiformes (indet)	139	26	11	9	4	2	1	1		338	121	1	1	1
<b>ESP Total</b>		<b>206</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>357</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>26</b>
FRA	<i>Amblyraja hyperborea</i>				3	0.48	2	18	10	7					
	<i>Amblyraja radiata</i>					4	8	5	9	9					
	<i>Raja brachyura</i>	2	5	6	27	31	25	29	45	62		0		0	
	<i>Raja clavata</i>	82	92	45	53	61	46	42	36	27					
	<i>Raja microocellata</i>	0.23	2	0.13	0.15	1	1	2	0.16	1					
	<i>Raja montagui</i>	0.01	0.01	0.11		0.00	0.04	0.02	0.04	58					
	<i>Raja undulata</i>		0.03		0.00			0.04	0.06						
	<i>Rajidae</i>									0.00	4	0.00			
	Rajiformes (indet)	463	215	123	77	42	46	28	31	30	122	29	33	22	16
<b>FRA Total</b>		<b>548</b>	<b>314</b>	<b>174</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>139</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>193</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>16</b>
GBR	<i>Amblyraja hyperborea</i>					0.11	0.11							1	
	<i>Amblyraja radiata</i>			0.05	0.03	1		0.23			0.49				
	<i>Raja brachyura</i>	10	5	4	11	1	1	3	2	2	3	2	1	2	2
	<i>Raja clavata</i>	30	55	58	58	35	14	20	27	24	12	18	21	23	21
	<i>Raja microocellata</i>	6	8	4	2	11	16	18	1	0.25	1	2	0.3	1	1

Country	Species	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
	<i>Raja montagui</i>											0.03			
	<i>Raja undulata</i>								0.17	0.01	0.19	0.36	0.1	1	1
	Rajiformes (indet)	463	223	102	83	54	45	6	4	8	13	23	32	21	5
<b>GBR Total</b>		<b>508</b>	<b>290</b>	<b>168</b>	<b>153</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>30</b>
IRL	<i>Amblyraja radiata</i>	0.08			0.04		0.05								
	<i>Raja brachyura</i>	5	36	46	47	53	53	40	45	47	40	56	35	39	37
	<i>Raja clavata</i>	18	81	88	127	111	117	133	147	151	89	71	39	37	33
	<i>Raja microocellata</i>		0.15				0.06		0.30						
	<i>Raja montagui</i>						1	1	0.03	42	0	0	0.3	0	
	<i>Rajella fyllae</i>		1		1										
	Rajiformes (indet)	983	429	259	236	79	49	53	38	43	59	21	14	14	
<b>IRL Total</b>		<b>1007</b>	<b>547</b>	<b>394</b>	<b>410</b>	<b>243</b>	<b>219</b>	<b>227</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>284</b>	<b>188</b>	<b>148</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>69</b>
NLD	<i>Raja clavata</i>			0.05											
	<i>Raja montagui</i>		0.10												
	Rajiformes (indet)	0.39		0.08	0.11	0.02									
<b>NLD Total</b>		<b>0.39</b>	<b>0.10</b>	<b>0.14</b>	<b>0.11</b>	<b>0.02</b>									
NOR	Rajiformes (indet)	96	131	62	107	99	157	272	312	153	30	274	331		2
<b>NOR Total</b>		<b>96</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>157</b>	<b>272</b>	<b>312</b>	<b>153</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>274</b>	<b>331</b>		<b>2</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>2783</b>	<b>1671</b>	<b>1052</b>	<b>919</b>	<b>600</b>	<b>594</b>	<b>714</b>	<b>770</b>	<b>729</b>	<b>731</b>	<b>639</b>	<b>531</b>	<b>181</b>	<b>143</b>

**Table 18.4a. Skates and rays in the Celtic Seas. Biomass estimates (kg per km<sup>2</sup>) of assessed stocks each survey used in the 2022 *Leucoraja naevus* benchmark assessment. The Stock is the combined total used as the stock index.**

Year	EVHOE	IGFSw	SP_PORC	NIGFS	SCOWCGFSn	Q1SWECOS	comb7gj	comb6a	Stock
2005	3014.88	656.41	298.62	148.56	476.64	244.94	232.86	412.32	5485.23
2006	1966.78	273.60	315.16	98.55	316.17	244.94	185.77	320.02	3720.99
2007	3910.04	641.37	330.05	186.38	597.98	284.18	297.09	611.39	6858.50
2008	4573.19	621.81	206.65	195.03	625.73	673.23	475.92	181.08	7552.64
2009	3266.91	1408.97	159.00	175.83	564.11	935.70	356.95	270.16	7137.62
2010	3472.23	650.27	229.77	171.31	525.14	510.56	213.12	519.23	6291.63
2011	5315.22	762.59	86.20	93.46	564.11	955.89	448.46	251.22	8477.15
2012	3359.69	548.13	120.10	77.13	848.75	1239.52	201.84	496.69	6891.85
2013	5050.91	481.75	80.27	242.06	818.02	1188.01	144.41	344.56	8349.99
2014	8897.90	488.96	180.26	432.05	1330.85	583.45	661.15	463.14	13037.74
2015	8877.80	1548.71	273.35	497.56	976.68	993.67	692.34	184.51	14044.62
2016	4325.24	1030.40	79.29	548.90	1560.28	151.78	704.44	544.97	8945.30
2017	7717.27	848.47	181.69	451.96	1618.16	663.25	550.57	307.09	12338.45
2018	7282.01	656.27	257.19	94.90	728.76	379.01	1048.30	339.96	10786.40
2019	10384.06	177.05	433.62	61.80	974.79	551.38	881.33	141.48	13605.51
2020	8687.95	563.50	136.01	113.57	483.67	881.02	447.10	176.04	11488.86
2021	9737.74	432.98	322.11	228.55	380.47	722.42	809.35	61.59	12695.22

**Table 18.4b. Skates and rays in the Celtic Seas. Exploitable biomass estimates (relative, expressed in tonnes based on swept area) for each survey used in the 2022 SPiCT assessment for *Raja undulata* in the English Channel (rju.27.7de).**

Year	FR-CGFS	UK-Q1-SWBeam
1990	235.21	
1991	138.20	
1992	209.78	
1993	0.00	
1994	626.01	
1995	150.21	
1996	28.56	
1997	145.94	
1998	356.78	
1999	71.30	
2000	97.14	
2001	143.22	
2002	60.97	
2003	0.00	
2004	93.41	
2005	108.15	
2006	330.66	120.04
2007	383.97	256.48

Year	FR-CGFS	UK-Q1-SWBeam
2008	158.93	859.34
2009	367.01	460.75
2010	251.73	1551.98
2011	147.88	1267.66
2012	518.01	397.66
2013	587.29	497.91
2014	765.19	1442.06
2015	1305.64	803.55
2016	1207.90	985.98
2017	1715.61	2449.01
2018	1663.04	1120.23
2019	3506.81	1821.83
2020	3841.49	305.97*
2021	3272.34	2710.37



Figure 18.1a. Skates and rays in the Celtic Seas. Total landings (tonnes) of skates (Rajidae) in the Celtic Seas (ICES subareas 6–7 including 7.d), from 1903–2015 (Source: Official nominal catches <https://www.ices.dk/data/dataset-collections/Pages/Fish-catch-and-stock-assessment.aspx>).

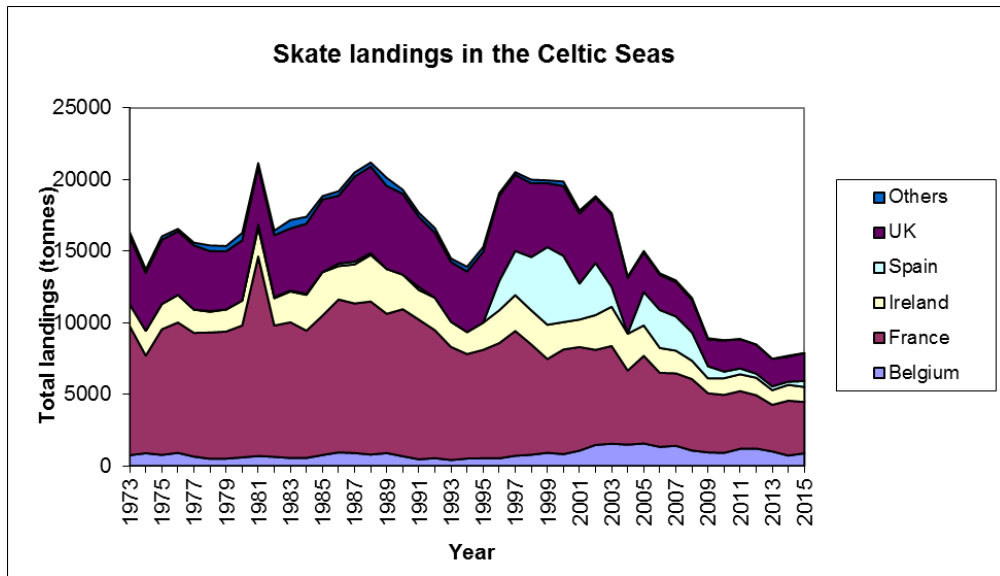


Figure 18.1b. Skates and rays in the Celtic Seas. Total landings (tonnes) of skates (Rajidae) by nation in the Celtic Seas from 1973–2015 (Source: Official nominal catches <https://www.ices.dk/data/dataset-collections/Pages/Fish-catch-and-stock-assessment.aspx>).

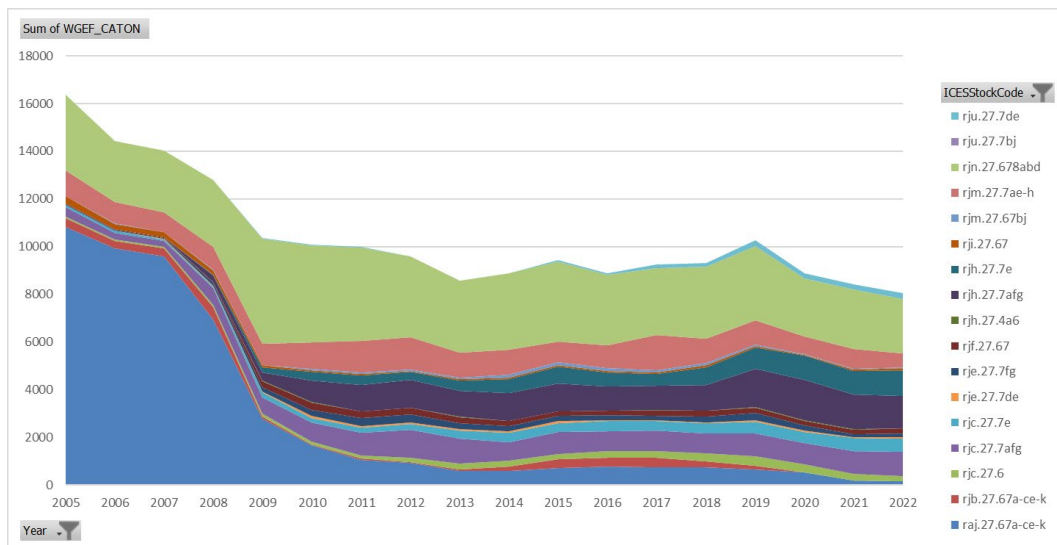
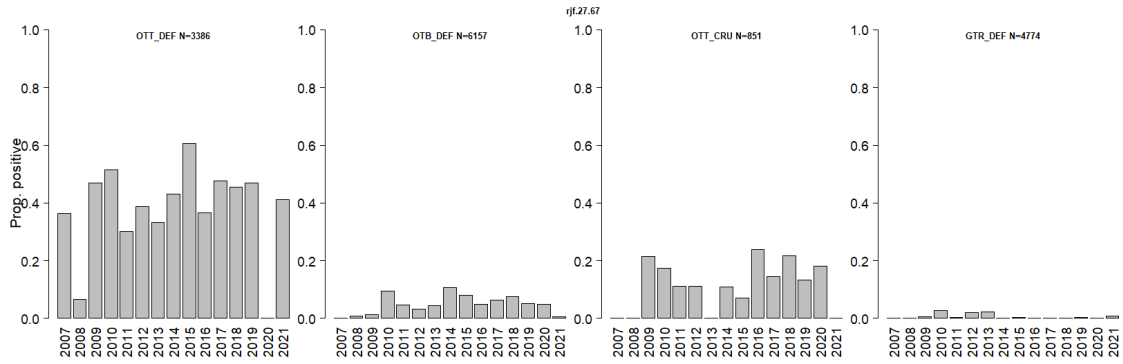
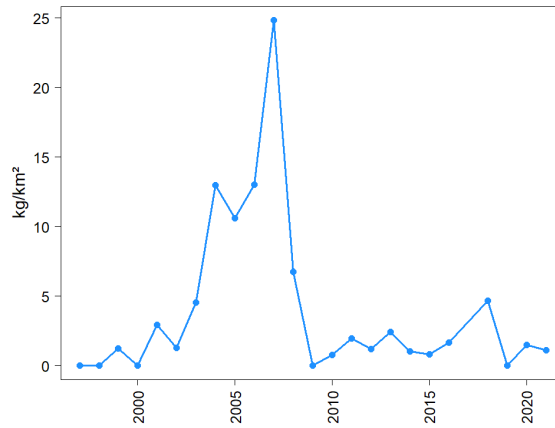


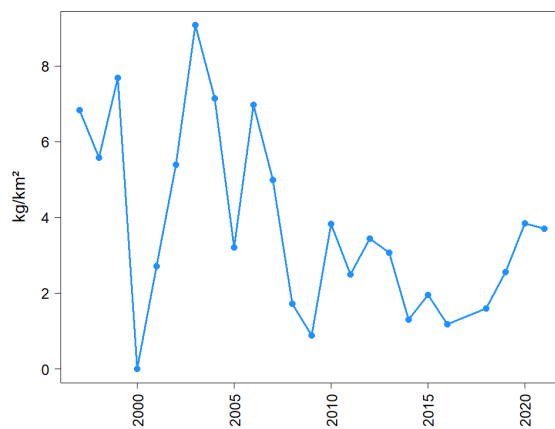
Figure 18.1.c Skates and rays in the Celtic Seas. Total landings (tonnes) of skates (Rajidae) by stock in the Celtic Seas from 2005–2022 (Source: ICES).



**Figure 18.2 Skates and rays in the Celtic Seas. Temporal trends in the proportion of hauls encountering individuals of the stock rjf.27.67, based on French on-board observer trips carried out in application of EU data collection programmes (the zero value in 2020 for OTT-DEF was due to COVID-19 disruption of the sampling).**



**Figure 18.3a. Exploitable biomass (individuals  $\geq$  50 cm TL) per km<sup>2</sup> of *Leucoraja circularis* in Subarea 7 (stock rji.27.67) from the EVHOE survey (1997–2021, no survey in 2017).**



**Figure 18.3b. Exploitable biomass (individuals  $\geq$  50 cm TL) per km<sup>2</sup> of *Leucoraja fullonica* in Subarea 7 (stock rjf.27.67) from the EVHOE survey (1997–2021, no survey in 2017).**

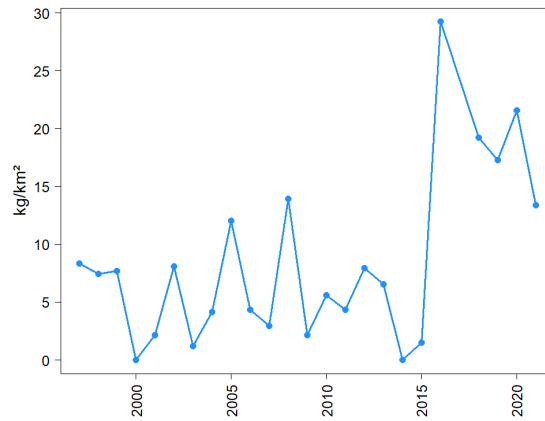


Figure 18.3c. Skates and rays in the Celtic Seas. Exploitable biomass (individuals  $\geq 50$  cm TL) per km<sup>2</sup> of *Raja clavata* in areas of the stock rjc.27.7afg covered by the VHOE survey (1997–2021, no survey in 2017).

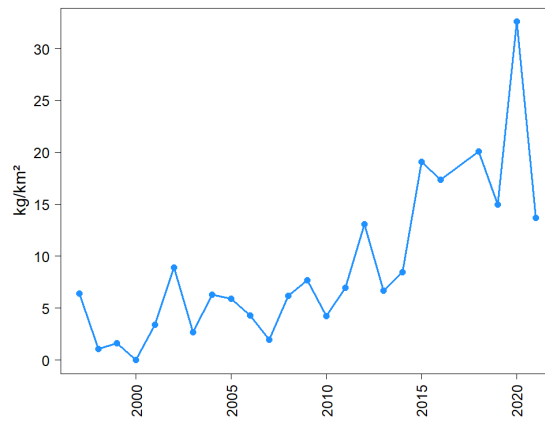


Figure 18.3d. Skates and rays in the Celtic Seas. Exploitable biomass (individuals  $\geq 50$  cm TL) per km<sup>2</sup> of *Raja montagui* in Subareas 7 (stock rjc.27.7ae-h) from the EVHOE survey (1997–2021, no survey in 2017).

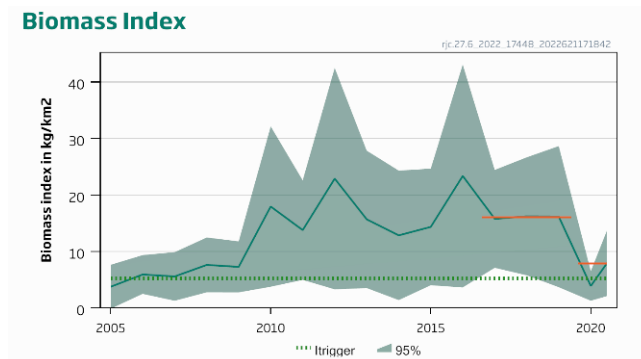


Figure 18.4a. Skates and rays in the Celtic Seas. Irish Groundfish Survey (IGFS-WIBTS-Q4) biomass index of *Raja clavata* in Division 6.a for 2005–2021. Red lines give average for 2017–2019 and for 2020–2021.



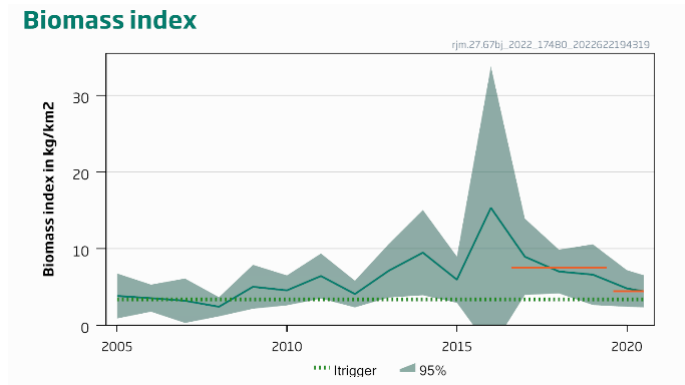


Figure 18.4b. Skates and rays in the Celtic Seas. Irish Groundfish Survey (IGFS-WIBTS-Q4) mean CPUE of *Raja montagui* in divisions 6.a and 7.b-c for 2005–2021. Red lines give average for 2017–2019 and for 2020–2021.

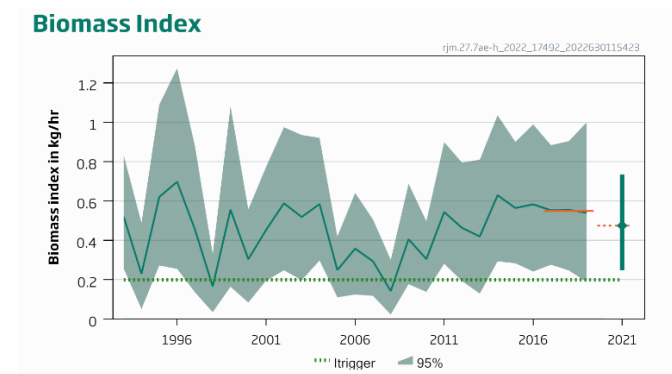


Figure 18.4c. Skates and rays in the Celtic Seas. UK (England and Wales) Irish Sea and Bristol Channel beam trawl survey (EngW-BTS-Q3) mean CPUE (individuals of  $\geq 50$  cm in total length) of *Raja montagui* in divisions 7.a, e-h for 1993–2021. Red lines give average for 2017–2019 and for 2021. The 2020 survey was not included in the assessment as it did not cover the usual range (Silva, 2022a).

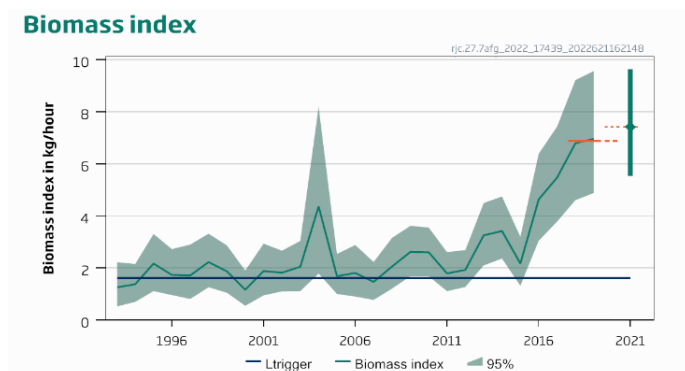


Figure 18.4d. Skates and rays in the Celtic Seas. UK (England and Wales) Irish Sea and Bristol Channel beam trawl survey (EngW-BTS-Q3) mean CPUE (individuals of  $\geq 50$  cm in total length) of *Raja clavata* in divisions 7.a, f-g for 1993–2021. Red lines give average for 2017–2019 and for 2021. The 2020 survey was not included in the assessment as it did not cover the usual range (Silva, 2022a).

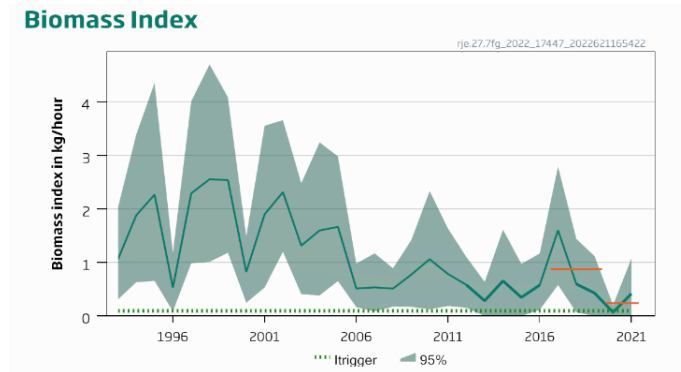


Figure 18.4e. Skates and rays in the Celtic Seas. UK (England and Wales) Irish Sea and Bristol Channel beam trawl survey (EngW-BTS-Q3) mean CPUE (individuals of  $\geq 50$  cm in total length) of *Raja microcellata* in divisions 7.f-g for 1993–2021. Red lines give average for 2013–2019 and for 2020–2021.

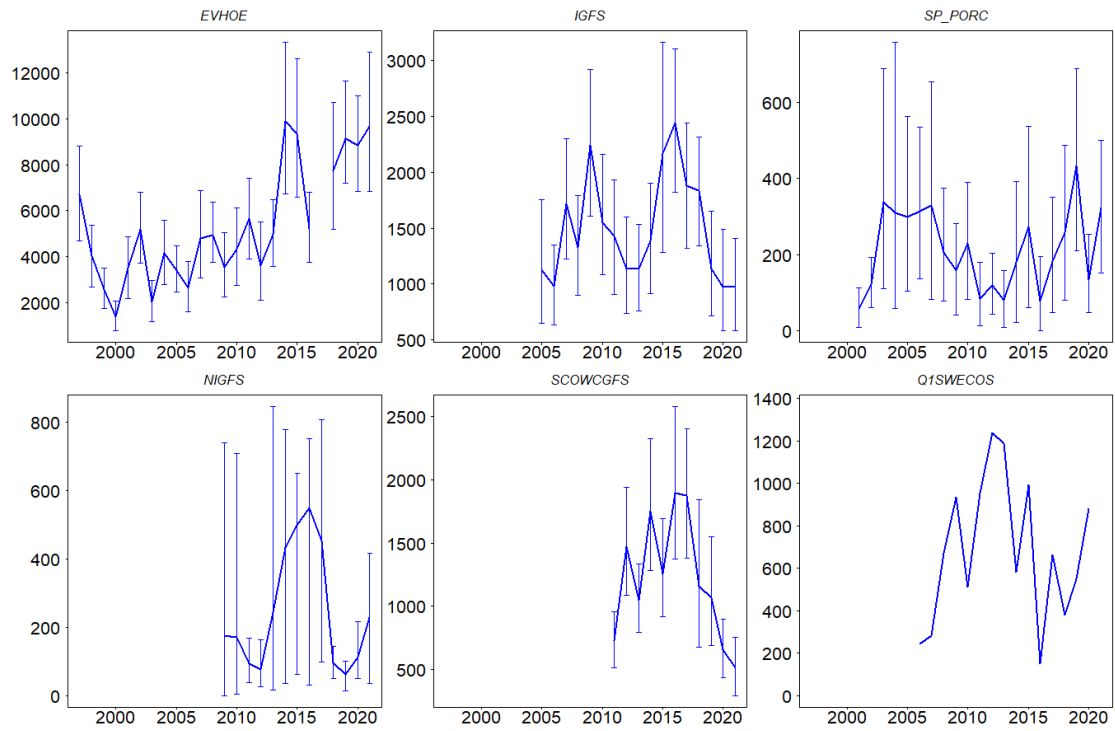


Figure 18.4f. Skates and rays in the Celtic Seas. Indices of the exploited biomass (individuals of  $\geq 50$  cm in total length) of cuckoo ray (*Leucoraja naevus*) from the six survey where individuals from the stock rnj.27.678abd are caught from 1997 (only EVHOE started in this year) to 2021. No EVHOE survey carried out in 2017.

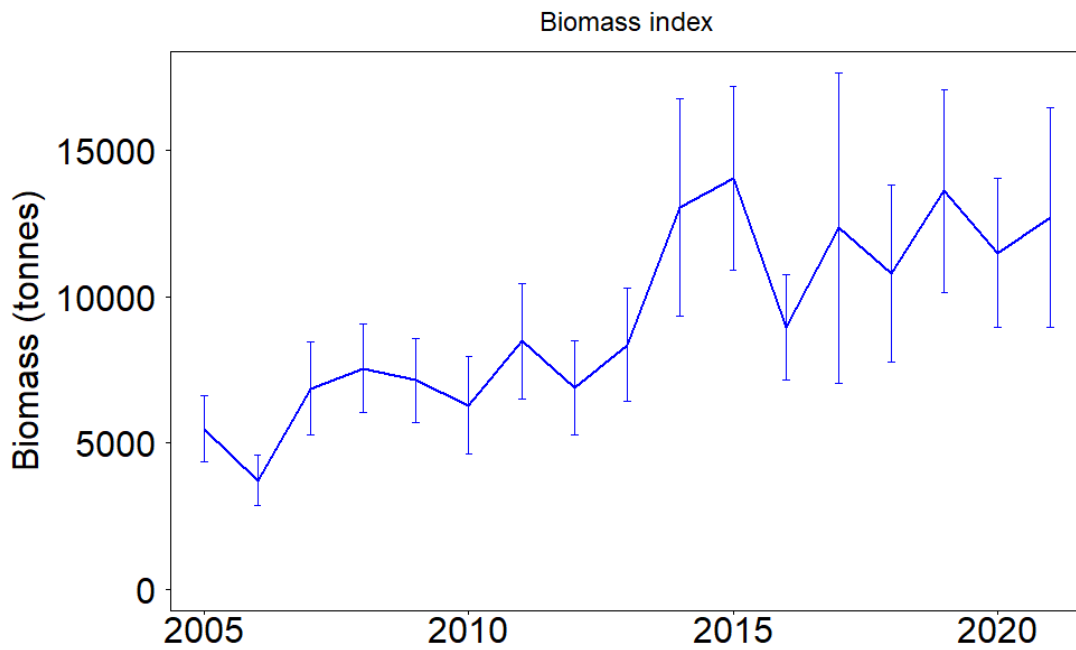


Figure 18.4g. Skates and rays in the Celtic Seas. Combined index of the exploited biomass (individuals of  $\geq 50$  cm in total length) of cuckoo ray, stock rnj.27.678abd used for the assessment (years 2005–2021).

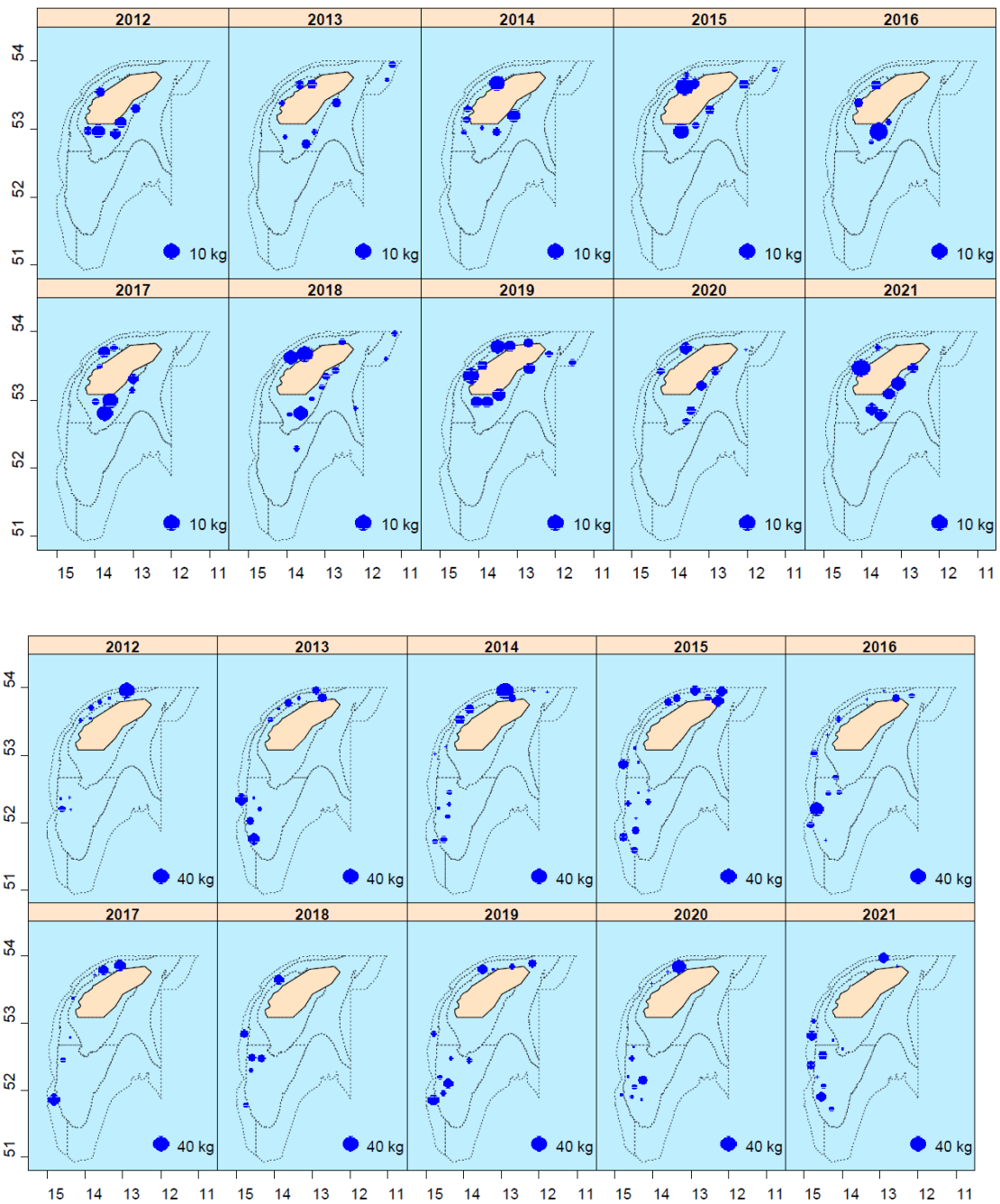


Figure 18.5a. Skates and rays in the Celtic Seas. Geographical distribution of cuckoo ray *Leucoraja naevus* (top) and sandy ray *Leucoraja circularis* (bottom) catches (kg haul<sup>-1</sup>) in Porcupine survey time-series (2012–2021) (WD06 - Fernández-Zapico *et al.*, 2022).

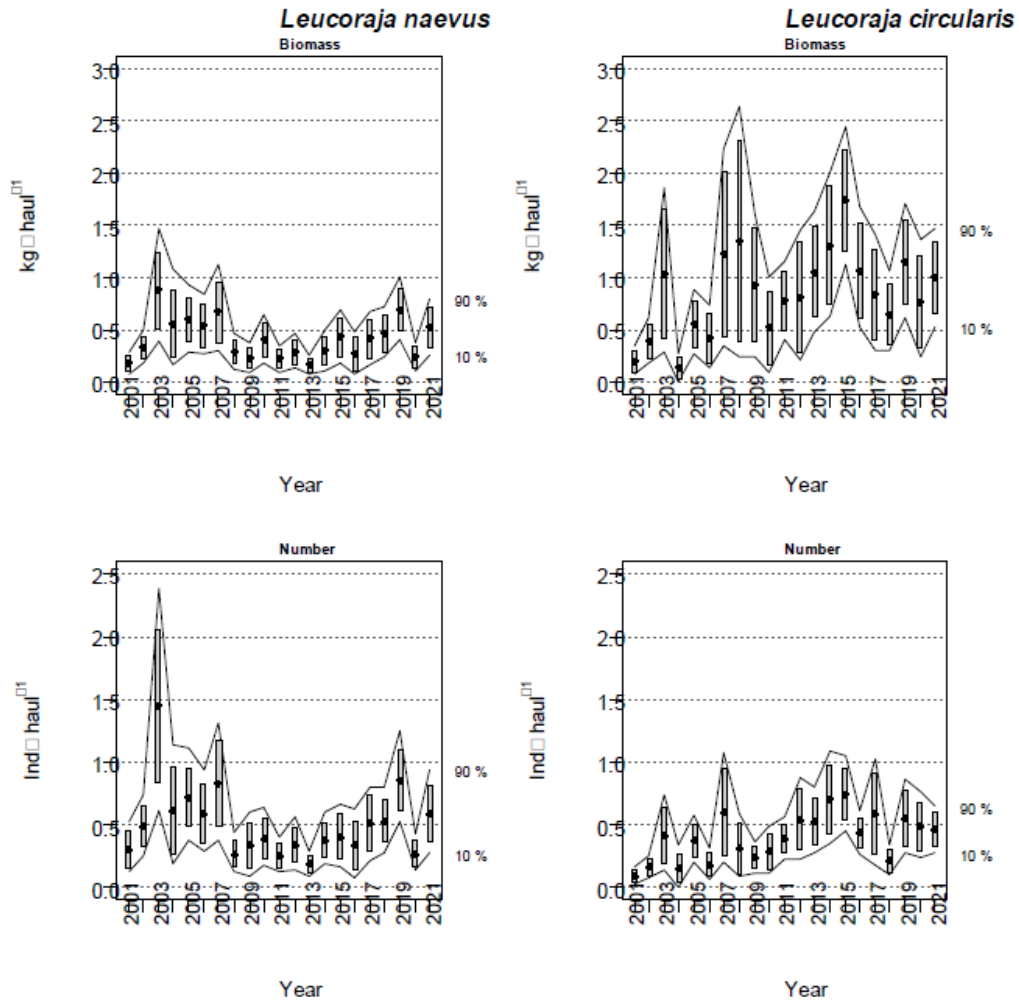


Figure 18.5b. Skates and rays in the Celtic Seas. Temporal changes of cuckoo ray *Leucoraja naevus* and sandy ray *Leucoraja circularis* biomass index (kg haul<sup>-1</sup>) during Porcupine survey time-series (2001–2021). Boxes mark parametric standard error of the stratified biomass index. Lines mark bootstrap confidence intervals ( $\alpha = 0.80$ , bootstrap iterations = 1000) (WD06 - Fernández-Zapico *et al.*, 2022).

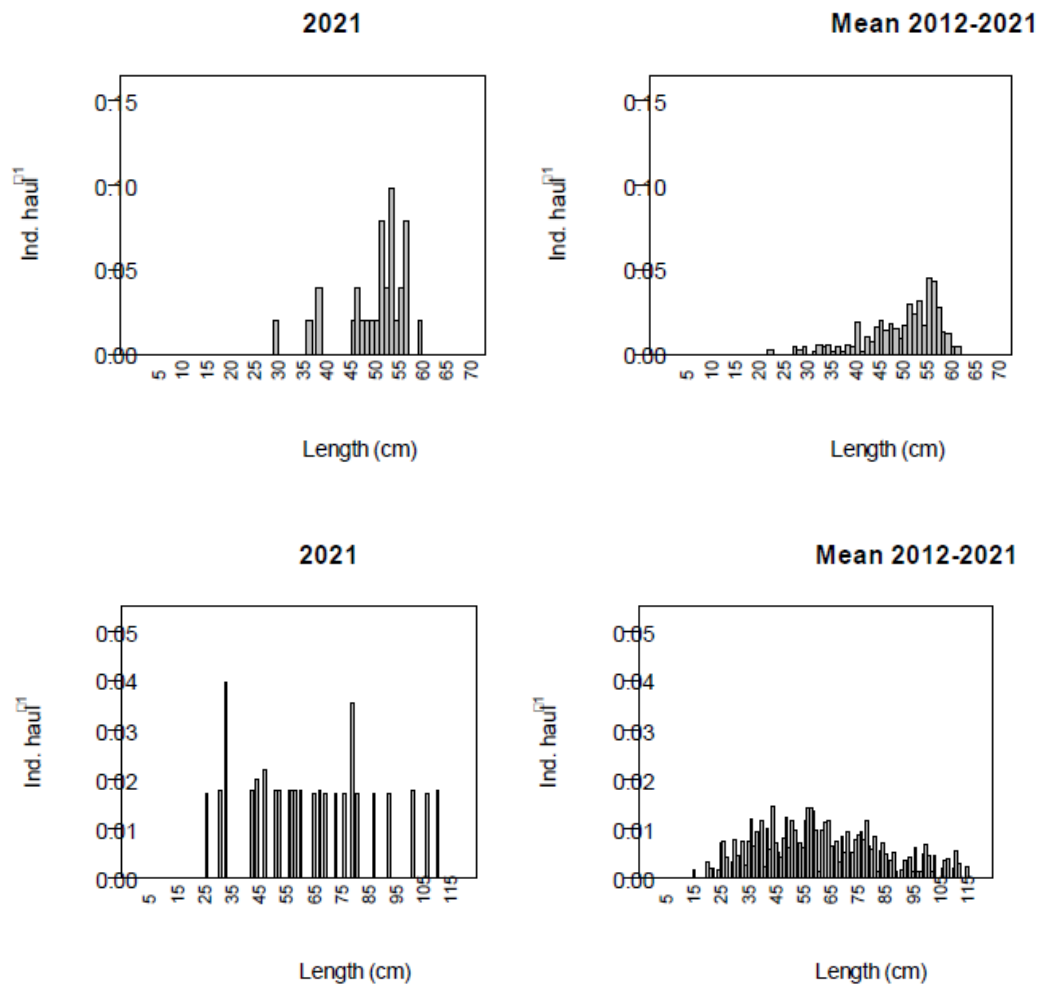


Figure 18.5c. Skates and rays in the Celtic Seas. Stratified length distributions of cuckoo ray *Leucoraja naevus* (top) and sandy ray *Leucoraja circularis* (bottom) in Porcupine survey 2012–2021 (WD06 - Fernández-Zapico *et al.*, 2022).

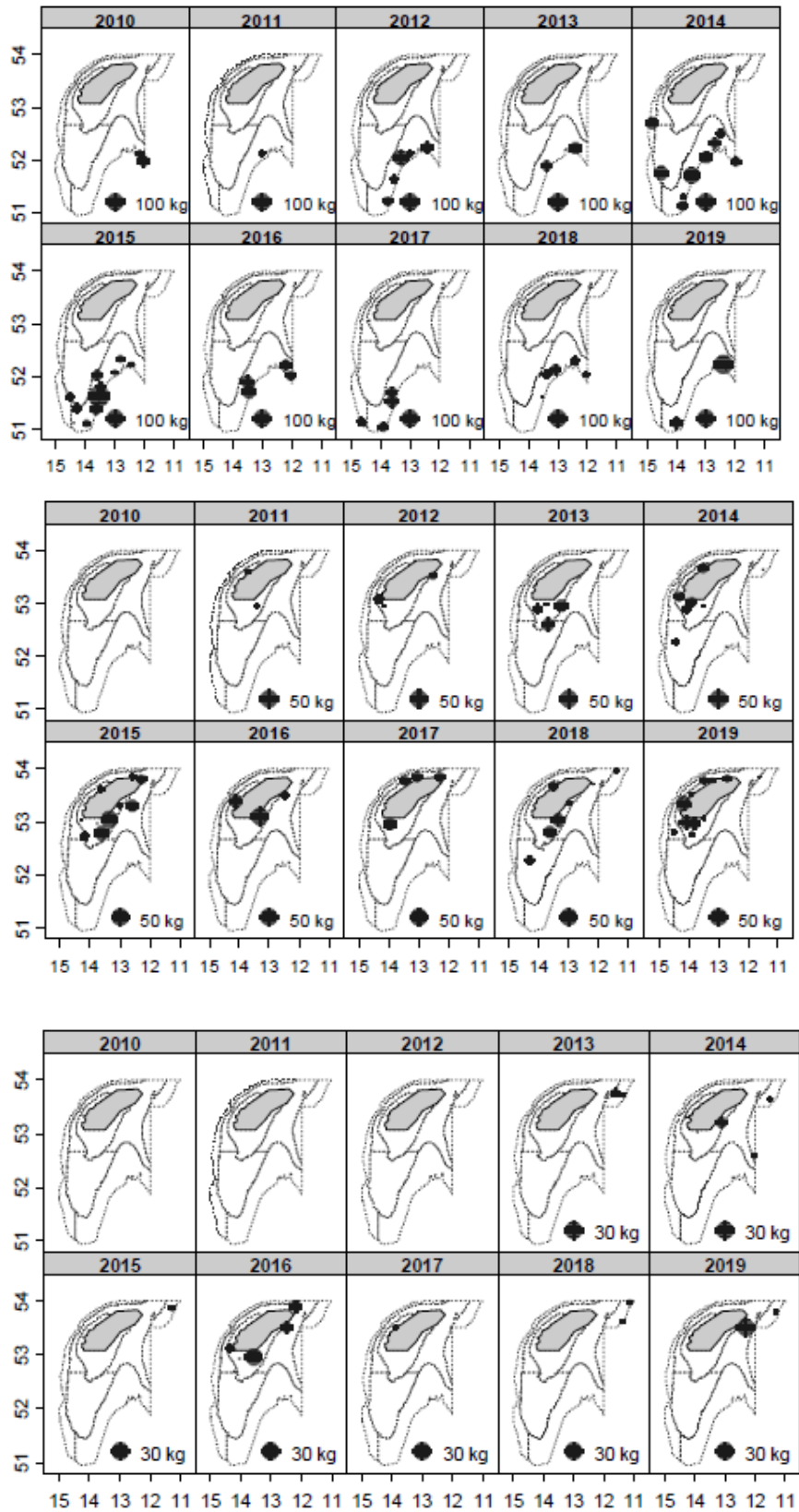


Figure 18.5d. Skates and rays in the Celtic Seas. Geographical distribution of *Dipturus nidarosiensis* (top), *D. batis* (middle) and *D. intermedius* (bottom) (kg haul<sup>-1</sup>) in Porcupine survey time-series (2008–2019) (WD02 - Ruiz-Pico et al., 2020).

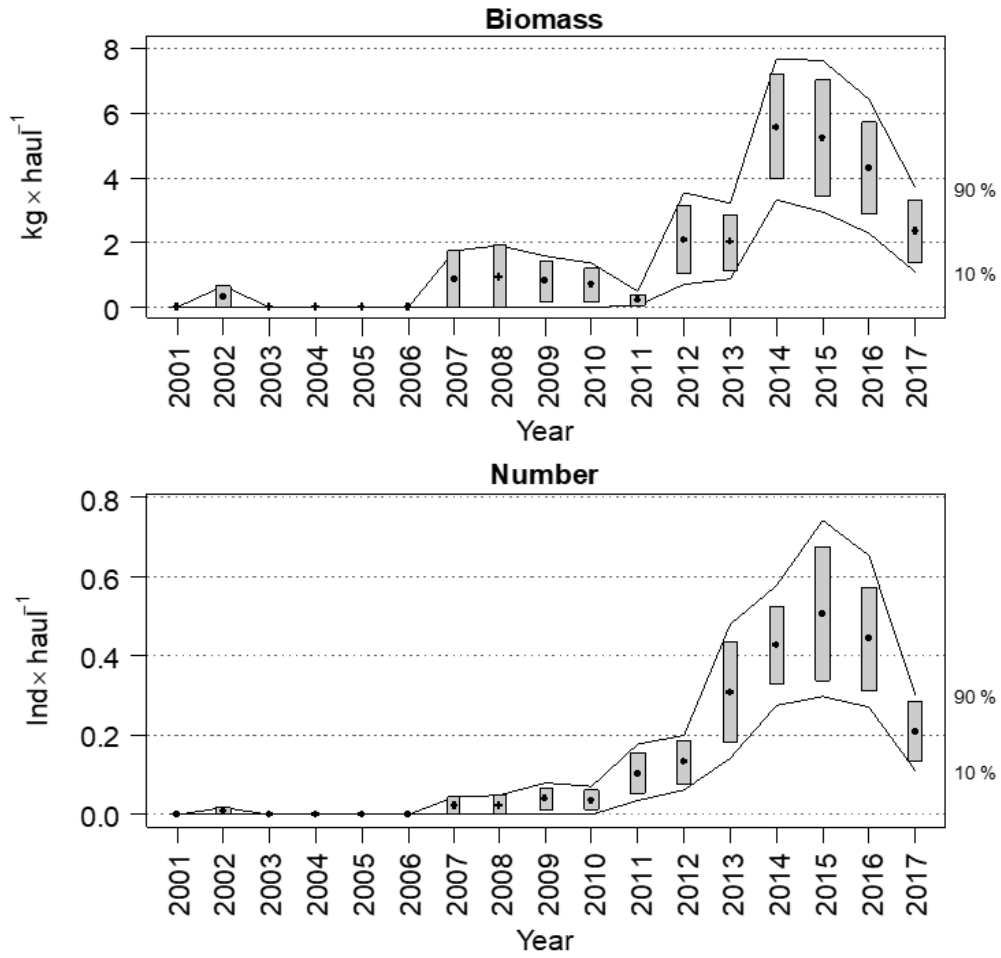


Figure 18.5f. Skates and rays in the Celtic Seas. Changes in *Dipturus* spp. biomass index ( $\text{kg} \cdot \text{haul}^{-1}$ ) during Porcupine survey time-series (2001–2017). Lines mark bootstrap confidence intervals ( $\alpha = 0.80$ , bootstrap iterations = 1000) (WD02 - Ruiz-Pico *et al.*, 2020).



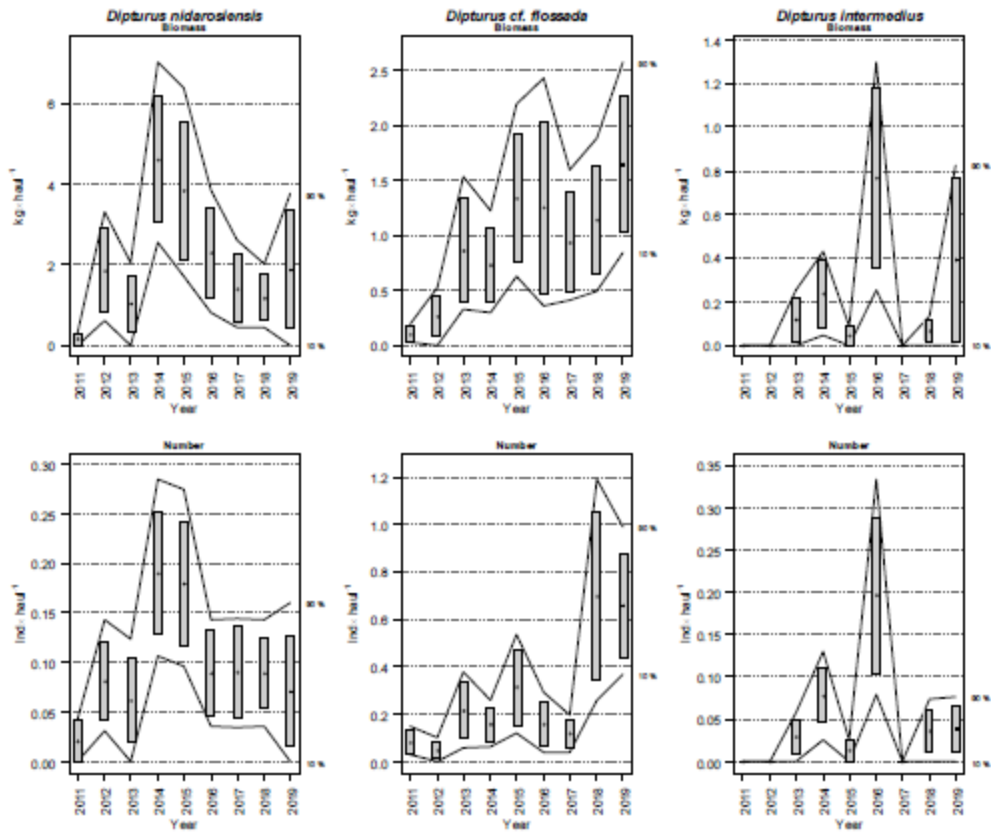


Figure 18.5g. Skates and rays in the Celtic Seas. Changes in *Dipturus nidarosiensis*, *Dipturus batis* (labelled *Dipturus cf. flossada*) and *Dipturus intermedius* (labelled *Dipturus cf. intermedia*) biomass index (kg haul<sup>-1</sup>) during Porcupine survey time-series (2011–2019). Boxes mark parametric standard error of the stratified index. Lines mark bootstrap confidence intervals ( $\alpha = 0.80$ , bootstrap iterations = 1000) (WD02 - Ruiz-Pico *et al.*, 2020).

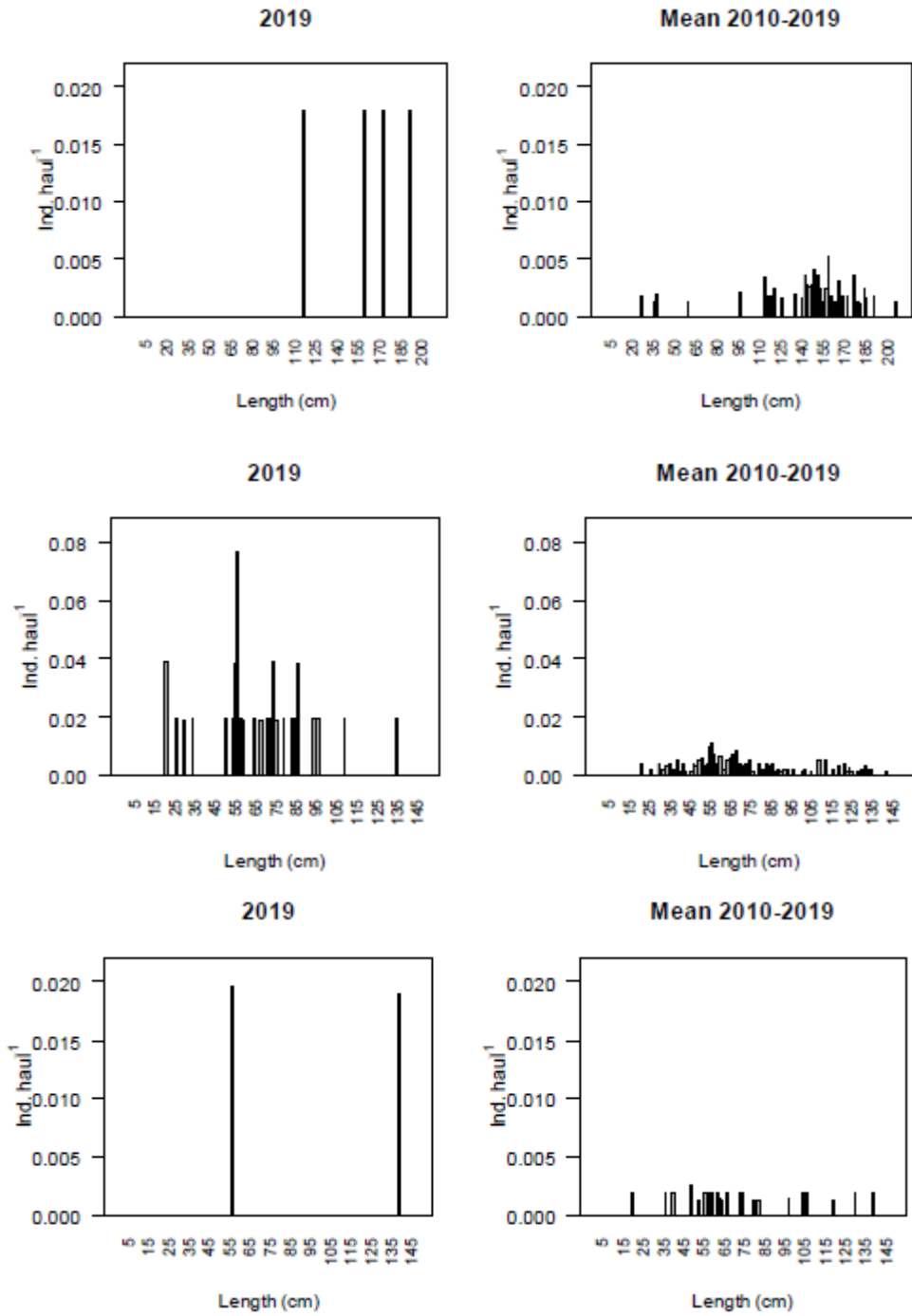


Figure 18.5h. Skates and rays in the Celtic Seas. Mean stratified length distributions of *Dipturus nidarosiensis* (top) and *Dipturus batis* (middle) and *D. intermedius* (bottom) from 2019 Porcupine surveys (WD02 - Ruiz-Pico *et al.*, 2020).

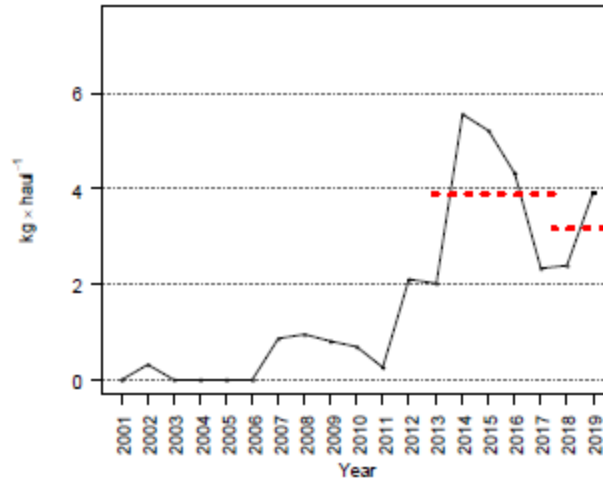


Figure 18.5i. Skates and rays in the Celtic Seas. Changes in *Dipturus* spp. biomass index during Porcupine survey time series (2001–2019). Dotted lines compare mean stratified biomass in the last two years and in the five previous years. (WD02 - Ruiz-Pico *et al.*, 2020).

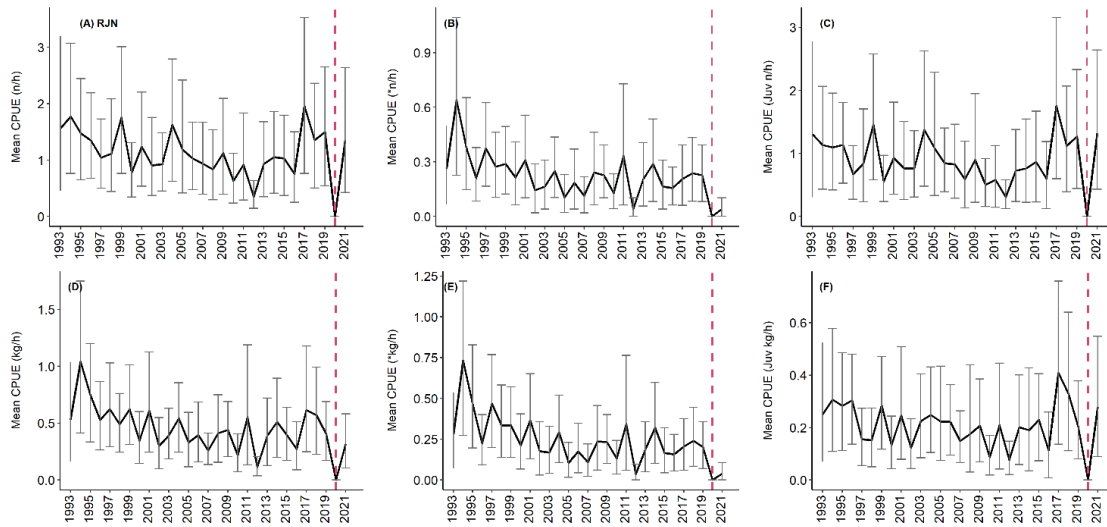
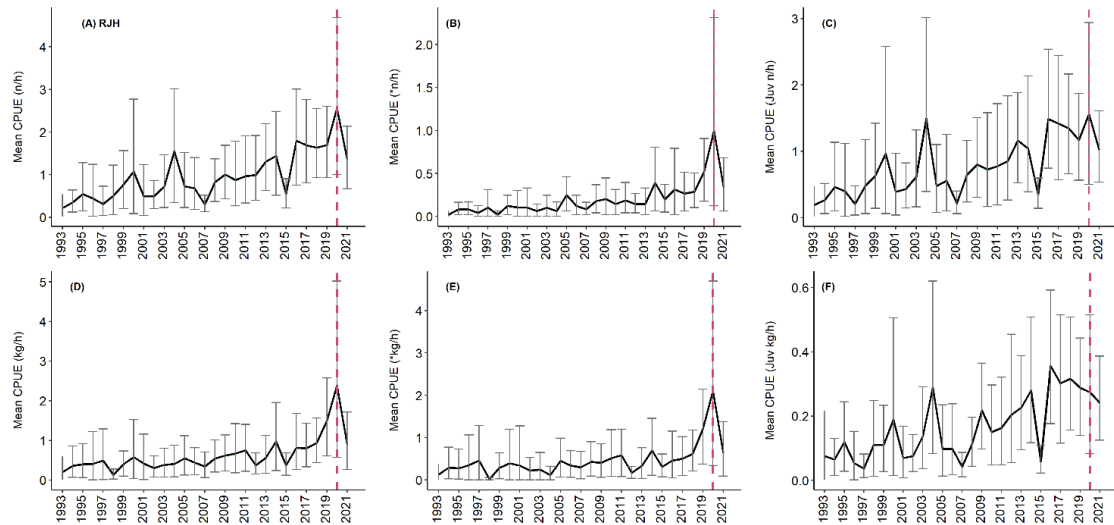
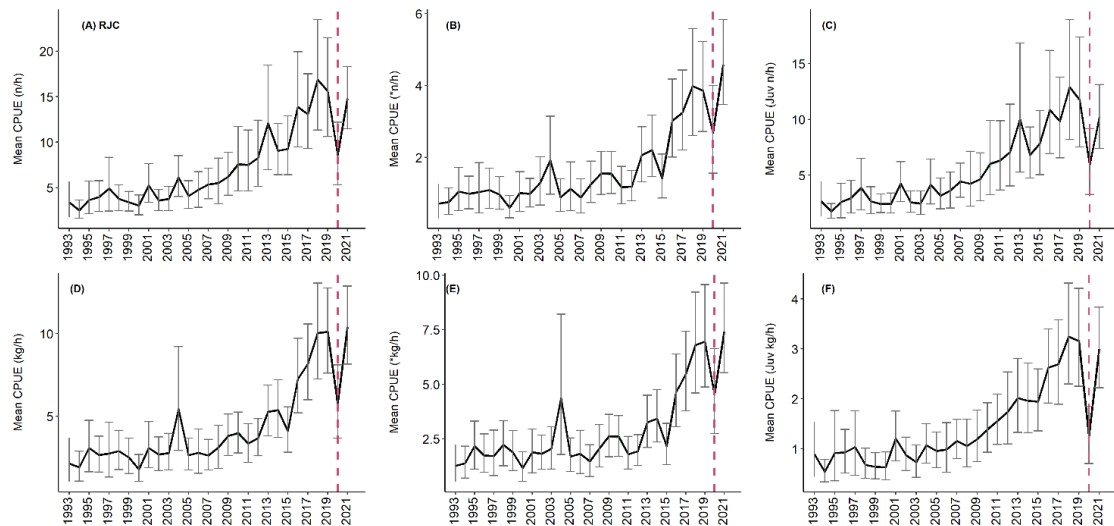


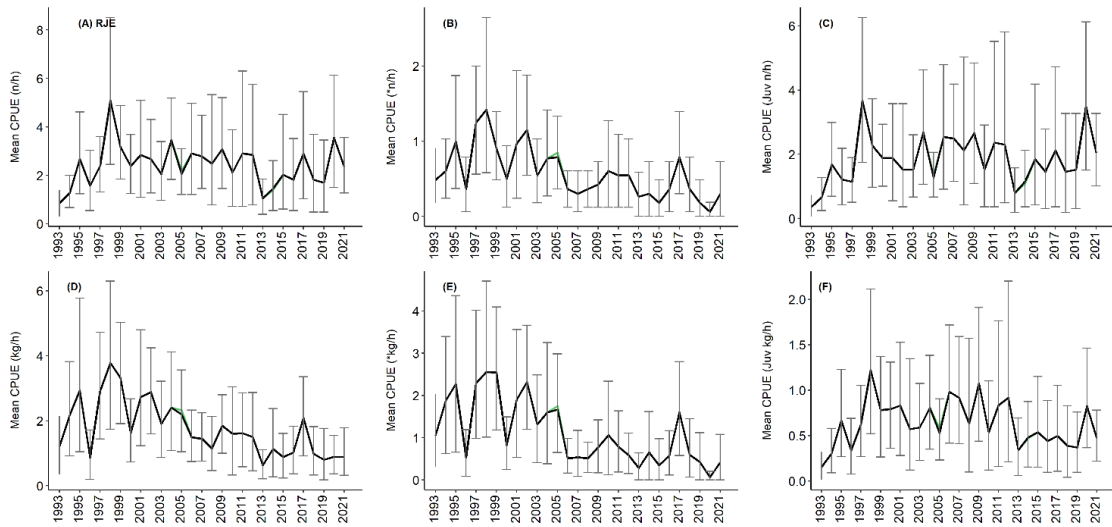
Figure 18.6a. Skates and rays in the Celtic Seas. Temporal trends (1993–2021) in the mean CPUE and associated confidence intervals (95%CI) by (A) individuals ( $n \cdot h^{-1}$ ), (B) individuals  $\geq 50$  cm  $L_T$  ( $*n \cdot h^{-1}$ ), (C) individuals  $< 50$  cm  $L_T$  (Juv  $n \cdot h^{-1}$ ), (D) biomass ( $kg \cdot h^{-1}$ ), (E) biomass  $\geq 50$  cm  $L_T$  ( $*kg \cdot h^{-1}$ ) and (F) biomass  $< 50$  cm  $L_T$  (Juv  $kg \cdot h^{-1}$ ) of cuckoo ray *L. naveus* in the 7.a-f-g beam trawl survey ((EngW-BTS-Q3). Note: Index covers divisions 7.a.f-g. Comparison between index based on DATRAS (black line) and national database (green line, not visible due to data harmony). Dashed line represents year when survey area limited to 7.f-g. Different y-axis (Source: Silva, 2022a).



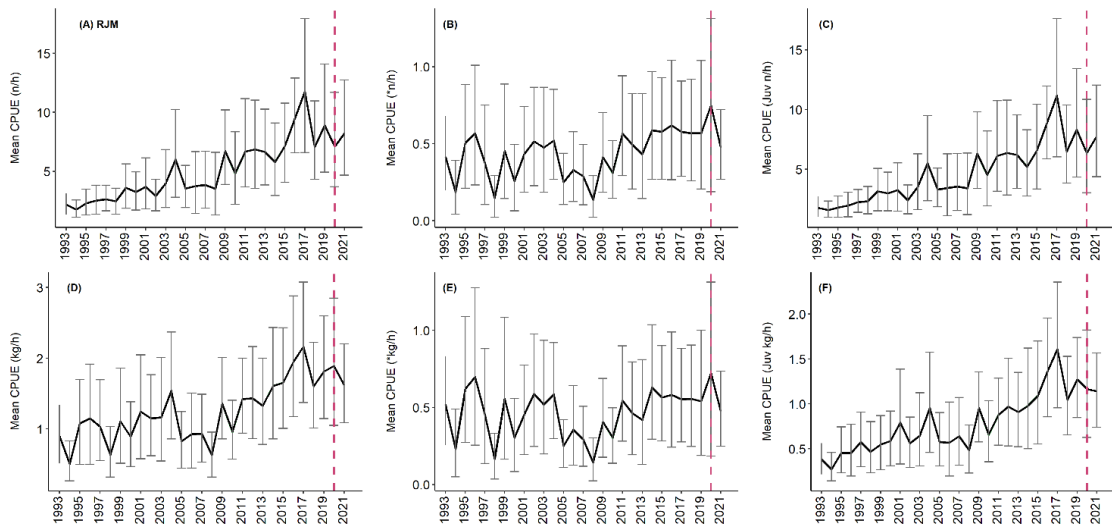
**Figure 18.6b. Skates and rays in the Celtic Seas. Temporal trends (1993–2021) in the mean CPUE and associated confidence intervals (95%CI) by (A) individuals ( $n \cdot h^{-1}$ ), (B) individuals  $\geq 50$  cm  $L_T$  ( $*n \cdot h^{-1}$ ), (C) individuals  $< 50$  cm  $L_T$  (Juv  $n \cdot h^{-1}$ ), (D) biomass ( $kg \cdot h^{-1}$ ), (E) biomass  $\geq 50$  cm  $L_T$  ( $*kg \cdot h^{-1}$ ) and (F) biomass  $< 50$  cm  $L_T$  (Juv  $kg \cdot h^{-1}$ ) of blonde ray *R. brachyura* in the 7.a-f-g beam trawl survey ((EngW-BTS-Q3). Note: Index covers divisions 7.a-f-g. Comparison between index based on DATRAS (black line) and national database (green line, not visible due to data harmony). Dashed line represents year when survey area limited to 7.f-g. Different y-axis (Source: Silva, 2022a).**



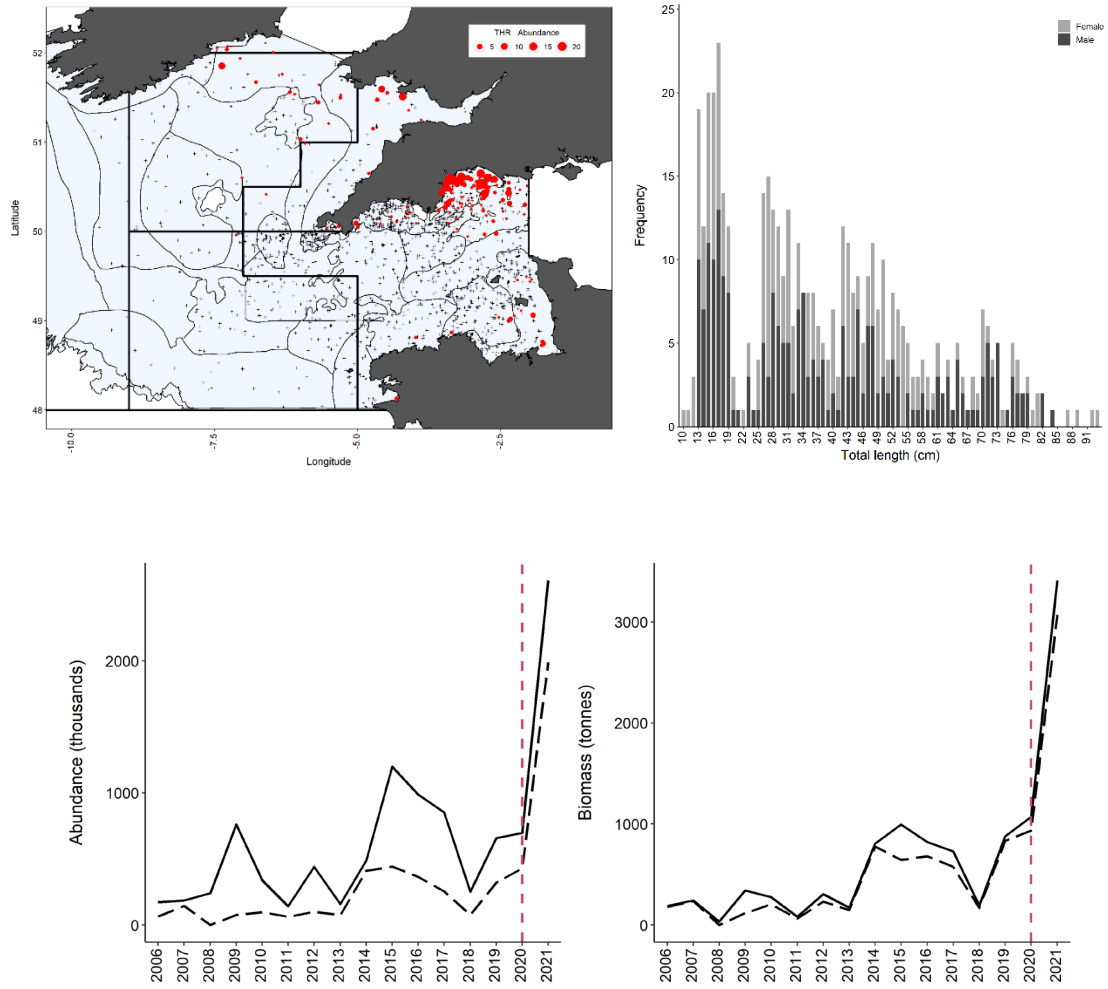
**Figure 18.6c. Skates and rays in the Celtic Seas. Temporal trends (1993–2021) in the mean CPUE and associated confidence intervals (95%CI) by (A) individuals ( $n \cdot h^{-1}$ ), (B) individuals  $\geq 50$  cm  $L_T$  ( $*n \cdot h^{-1}$ ), (C) individuals  $< 50$  cm  $L_T$  (Juv  $n \cdot h^{-1}$ ), (D) biomass ( $kg \cdot h^{-1}$ ), (E) biomass  $\geq 50$  cm  $L_T$  ( $*kg \cdot h^{-1}$ ) and (F) biomass  $< 50$  cm  $L_T$  (Juv  $kg \cdot h^{-1}$ ) of thornback ray *R. clavata* in the 7.a-f-g beam trawl survey ((EngW-BTS-Q3). Note: Index covers divisions 7.a-f-g. Comparison between index based on DATRAS (black line) and national database (green line, not visible due to data harmony). Dashed line represents year when survey area limited to 7.f-g. Different y-axis (Source: Silva, 2022a).**



**Figure 18.6d. Skates and rays in the Celtic Seas. Temporal trends (1993–2021) in the mean CPUE and associated confidence intervals (95%CI) by (A) individuals ( $n \cdot h^{-1}$ ), (B) individuals  $\geq 50$  cm  $L_T$  ( $*n \cdot h^{-1}$ ), (C) individuals  $< 50$  cm  $L_T$  (Juv  $n \cdot h^{-1}$ ), (D) biomass ( $kg \cdot h^{-1}$ ), (E) biomass  $\geq 50$  cm  $L_T$  ( $*kg \cdot h^{-1}$ ) and (F) biomass  $< 50$  cm  $L_T$  (Juv  $kg \cdot h^{-1}$ ) of small-eyed ray *R. microocellata* in the 7.af-g beam trawl survey ((EngW-BTS-Q3). Note: Index covers only divisions 7.f-g. Comparison between index based on DATRAS (black line) and national database (green line, negligible and only visible in 2005). Different y-axis (Source: Silva, 2022a).**



**Figure 18.6e. Skates and rays in the Celtic Seas. Temporal trends (1993–2021) in the mean CPUE and associated confidence intervals (95%CI) by (A) individuals ( $n \cdot h^{-1}$ ), (B) individuals  $\geq 50$  cm  $L_T$  ( $*n \cdot h^{-1}$ ), (C) individuals  $< 50$  cm  $L_T$  (Juv  $n \cdot h^{-1}$ ), (D) biomass ( $kg \cdot h^{-1}$ ), (E) biomass  $\geq 50$  cm  $L_T$  ( $*kg \cdot h^{-1}$ ) and (F) biomass  $< 50$  cm  $L_T$  (Juv  $kg \cdot h^{-1}$ ) of spotted ray *R. montagui* in the 7.af-g beam trawl survey ((EngW-BTS-Q3). Note: Index covers divisions 7.a.f-g. Comparison between index based on DATRAS (black line) and national database (green line, not visible due to data harmony). Dashed line represents year when survey area limited to 7.f-g. Different y-axis (Source: Silva, 2022a).**



**Figure 18.7a. Skates in the Celtic Sea. Distribution and relative abundance (top left) and length-frequency by sex (top right) of thornback ray *Raja clavata* in the Q1SWECOS trawl survey. Preliminary estimates of total abundance (numbers in thousands) and total biomass (tonnes) for *R. clavata*. Note: Different y-axes. Continuous line relates to all specimens, black dashed line relates to individuals  $\geq 50$  cm L<sub>T</sub>. Dashed vertical line represents year when survey was conducted in June instead of Q1 (Source: Silva *et al.*, 2020 and Silva, 2022b).**

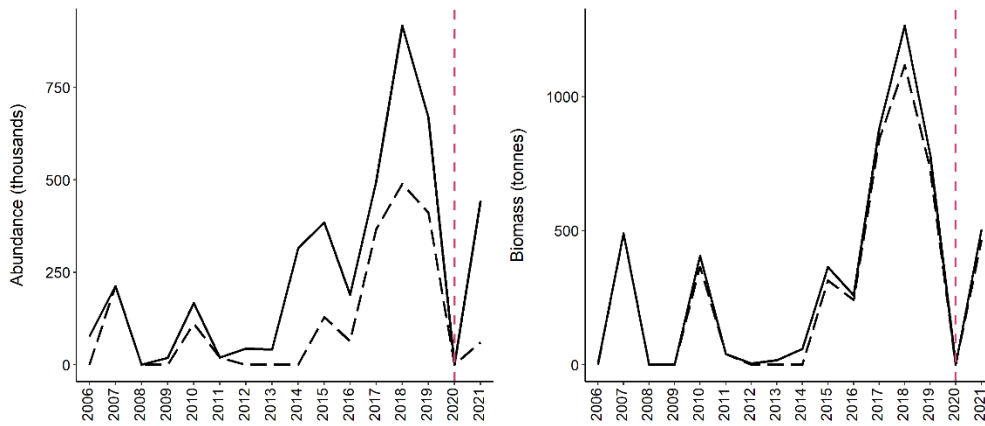
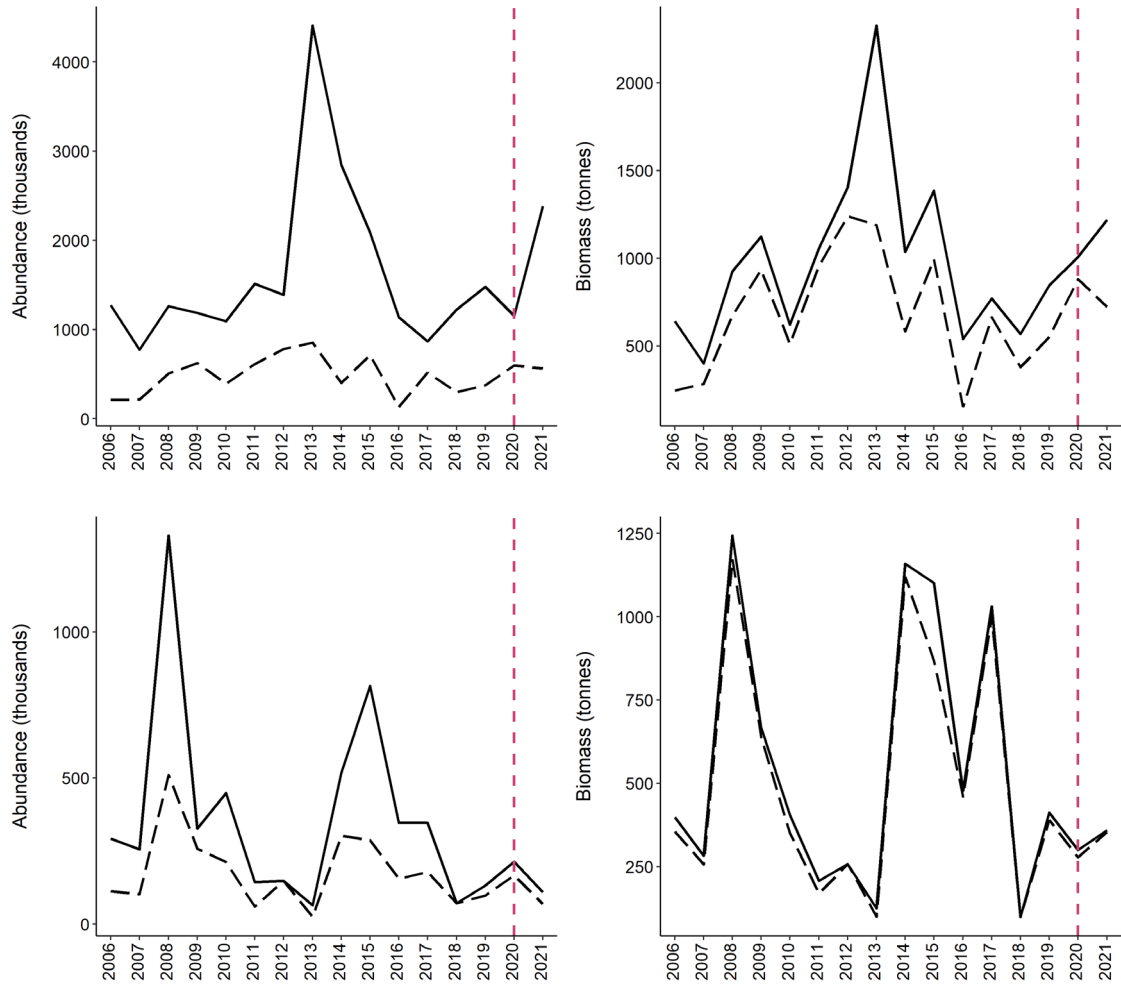
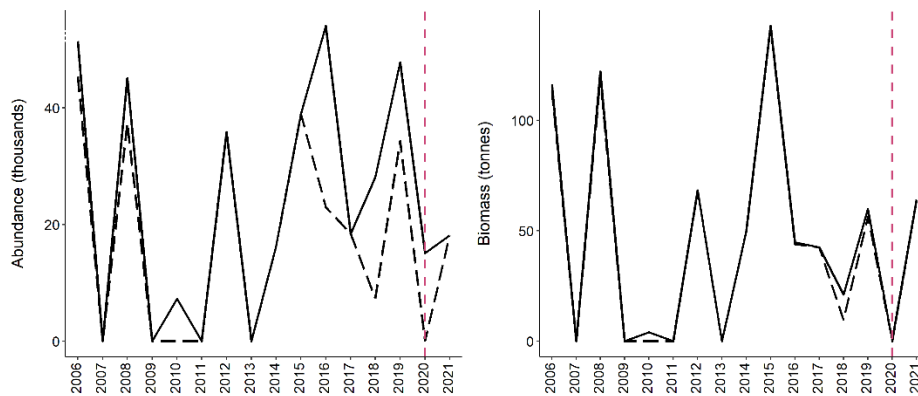


Figure 18.7b. Skates in the Celtic Sea. Demersal elasmobranchs in the Q1SWECOS indicating preliminary estimates of total abundance (numbers in thousands) and total biomass (tonnes) for common skate *Dipturus batis*-complex. Note: Different y-axes. Continuous line relates to all specimens, black dashed line relates to individuals  $\geq 50$  cm L<sub>T</sub>. Dashed vertical line represents year when survey was conducted in June instead of Q1 (Source: Silva, 2022).



**Figure 18.7c. Skates in the Celtic Sea. Demersal elasmobranchs in the Q1SWECOS indicating preliminary estimates of total abundance (numbers in thousands) and total biomass (tonnes) for (top) cuckoo ray *Leucoraja naevus* and (bottom) blonde ray *Raja brachyura*. Note: Different y-axes. Continuous line relates to all specimens, black dashed line relates to individuals  $\geq 50$  cm  $L_T$ . Dashed vertical line represents year when survey was conducted in June instead of Q1 (Source: WD02 - Silva, 2022).**



**Figure 18.7d. Skates in the Celtic Sea. Demersal elasmobranchs in the Q1SWECOS indicating preliminary estimates of total abundance (numbers in thousands) and total biomass (tonnes) for small-eyed ray *Raja microocellata*. Note: Different y-axes. Continuous line relates to all specimens, black dashed line relates to individuals  $\geq 50$  cm  $L_T$ . Dashed vertical line represents year when survey was conducted in June instead of Q1 (Source: WD02 - Silva, 2022).**



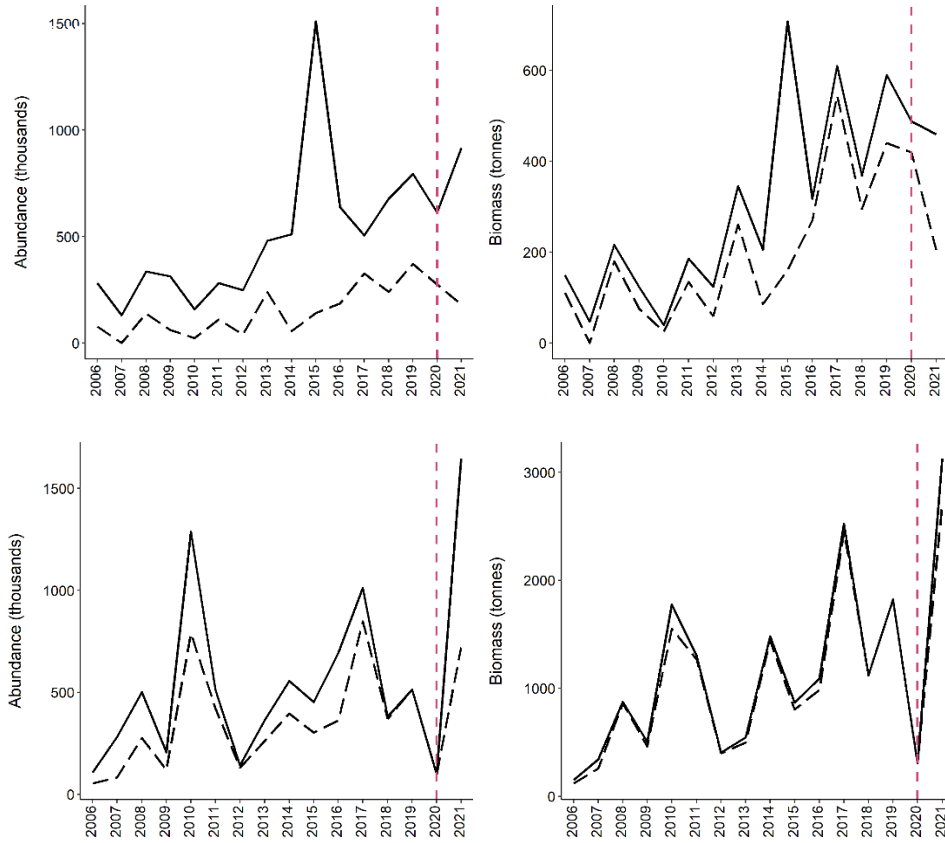


Figure 18.7e. Skates in the Celtic Sea. Demersal elasmobranchs in the Q1SWECOS indicating preliminary estimates of total abundance (numbers in thousands) and total biomass (tonnes) for (top) spotted ray *Raja montagui* and (bottom) undulate ray *Raja undulata*. Note: Data for 2020 for undulate ray showed only for illustrative purposes and should be viewed with caution. Different y-axes. Continuous line relates to all specimens, black dashed line relates to individuals  $\geq 50$  cm L<sub>T</sub>. Dashed vertical line represents year when survey was conducted in June instead of Q1 (Source: WD02 - Silva, 2022).

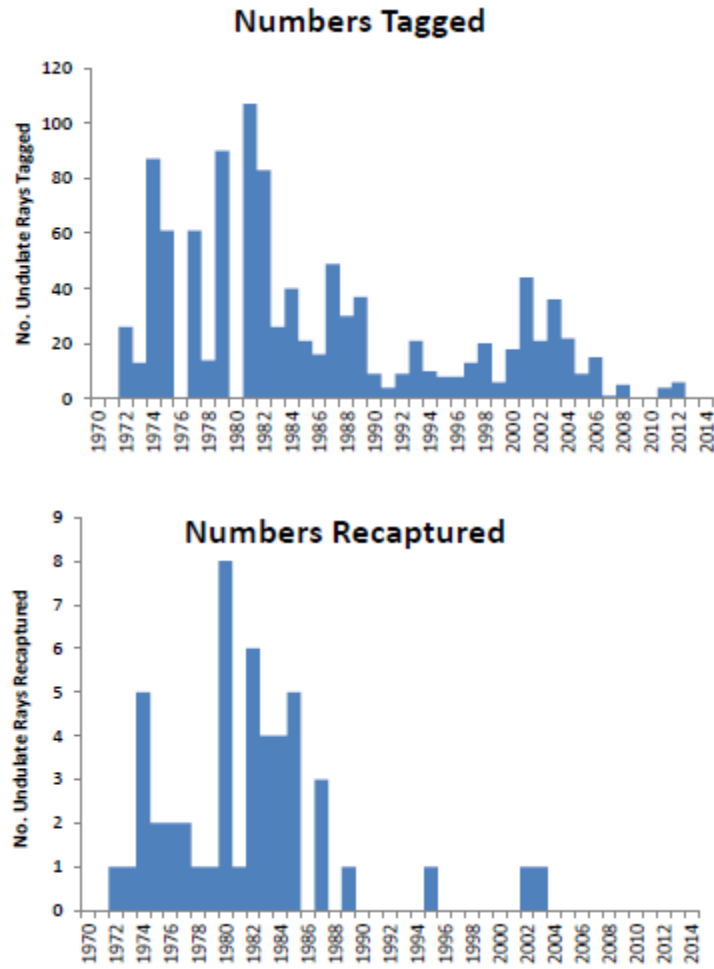


Figure 18.8. Skates in the Celtic Seas. Numbers of *Raja undulata* tagged (top) and recaptured (bottom) in Tralee Bay and surroundings, 1970–2014. Source: Wögerbauer *et al.*, 2014 WD.

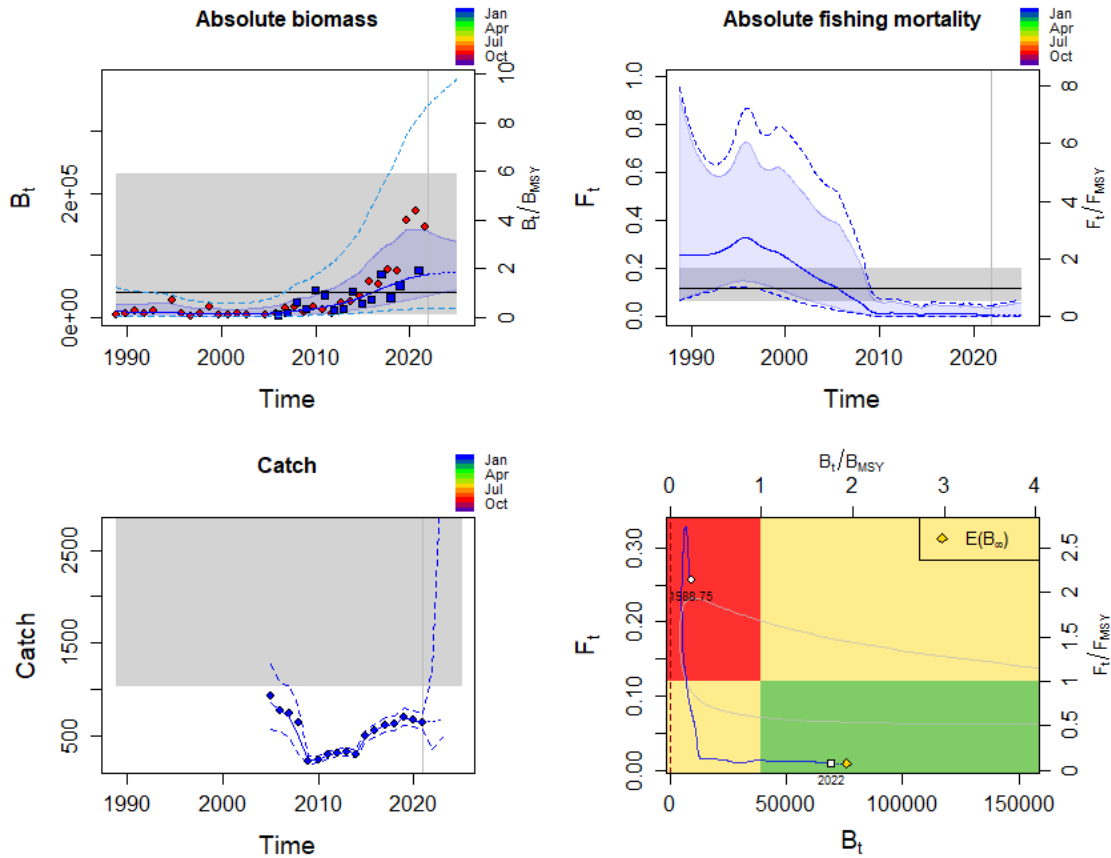


Figure 18.9. Time series of biomass, fishing mortality and catch, as well as Kobe plot estimated from the SPiCT assessment of undulate ray (rju.27.7de). Envelopes represent 95% confidence intervals around estimated values.

## 18.16 Appendix 1 – rfb method calculations by stock

### 18.16.1 Rjc.27.6

Length frequencies from 2019-2021 were examined. As there were limited lengths sampled in 2020 and 2021, the length samples from 2019-2021 were combined into one length frequency.

Survey index

rjc.27.6	kg per hour	CI lower	CI higher	Landings	advised landings
2005	3.743457	-0.14978	7.636691		
2006	5.918033	2.479871	9.356196		
2007	5.566723	1.25586	9.877586		
2008	7.614717	2.756651	12.47278		
2009	7.268841	2.749677	11.78801		

2010	17.95365	3.744648	32.16265		
2011	13.78083	4.955622	22.60604		
2012	22.89845	3.28423	42.51268		
2013	15.6807	3.511421	27.84999		
2014	12.8471	1.374992	24.3192		
2015	14.33994	4.008358	24.67153		
2016	23.36949	3.616883	43.12209		
2017	15.76918	7.09373	24.44464	294	
2018	16.21579	5.760897	26.67069	337	
2019	16.16309	3.661064	28.66511	416	174
2020	3.886069	1.260858	6.511279	315	137
2021	11.84196	2.905287	20.77863	267	137
2	7.864014		2	7.864014	
3	16.04935		5	17.1715	
2/3	0.489989			0.457969	
	67.12855			62.74176	

## Length Frequency (Combined 2019–2022)

19	29300	63	6749.982
20	43949	64	3199.577
21	29301	65	26903.65
22	51278	66	34693.06
23	14733	67	33104.76
24	31418	68	50212.96
25	3240	69	4331.292
26	31040	70	13640.82
27	16818	71	7727.899
28	4394	72	5330.169
29	46859	73	8006.133
30	11173	74	13965.28
31	61588	75	2549.515
32	14936	76	6003.917
33	22332	77	4678.595
34	74498	78	732.6479
35	16842	79	1628.294
36	46797	80	8275.352
37	36470	81	3095.56
38	6227	82	2253.995
39	31159	83	1724.059
40	49457	84	4017.964
41	113728	85	1970.538
42	19242	86	3274.693
43	76258	87	938.6542
44	24117	88	1922.316
45	5958.995	89	1719.303
46	68209	90	2239.355
47	108703	91	775.4059
48	19340.82	92	2495.52
49	6166.208	93	1218.436
50	33277.62	94	516.1464
51	16949.13	95	2581.095
52	62334.22	96	677.1341
53	45159.4	97	2717.034
54	113489.8	98	1405.129
55	28108.21	99	372.0338
56	60224.13	100	0
57	2226.131	101	333.162
58	48439.27	102	1096
59	60586.57	103	
60	13501.38	104	0
61	48002.06	105	115
62	18495.58		

### 18.16.2 Rjc.27.7afg

Length frequencies from 2019-2021 were examined. As there were limited lengths sampled in 2020 and 2021, the length samples from 2019-2021 were combined into one length frequency. The UK (E&W)-BTS-Q3 survey estimate for 2020 was excluded from the analysis, as due to the COVID-19 this survey did not cover the usual area (Silva, 2022a).

	20 biomass	low	high	Landings	advised landings
1993	1.259082	0.523207	2.226098		
1994	1.379068	0.698069	2.157471		
1995	2.170724	1.113965	3.310895		
1996	1.736846	0.962005	2.729211		
1997	1.715405	0.812168	2.901939		
1998	2.229719	1.260557	3.321314		
1999	1.872977	1.049409	2.87207		
2000	1.166849	0.548378	1.906961		1.330208
2001	1.885366	0.948295	2.939187		
2002	1.821736	1.101814	2.669355		
2003	2.049649	1.11311	3.043905		
2004	4.367254	1.784021	8.203029		
2005	1.687769	1.005088	2.543209		
2006	1.811835	0.904253	2.886878		
2007	1.468422	0.775855	2.236111		
2008	2.056207	1.208563	3.16073		
2009	2.616179	1.684092	3.620236		
2010	2.607674	1.684575	3.560831		
2011	1.794635	1.109941	2.614238		
2012	1.929077	1.271588	2.691027		
2013	3.255876	2.100519	4.498588		
2014	3.421425	2.360788	4.748925		
2015	2.175107	1.315911	3.204408		
2016	4.635301	3.045555	6.390153		
2017	5.470325	3.777486	7.431976		

	20 biomass	low	high	Landings	advised landings
2018	6.790722	4.60328	9.218335	878	
2019	6.958808	4.880343	9.56529	840	
2020				960	
2021	7.416985	5.533825	9.634845		
					1596
2	7.416985		2	7.416985	
3	6.406618		5	5.206052	
2/3	1.157707			1.424685	
	158.6058			195.1818	

## Length frequency (2019–2022 combined)

10	3490	65	26695.49
11	15629	66	29070.11
12	14382.3	67	34588.3
13	9783.513	68	34848.67
14	10471	69	30296.31
15	14728.89	70	34732.43
16	7709.241	71	28252.41
17	9423.122	72	29681.08
18	3257.093	73	30377.79
19	3133.882	74	31465.05
20	2511.887	75	30553.62
21	7539.077	76	28087.95
22	6405.662	77	29473.25
23	11998.2	78	11523.82
24	17986.09	79	22412.45
25	17227.02	80	31211.25
26	4614.669	81	18111.55
27	11313.12	82	17210.16
28	1544.972	83	4658.413
29	16184.66	84	21527.29
30	11991.61	85	7454.733
31	11574.68	86	5660.708
32	14699.34	87	3333.864
33	25437.84	88	3909.533
34	24357.74	89	3586.109
35	26341.8	90	2282.122
36	13808.98	91	807.9283
37	14897.79	92	724.4002
38	21737.47	93	763.722
39	13484.61	94	346.4358
40	25575.84	95	838.6487
41	25485.56	96	107.7146
42	26554.33	97	109.283
43	25294.89	98	177.5057
44	29073.32	99	
45	23848.54	100	17.97517
46	20158.35	101	77
47	28067.1	102	73.33269
48	24119.59	103	62.0367
49	42489.18	104	11.29599
50	21032.27		
51	28823.04		
52	22732.03		
53	20683.95		
54	14902.34		
55	18859.03		
56	18888.61		
57	11149.18		
58	22151.42		
59	11724.74		
60	26211.24		
61	31539.84		
62	43634.94		
63	36444.71		
64	25584.74		



modal length in catch L	62.00
Lc ("Length of first capture" = length at 50% of modal abundance)	33.00
Mean length in catch y-1 ( $L_{y-1}$ )	60.05
$L_{\infty}$	118.00

Target reference length (LF=M)	54.25
Fishing proxy (f)	1.11
Biomass safeguard (b)	1.00

A2022      1596  
 r            1.15  
 f            1.11  
 b            1  
 m            0.9

A2023      1833.565

### 18.16.3Rjm.27.7ae-k

Length frequencies from 2019-2021 were examined. As there were limited lengths sampled in 2020 and 2021, the length samples from 2019-2021 were combined into one length frequency. Lengths above 90 cm total length were excluded as considered likely to relate to *R. brachyura*.

The UK (E&W)-BTS-Q3 survey estimate for 2020 was excluded from the analysis, as due to the COVID-19 this survey did not cover the usual area (Silva, 2022a). As data for 2020 data were not used in the assessment the stock biomass trend is based on the index A of one year (2021) over Index B of the three preceding years (2017, 2018 and 2019).

The life-history parameter on  $L_{\infty}$  used and available in FishBase of 78.4 cm (Gallagher *et al.*, 2005) is lower than the maximum length considered on the length data used in the assessment. However, the quality of data may have been hampered by confounding issues of *R. montagui* with *R. brachyura* within the dataset, and reallocation of these may be difficult to ascertain.

From fishbase	k=0.3	Linf=78.4			
rjm.27.7ae-k	Survey index				
Year	kg per hour	conf. upper	conf. lower	Landings	Landings advice
1993	0.520218	0.833299	0.256498		
1994	0.230353	0.489615	0.050651		
1995	0.620751	1.090486	0.27243		
1996	0.697684	1.274918	0.255047		
1997	0.456072	0.881297	0.135929		
1998	0.166452	0.331423	0.034785		
1999	0.555816	1.083023	0.164258		
2000	0.304455	0.558103	0.084054		
2001	0.453343	0.774532	0.195512		
2002	0.588692	0.975249	0.247739		
2003	0.518746	0.935565	0.197653		
2004	0.584669	0.921326	0.297399		
2005	0.249555	0.420365	0.110807		
2006	0.358055	0.641858	0.124639		
2007	0.293934	0.506956	0.118301		
2008	0.143003	0.302032	0.023276		Lowest value
2009	0.405701	0.688557	0.177109	887	
2010	0.305287	0.497979	0.138179	1110	

<b>From fishbase</b>	<b>k=0.3</b>	<b>Linf=78.4</b>			
<b>rjm.27.7ae-k</b>	<b>Survey index</b>				
2011	0.54408	0.899833	0.28103	1332	
2012	0.463807	0.795408	0.19322	1343	
2013	0.419967	0.810387	0.129293	1032	
2014	0.629325	1.035834	0.293421	1042	
2015	0.564608	0.90081	0.283519	864	
2016	0.582809	0.989462	0.241381	947	
2017	0.552998	0.883882	0.276405	762	
2018	0.555856	0.904436	0.247025	1001	1296
2019	0.539682	0.999911	0.188507	1011	1296
2020				741.483	1041
2021	0.475057	0.735405	0.248601	820.766	1041

## Length Frequency (Combined 2019–2021) Lengths &gt;90cm removed

6	2049.954	46	96485.92	86	466.4508
7		47	92841.62	87	21.05693
8	2049.954	48	35413.7	88	126.6555
9		49	54695.45	89	492.9206
10		50	66243.79	90	256.7371
11	3444.037	51	211550.8		
12	5047.312	52	118490.8		
13	2049.954	53	82994.88		
14	3841.274	54	86700.87		
15	4730.202	55	98108.78		
16	2150.573	56	91893.27		
17	5093.256	57	114106.1		
18	7199.036	58	95737.94		
19	4709.554	59	56052.51		
20	7494.279	60	61581.35		
21	7912.086	61	37374.97		
22	16434.71	62	63656.36		
23	20958.43	63	39737.81		
24	11302.24	64	44332.83		
25	40332.93	65	31578.49		
26	30199.64	66	25249.96		
27	35323.38	67	29872.08		
28	70482.6	68	18538.04		
29	56645.85	69	20997.88		
30	83684.48	70	8818.08		
31	97847.73	71	11969.73		
32	35637.8	72	22394.79		
33	61015.91	73	3746.63		
34	31807.52	74	3211.664		
35	96273.25	75	1620.305		
36	58520.07	76	3280.058		
37	26297.11	77	2087.485		
38	87212.47	78	1367.08		
39	114713.9	79	2204.513		
40	90716.45	80	302.885		
41	115933.2	81	519.946		
42	106961.5	82	508.9988		
43	139963.4	83	1016.181		
44	127745.3	84	218.5471		
45	164171.8	85	404.5641		

modal length in catch L (ICES, 2018b).	51.00
Lc ("Length of first capture" = length at 50% of modal abundance)	39.00
Mean length in catch y-1 ( $L_{y-1}$ )	51.83
$L_{\infty}$	78.40
Target reference length (LF=M)	48.85
Fishing proxy F	1.09

A_2022	1041
r	0.86
f	1.06
b	1
m	0.90
A_2023	860

**18.16.4Rjm.27.67bj**

Length frequencies from 2019-2021 were examined. As there were limited lengths sampled in 2020 and 2021, the length samples from 2019-2021 were combined into one length frequency

## Survey index

Series	Lower limit	higher limit	Landings	Landings advice
3.820364	0.876142	6.764587		
3.531714	1.758609	5.30482		
3.196319	0.291253	6.101384		
2.407975	1.153045	3.662905		
5.01776	2.14584	7.889679		
4.548864	2.588672	6.509055		
6.419649	3.468341	9.370957		
4.072012	2.323	5.821023		
7.123465	3.618573	10.62836		
9.474577	3.900799	15.04836		
5.944108	2.918739	8.969477		
15.32489	-3.16907	33.81885		
8.93665	3.949908	13.92339		
7.010963	4.151409	9.870516	96	
6.600154	2.634099	10.56621	104	80
4.80208	2.406143	7.198017	79	80
4.054243	2.254747	5.853739		51
				51
4.428162		2	4.428162	
7.515922		5	8.763352	
0.589171		2/5	0.505305	

## Length Frequency (Combined 2019–2021) Lengths &gt;90cm removed

10	0	50	498.1303	90	0
11	3365	51	117146.1		
12		52	53536.61		
13		53	4058.912		
14		54	818.8523		
15		55	4600.443		
16	331.845	56	21004.5		
17	627.868	57	6120.353		
18	1295.741	58	6614.26		
19	1644.613	59	3577.008		
20	5343.78	60	3257.858		
21	746.652	61	4901.409		
22	248.884	62	4493.636		
23	248.884	63	1924.427		
24	995.536	64	3625.559		
25	922.612	65	2502.196		
26	1836.368	66	3822.853		
27	4390.202	67	1159.596		
28	10403.35	68	987.4568		
29	3243.686	69	853.835		
30	19960.51	70	479.8773		
31	23886.86	71	899.3972		
32	5839.067	72	82		
33	9933.61	73	690.578		
34	12498.93	74	4		
35	60660.59	75	346		
36	13453.1	76	0		
37	3617.524	77	0		
38	20897.79	78	283.814		
39	31756.64	79	632.443		
40	28444.2	80	8		
41	40318.49	81	210.814		
42	35441.81	82	277.9402		
43	92887.24	83	488.367		
44	60433.6	84	0		
45	73591.62	85	4.387215		
46	53050.13	86	0		
47	35902.39	87	0		
48	6704.029	88	0		
49	17409.02	89	0		

modal length in catch L	62.00
Lc ("Length of first capture" = length at 50% of modal abundance)	45.00
Mean length in catch y-1 ( $L_{y-1}$ )	56.75
$L_{\infty}$	78.40

Target reference length (LF=M)	53.35
Fishing proxy (f)	1.06

modal length in catch L	41.00
Lc ("Length of first capture" = length at 50% of modal abundance)	31.00
Mean length in catch y-1 ( $L_{y-1}$ )	51.05
$L_{\infty}$	118.00

Target reference length (LF=M)	52.75
Fishing proxy (f)	0.97
Biomass safeguard (b)	1.00

A\_2022      137  
r              0.49  
f              0.97  
b              1  
m              0.9

A\_2023      58.60449



### 18.16.5 rje.27.7fg rfb rules

The fishery-independent survey UK(E&W)-BTS-Q3 [B6596] is used in the assessment of small-eyed ray *Raja microocellata* in divisions 7.f-g (rje.27.7fg), with input data applicable to the exploitable biomass (individuals  $\geq 50$  cm total length,  $L_T$ ; Table 18.15a and Figure 18.4.e, Silva, 2022a).

**Table 18.15a. Small-eyed ray in divisions 7.f and 7.g. Time-series of survey index used for the advice. Series are the mean biomass per hour (for specimens  $\geq 50$  cm total length) from the UK (E&W)-BTS-Q3 [B6596]. Note: ICES rounding rules applied.**

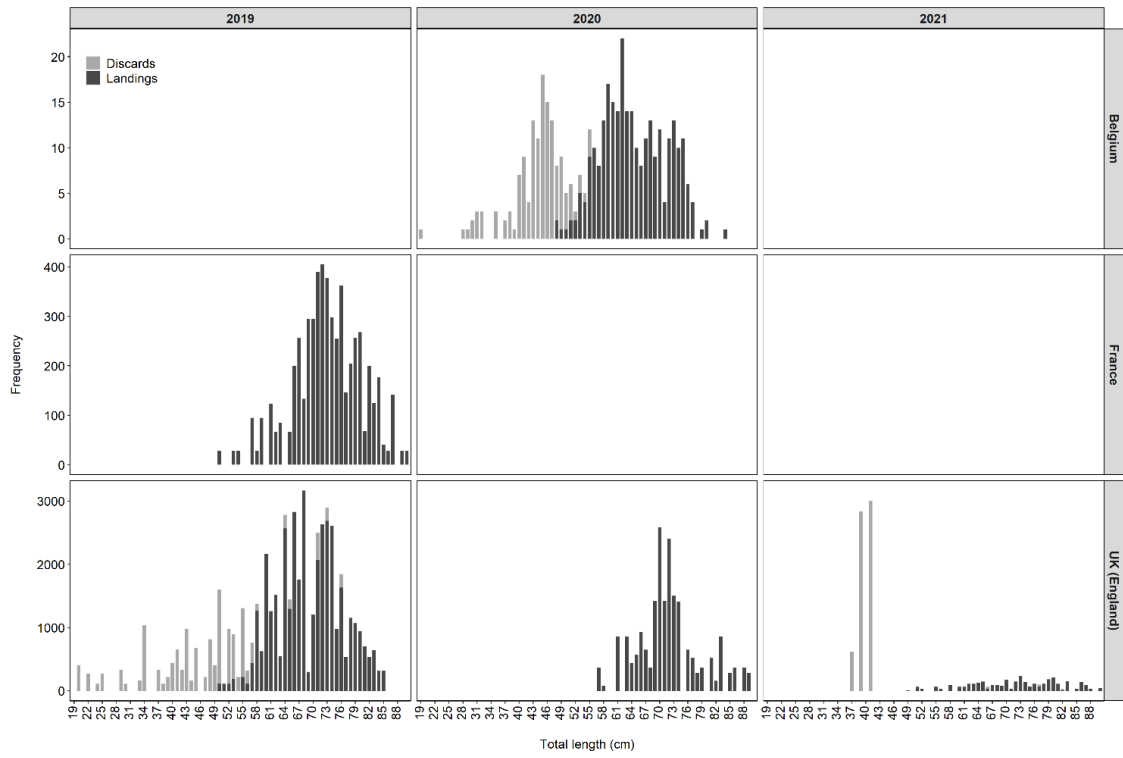
Year	Biomass index (kg.hr <sup>-1</sup> )	High 95% CI	Low 95% CI
1993	1.05	2.0	0.31
1994	1.88	3.4	0.63
1995	2.3	4.4	0.66
1996	0.53	1.19	0.084
1997	2.3	4.0	0.98
1998	2.6	4.7	1.01
1999	2.5	4.1	1.18
2000	0.82	1.49	0.25
2001	1.90	3.6	0.53
2002	2.3	3.7	1.20
2003	1.32	2.5	0.41
2004	1.60	3.2	0.38
2005	1.67	3.0	0.65
2006	0.51	0.98	0.165
2007	0.54	1.17	0.084
2008	0.51	0.89	0.174
2009	0.77	1.42	0.170
2010	1.06	2.3	0.124
2011	0.79	1.64	0.187
2012	0.58	1.11	0.154
2013	0.28	0.64	0.00
2014	0.66	1.62	0.00
2015	0.35	0.98	0.00
2016	0.58	1.17	0.113
2017	1.60	2.8	0.58
2018	0.60	1.44	0.066
2019	0.43	1.12	0.00
2020	0.068	0.20	0.00
2021	0.42	1.08	0.00

The quality of commercial data may be hampered due to confusion over the local name “sandy ray”, with landings and discards from sandy ray *Leucoraja circularis* in divisions 7.a, 7.f, and 7.g

considered to refer to small-eyed ray *Raja microocellata* for most countries. The extent of these confounding issues between the two species has not been considered (or quantified) in relation to the length data used to apply WKLIFE methods, due to the lack of information on the fishing area associated with most records.

Length data from 2019 to 2021 were available for UK (E&W), Belgium and France, and thus considered for the initial ICES Category 3 rfb exploratory analysis including years when only landings and/or discards were available for a given country. Although the units of the Belgian length data available on the Accessions database (AC) for 2020 relate only to the raw numbers measured, contrary to the raised numbers provided by the UK (E&W) and France, these were still included as Belgium is one of the main countries contributing to the landings of this species in these divisions. In 2021, there were no raised Belgian and French length data available for rje.27.7fg through Intercatch. It should be noted that the decrease in Belgian landings in 2021, is due to the introduction from the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2021 of a Producer Organisation (PO) measure to exclude landings of this species. Data from UK (E&W) were available from 2016 to 2021 via Accessions, though only the more recent data were considered in the assessment.

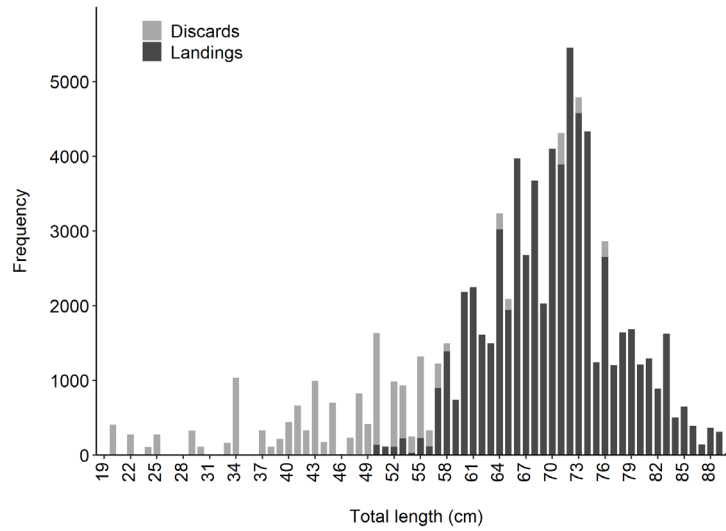
Data were presented at the meeting, and the EG considered that the high levels of discards in 2021 for specific length classes (ca. 39 and 41 cm total length,  $L_T$ ) would not be realistic and thus, would skew the perception of the length frequency (Figure 18.15a). Hence, length data used for the assessment only included 2019–2020 as considered the more reliable available data (Table 18.15b and Figure 18.15b).



**Figure 18.15a. Small-eyed ray in divisions 7.f and 7.g. Length data of commercial landings and discards from 2019–2021 available to WGEF 2022.**

**Table 18.15b. – Small-eyed ray in divisions 7.f and 7.g. Length data of commercial landings and discards from 2019–2020 used in the assessment of rje.27.7fg. Note: Numbers rounded to two decimal places.**

Length (cm)	Number	Length (cm)	Number	Length (cm)	Number
19	1.00	47	230.83	70	4096.45
20	408.44	48	824.88	71	4312.40
22	272.29	49	417.44	72	5451.03
24	108.92	50	1634.43	73	4790.49
25	272.29	51	114.92	74	4329.75
28	1.00	52	983.25	75	1241.38
29	327.75	53	931.57	76	2862.31
30	110.92	54	251.16	77	1202.72
31	3.00	55	1319.00	78	1641.86
32	3.00	56	331.33	79	1687.53
33	163.38	57	1228.04	80	1209.42
34	1034.71	58	1497.13	81	1290.84
35	3.00	59	735.92	82	889.26
37	328.75	60	2183.29	83	1623.47
38	111.92	61	2250.79	84	498.82
39	218.83	62	1608.06	85	646.04
40	442.67	63	1497.85	86	390.98
41	662.50	64	3234.77	87	141.62
42	330.75	65	2090.36	88	362.65
43	993.25	66	3969.64	89	313.09
44	174.38	67	2674.55	90	28.32
45	698.73	68	3675.73		
46	15.00	69	2026.53		



**Figure 18.15b. – Small-eyed ray in divisions 7.f and 7.g. Length data of commercial landings and discards from 2019–2020 used in the assessment of rje.27.7fg.**

Following the rfb rules, the advice is based on the recent advised landings, multiplied by the ratio of the mean of the last two index values (index A) and the mean of the three preceding values (index B), a ratio of observed mean length in the catch relative to the target mean length, a biomass safeguard, and a precautionary multiplier. The decrease in advice is driven by the low exploitable biomass in the more recent years of the UK (E&W)-BTS-Q3 survey. Therefore, the stability clause was considered and applied to limit the reduction in landings advice to -30%. Details on the data input used in the assessment are described in Table 18.15c.

**Table 18.15c. Small-eyed ray in divisions 7.f and 7.g. Components of the rfb rule.**

Components	Estimate	Input data	Comment
r: Stock biomass trend	0.28	Index A/Index B  Index A = 0.24 kg.hr <sup>-1</sup> Index B = 0.87 kg.hr <sup>-1</sup>	The stock trend shows a decline comparatively to the earlier years within the time-series and, currently at low levels.
b: Biomass safe-guard min { $I_{2021}/I_{trigger}$ , 1}	1	$I_{loss} = 0.068 \text{ kg.hr}^{-1}$ $I_{trigger} = 0.095 \text{ kg.hr}^{-1}$ $I_{2021} = 0.42 \text{ kg.hr}^{-1}$	$I_{loss}$ - minimum estimate in 2020 $I_{trigger} = I_{loss} \times \omega$ , considering $\omega=1.4$ $I_{2021}/I_{trigger} = 4.4$
m linked to von Bertalanffy k	0.95	$k < 0.20$	Estimates of $k = 0.086$ (Ryland and Ajayi, 1984). However, the only age and growth study may have confounded 0 and 1 group (Brander and Palmer, 1985).
f: Fishing proxy $L_{mean}/L_{F=M}$	1.02	Length data used from 2019–2020 $L_c = 64 \text{ cm } L_T$ $L_{mean} = 72.989 \text{ cm } L_T$ $L_{inf} = 93.7 \text{ cm } L_T$ $L_{F=M} = 71.425 \text{ cm } L_T$	Length data for 2021 excluded from assessment. $N_{max} = 5451.03$ (at 72 cm $L_T$ ) $L_{mean}$ – considered only length classes > 64 cm $L_T$ ( $L_c$ ) $L_{F=M} = 0.75 L_c + 0.25 L_{inf}$ Available $L_{inf}$ from the literature of 137 cm $L_T$ is not biologically plausible given the maximum observed length of 91 cm $L_T$ (Ryland and Ajayi, 1984). The only published study on age and growth study may have confounded 0 and 1 group (Brander and Palmer, 1985). FishBase provided also another $L_{inf}$ of 89.7 cm $L_T$ based on $L_{max}$ of 87 cm $L_T$ from Dorel (1986). However, given the observed length observed on commercial length data up to 90 cm $L_T$ to be used in the rfb, this $L_{inf}$ estimate was considered an underestimate. Thus, $L_{inf}$ was recalculated using <a href="#">FishBase – popdyn</a> and $L_{max}$ of 91 cm $L_T$ , resulting on $L_{inf}$ of 93.7 cm $L_T$ .
$A_{y+1} = A_y \times r \times f \times b \times m$	33 tonnes	$A_y \times r \times f \times b \times m$ $A_y = 123 \text{ tonnes}$	More than 30% decrease relative to previous landings advice of 123 tonnes for 2021 and 2022. Therefore, stability clause was applied to limit decrease, see below.
Stability clause	86 tonnes	$\min\{\max(0.7A_y, A_{y+1}), 1.2 A_y\}$	Final landings advice for 2023/24.

## 19 Skates in the Bay of Biscay and Iberian Waters (ICES Subarea 8 and Division 9.a)

ICES uses the generic term “skate” to refer to all members of the order Rajiformes. The generic term “ray”, formerly used by ICES also to refer to Rajiformes, is now only used to refer to other batoid fish, including manta rays and sting rays (Myliobatiformes), and electric rays (Torpediniformes). ICES only provides routine advice for Rajiformes.

### 19.1 Ecoregion and stock boundaries

The Bay of Biscay and Iberian Waters ecoregion covers the Bay of Biscay (divisions 8.a-b and 8.d), including the Cantabrian Sea (Division 8.c), and the Spanish and Portuguese Atlantic coast (Division 9.a). This ecoregion broadly equates with the area covered by the South Western Waters Advisory Council (SWWAC). Commercially-exploited skates do not occur in the offshore Division 8.e to any significant extent.

The northern part of the Bay of Biscay has a wide continental shelf with flat and soft bottom more suitable for trawlers, whilst the Cantabrian Sea has a narrower continental shelf with some remarkable bathymetric features (canyons, marginal shelves, etc.). The Portuguese continental shelf (Division 9.a) is narrow, except for the area located between the Minho River and the Nazaré Canyon, and in the Gulf of Cadíz, where it is about 50 km wide, particularly to the east. The slope is mainly steep with a rough bottom including canyons and cliffs.

Rajidae are widespread throughout this ecoregion but there are regional differences in their distribution as described in earlier reports (ICES, 2010), and this is particularly evident for those species with patchier distributions and limited dispersal (Carrier *et al.*, 2004).

Recent studies have provided information on ecologically important habitats for *R. clavata*, *R. brachyura*, *R. montagui*, *R. microocellata*, *R. undulata* and *L. naevus* in Portuguese continental waters (Serra-Pereira *et al.*, 2014). Sites with similar geomorphology were associated with the occurrence of juveniles and/or adults of the same group of species. For example, adult *R. clavata* occurred mainly in sites deeper than 100 m with soft sediment. Those were also considered to be habitat for egg-laying of this species. *Raja undulata* and *R. microocellata* occurred preferentially on sand or gravel habitats. Potential nursery areas for *R. brachyura*, *R. montagui* and *R. clavata* were found in coastal areas with rock and sand substrates. Further details are given in the Stock Annexes.

Information from trawl surveys on catches of (viable) skate egg-cases is considered valuable to further identify ecologically important habitats. Further information could be collected in trawl surveys. Skates in this ecoregion include thornback ray *Raja clavata*, cuckoo ray *Leucoraja naevus*, the less frequent blonde ray *Raja brachyura*, small-eyed ray *R. microocellata*, brown ray *R. miraletus*, spotted ray *R. montagui*, undulate ray *R. undulata*, shagreen ray *Leucoraja fullonica*, common skate *Dipturus batis*-complex, (recently split into *D. batis* and *D. intermedius*), long-nosed skate *D. oxyrinchus*, sandy ray *Leucoraja circularis* and white skate *Rostroraja alba*.

Studies undertaken in the Portuguese Atlantic coast (Division 9.a; Serra-Pereira *et al.*, 2014), and in the Cantabrian Sea (eastern parts of Division 8.c) indicate spatial overlap between *R. clavata* and *L. naevus* (e.g. Sánchez, 1993). In the Bay of Biscay, *L. naevus* is more abundant on the offshore trawling grounds (Sánchez *et al.*, 2002). Along the Portuguese coast *R. clavata* and *L. naevus* co-occur in areas deeper than 100 m, on grounds composed of soft bottom, from mud to fine sand (Serra-Pereira *et al.*, 2014). *Raja clavata* can also be found from rocky to coarse sandy bottoms.

*Raja brachyura* occurs primarily near the coast in shallower depths in areas of rocks surrounded by sand. Juvenile *R. brachyura*, *R. montagui* and *R. clavata* co-occur on grounds shallower than 100 m. In the Bay of Biscay and the Iberian Coast, *R. undulata* and *R. microocellata* occur at depths < 40 m over sandy bottoms. *R. undulata* is locally abundant in the shallow waters between the Loire and Gironde estuaries (eastern Bay of Biscay; divisions 8.a-b) and occurs along most of the French coast.

The geographical distributions of the main skate species in the ecoregion are known, but their stock structure still needs to be more accurately defined. Studies (e.g. tagging and/or genetic studies) to better understand stock structure are required.

A tagging survey of *R. undulata* carried out in the Bay of Biscay (2012–2013) showed that movements of this species were limited to ca. 30 km (Delamare *et al.*, 2013 WD; Biais *et al.*, 2014 WD). This result supports the hypothesis that several local stocks exist in European waters and corroborates the assumption of three distinct assessment units (divisions 8.a–b; 8.c and 9.a) in this ecoregion.

In 2022 the stock of thornback ray in the Bay of Biscay (rjc.27.8) was split between the eastern shelf (divisions 8.abd) and the Cantabrian Sea (Division 8.c) following the benchmark for the stock where the population connectivity was addressed (ICES, 2022b). A third stock unit of thornback ray was already considered separately in Division 9.a. Since 2015, cuckoo ray from ICES subareas 6 and 7 in the Celtic seas ecoregion and the Bay of Biscay is considered to form one single stock, cuckoo ray in subareas 6 and 7 and divisions 8.a-b,d. There are two other stocks of cuckoo ray in this ecoregion: in Division 8.c (Cantabrian Sea) and Division 9.a (Iberian waters). For the spotted ray two stock units are considered: Subarea 8 and Division 9.a. Lastly, for blonde ray the stock unit considered covers only Division 9.a. Landings of skates outside of the boundaries of ICES stock units are considered together with landings not reported species-by-species in a multispecies unit referred to as "Other skates and rays in Subarea 8 and Division 9.a" this unit is not subject to assessment and advice for it was not requested in 2022.

## 19.2 The fishery

### 19.2.1 History of the fishery

In the Bay of Biscay and Iberian waters, skates are caught mainly as a bycatch in mixed demersal fisheries, which target various species: primarily hake, nephrops, anglerfish and megrim. The main fishing gears used are otter trawl, bottom-set gillnets and trammel nets. The countries involved in these fisheries are France, Spain and Portugal, as detailed below.

#### France

Skates are traditional food resources in France, where target fisheries were known to occur during the 1800s. In the 1960s, skates were taken primarily as a bycatch of bottom trawl fisheries operating in the northern parts of the Bay of Biscay, the southern Celtic Sea and English Channel. By this time, *R. clavata* was targeted seasonally by some fisheries, and was the dominant skate species landed. After the 1980s, *L. naevus* became the main species landed. However, landings of both *R. clavata* and *L. naevus* declined after 1986.

Other skates are also landed, including *L. circularis*, *L. fullonica*, *R. microocellata*, *D. batis* complex (mostly common blue skate), which is included in the prohibited species list by the EU regulation since 2010, and *D. oxyrinchus*. There have been no major annual landings of *Rostroraja alba* by French fleets in the past three decades.



The historical French catches of skates in coastal fisheries are poorly known. Most landings of skates and rays were not reported by species before 2009 where species-specific reporting of landings was required by the EU regulation. For *Raja undulata*, this implies that no species-specific landings were reported before its inclusion on the EU prohibited species list and past levels of catch are unknown.

### Spain

Spanish demersal fisheries operating in Galicia and the Cantabrian Sea (Division 9a N and 8.c) and Bay of Biscay (divisions 8.a-b and 8.d) catch various skate species using different fishing gears. Most landings are a bycatch from trawl fisheries targeting demersal teleosts, (e.g. hake, anglerfish and megrim). Among the skate species landed, *R. clavata* and *L. naevus* are the most frequent. Historically, due to their low commercial value, most skate species, especially those derived from artisanal gillnetters, were reported as Rajidae. There are artisanal gillnet fisheries operating in bays, rias and shallow waters along the Cantabrian Sea and Galician coasts (divisions 8.c and 9.a). *R. undulata* is caught mainly in the coastal waters of Galicia (northern part of Division 9.a and western part of Division 8.c) where it was frequently landed and one of the most abundant species inside the rias. Other skate species caught in Galician waters include *R. brachyura*, *R. microocellata*, *R. montagui*, *R. clavata* and *L. naevus*. The characteristics of Spanish artisanal fleets catching skates are not fully known.

### Mainland Portugal

Off mainland Portugal (Division 9.a), skates are caught mainly by the artisanal polyvalent fleet with a smaller contribution of trawlers to landings. The artisanal fleet operates mostly with trammel nets, but other fishing gears (e.g. longlines and gillnets) are also used. The skate species composition of landings varies along the Portuguese coast. *Raja clavata* is the main species landed, but *R. brachyura*, *L. naevus* and *R. montagui* are also caught. Before being prohibited, *R. undulata* was frequently landed. Other species, such as *R. microocellata*, *D. oxyrinchus*, *R. miraletus*, *R. alba* and *L. circularis*, are also caught, albeit less frequently (particularly the latter three species). Further details on fisheries in Division 9.a are given in Stock Annexes.

## 19.2.2 The fishery in 2021-2022

COVID-19 is expected to have affected fishing activity in 2020, although so far unquantified, with national or local restrictions on fishing activity as well as disruption of markets and the food chain reducing fishing effort for at least part of the year.

Apart from COVID-19, no other clear changes are noted in recent years.

### France

Landings and on-board observation data confirm that skates are primarily a bycatch in numerous fisheries operating in the Bay of Biscay. French landings statistics from more than 100 métiers (defined at DCF level 6) report landings of *R. clavata* and *R. montagui* in the Bay of Biscay. Trammel nets are the main métier for *R. montagui*, while twin-trawl is the main métier for *R. clavata*.

### Spain

The results from the DCF pilot study held from 2011–2013 and conducted in the Basque Country waters (Division 8.c) with the objective of describing and characterizing coastal artisanal fisheries (trammel nets targeting mainly hake, anglerfish and mackerel), showed that several skate species (*R. clavata*, *R. montagui*, *L. naevus*, *L. fullonica*, *L. circularis*, *R. brachyura* and *R. undulata*) are caught as bycatch. The Basque artisanal fleet consists of 55 small vessels that use gillnets and trammel nets during some periods of the year. Vessels have an average length of 12.7 m and an average

engine power of 82.4 kW. The proportions of skates in the total sampled trips were 30% (2011), 35% (2012) and 16% (2013). The estimated landings of skates by this fleet were 19.3 t in 2012 and 26.9 t in 2013 (Diez *et al.*, 2014 WD).

In the Cantabrian Sea (Division 8.c) most skate landings are also from bycatch from otter trawl (47%) and gillnet gears (43%). The remaining landings are derived from longlines and other fishing gears.

### Mainland Portugal

Skates are mainly a bycatch in mixed fisheries, particularly from the artisanal polyvalent fleet (representing around 80% of landings). Set nets (mainly trammel nets), or a combination of set nets and traps, account for most skates' landings (*ca.* 53% in weight and 63% in number of trips in 2021), followed by longline (*ca.* 31% in weight and 26% in number of trips in 2021). Also, within the artisanal polyvalent fleet, small trawlers may account for 7% in weight and 6% in number of trips of the total landings of skates and rays, being only observed in certain landing ports. Methods to estimate landings by skate species were developed during the DCF-funded pilot study focused on skate catches in Portuguese continental fisheries carried out from 2011 to 2013 (Figueiredo *et al.*, 2020b).

The experimental quota of *R. undulata* assigned to Portugal since 2016 requires a special fishing license for this species. Vessels with the license are mainly operating close to the coast. This fishery is TAC constrained and has as the main goal to provide fishery data for future scientific advice.

### 19.2.3 ICES Advice

Before 2012, ICES provided general advice on skates by ecoregions. This is not much adequate as skate species have different life-history traits and this does not fit with stocks straddling the boundaries of ecoregions. For instance, one stock of *L. naevus* straddles subareas 6 and 7 (excl. Division 7.d) and divisions 8.a-b and 8.d.

From 2012–2014, ICES has moved towards providing advice at single stock level, giving quantitative advice where possible.

Advice on skates is given biennially. The last advice was given in 2022 for 2023 and 2024 and new advice will be requested in 2024. For most stocks a landings advice was given. A summary of these and details for stocks not subject to a landings advice or for which the advice was more complex are provided in the table below.

Scientific name	ICES stock code	Distribution area	Advice for 2023 and 2024	ICES stock data category
<i>Raja undulata</i>	rju.27.8ab	8.a,b	Catches should be no more than 202 tonnes of which no more than 12 tonnes should be landed	6
<i>Raja undulata</i>	rju.27.8c	8.c	No targeted fisheries, manage bycatch	6
<i>Raja clavata</i>	rjc.27.8abd	8.abd	Not more than 255 t in 2023 and not more than 257t in 2024	2
<i>Raja clavata</i>	rjc.27.8c	8.c	Catches should be no more than 201 tonnes of which no more than 173 tonnes should be landed	3
<i>Leucoraja naevus</i>	rjn.27.8c	8.c	Catches should be no more than 38 tonnes of which no more than 33 tonnes should be landed	3
<i>Raja montagui</i>	rjm.27.8	8	Landings should be no more than 99 tonnes	3
<i>Raja montagui</i>	rjm.27.9a	9.a	Landings should be no more than 98 tonnes	3
<i>Leucoraja naevus</i>	rjn.27.9a	9.a	Catches should be no more than 84 tonnes of which no more than 71 tonnes should be landed	3
<i>Raja clavata</i>	rjc.27.9a	9.a	Landings should be no more than 1452 tonnes	3
<i>Raja undulata</i>	rju.27.9a	9.a	Landings should be no more than 31 tonnes	6
<i>Raja brachyura</i>	rjh.27.9a	9.a	Landings should be no more than 231 tonnes	3
<i>Dipturus batis</i> complex ( <i>Dipturus batis</i> ) ( <i>Dipturus intermedius</i> )	rjb.27.89a	8, 9.a	No advice requested	6
Other skates	raj.27.89a	8, 9.a	ICES cannot provide catch advice	5

## 19.2.4 Management applicable

An EU TAC for skates (Rajiformes) in subareas 8 and 9 was first established in 2009, and set at 6423 t. Since then, the TAC was reduced between 9 and 15% up to 2014, and increased between 8 and 15% since 2017. The history of the EU regulations adopted for skates in this ecoregion and the ICES landings estimates for all Rajiformes (excluding *Raja undulata* from 2014 onwards, where a sub-TAC was set for this species from 2015 in Subarea 8 and from 2016 in Division 9.a) are summarized below:

Year	TAC for EC waters of subareas 8 and 9	TAC change (%)	ICES landing estimates	Regulation
2009	6423 t		4327 t	Council Regulation (EC) No 43/2009 of 16 January 2009 <sup>(1,2)</sup>
2010	5459 t	-15	4140 t	Council Regulation (EU) No 23/2010 of 14 January 2010 <sup>(1,2)</sup>
2011	4640 t	-15	4144 t	Council Regulation (EU) No 57/2011 of 18 January 2011 <sup>(1,2)</sup>
2012	4222 t	-9	3766 t	Council Regulation (EU) No 43/2012 of 17 January 2012 <sup>(1,2)</sup>
2013	3800 t	-9	3686 t	Council Regulation (EU) No 39/2013 of 21 January 2013 <sup>(3,2)</sup>
2014	3420 t	-10	3685 t	Council Regulation (EU) No 43/2014 of 20 January 2014 <sup>(3,2)</sup>
2015	3420 t	0	3507 t	Council Regulation (EU) No 104/2015 of 19 January 2015 amended by the Council Regulation (EU) No 523/2015 of 25 March 2015 <sup>(3,4)</sup>
2016	3420 t	0	3296 t	Council Regulation (EU) No 72/2016 of 22 January 2016 <sup>(3,4)</sup>
2017	3762 t	+9	3430 t	Council Regulation (EU) No 2017/127 of 20 January 2017 <sup>(3,4)</sup>
2018	4314 t	-15	3795 t	Council Regulation (EU) No 2018/120 of 23 January 2018 <sup>(3,4)</sup>
2019	4759 t	+10	3550 t	Council Regulation (EU) No 2019/124 of 30 January 2019 <sup>(3,4)</sup>
2020	4759 t	0	3373 t	Council Regulation (EU) No 2020/123 of 27 January 2020 <sup>(3,4)</sup>
2021	5140 t	+8	3425 t	Council Regulation (EU) No 2021/703 of 26 April 2021 <sup>(3,4)</sup>
2022	5140 t	0	3571 t	Council Regulation (EU) No 2022/515 of 31 March 2022 <sup>(3,4)</sup>

<sup>(1)</sup> Catches of cuckoo ray (*Leucoraja naevus*) (RJN/89-C), thornback ray (*Raja clavata*) (RJC/89-C) shall be reported separately.

<sup>(2)</sup> Does not apply to undulate ray (*Raja undulata*), common skate complex (*Dipturus batis* and *D. intermedius*) and white skate (*Rostroraja alba*). Catches of these species may not be retained on board and shall be promptly released unharmed to the extent practicable. Fishers shall be encouraged to develop and use techniques and equipment to facilitate the rapid and safe release of the species.

<sup>(3)</sup> Catches of cuckoo ray (*Leucoraja naevus*) (RJN/89-C), blonde ray (*Raja brachyura*) (RJH/89-C), and thornback ray (*Raja clavata*) (RJC/89-C) shall be reported separately.

<sup>(4)</sup> Shall not apply to undulate ray (*Raja undulata*). This species shall not be targeted in the areas covered by this TAC. By-catch of undulate ray in subarea 8 (since 2015) and 9 (since 2016) may only be landed whole or gutted, and provided that it does not comprise more than 20 kilograms live weight per fishing trip in subarea 8 (in 2015 and 2016) and 40 kilograms of live weight per fishing trip in subarea 9 (in 2016). This provision shall not apply for catches subject to the landing obligation. By-catches of undulate ray shall be reported separately under the codes RJU/8-C and RJU/9-C, respectively for each subarea.

Regarding *R. undulata* no management measures had been adopted by European Commission (EC) until 2009, when EC regulations stated that “Undulate ray ... (in) ... EC waters of VI, VII, VIII, IX and X ... may not be retained on board. Catches of this species shall be promptly released unharmed to the extent practicable” (CEC, 2009). In 2010, *R. undulata* was listed as a prohibited species on quota

regulations (Section 6 of CEC, 2010). In 2017, EC stated that “it shall be prohibited for third-country vessels to fish for, to retain on board, to tranship or to land undulate ray (*Raja undulata*) in Union waters of ICES subareas VI, IX and X (Council Regulation (EU) No 2017/127). A by-catch TAC was established for Subarea 8 since 2015 and for Subarea 9 since 2016, under the limits presented in the table below:

Year	TAC for EU waters of Subarea 8	TAC for EU waters of Subarea 9	ICES landing estimates in Subarea 8	ICES landing estimates in Subarea 9	Regulation
2015	25 t	-	16 t	-	Council Regulation (EU) No 523/2015 of 25 March 2015 <sup>(3,4)</sup>
2016	25 t	40 t	21 t	31 t	Council Regulation (EU) No 72/2016 of 22 January 2016 <sup>(3,4)</sup>
2017	30 t	48 t	30 t	46 t	Council Regulation (EU) No 2017/127 of 20 January 2017 <sup>(3,4)</sup>
2018	30 t	48 t	26 t	52 t	Council Regulation (EU) No 2018/120 of 23 January 2018
2019	33 t	50 t	31 t	38 t	Council Regulation (EU) No 2019/124 of 30 January 2019
2020	33 t	50 t	29 t	45 t	Council Regulation (EU) No 2020/123 of 27 January 2020
2021	33 t	50 t	30 t	35 t	Council Regulation (EU) No 2021/703 of 26 April 2021
2022	33 t	50 t	35 t	53 t	Council Regulation (EU) No 2022/515 of 31 March 2022 Council Regulation (EU) No 2021/703 of 26 April 2021

Unwanted catches of skates and rays in subareas 8 and 9 for the period 2021–2023 are regulated by the Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2020/20153, , which establishes the details of the landing obligation in Southern-Western waters. According to this, based on scientific evidences of high survivability, most skates and rays are exempted from the landing obligation. This exemption implies that when discarding skates and rays in the cases referred above, those shall be released immediately, and that during the period 2021–2023, all Member States have to present before 1 May each year additional scientific information supporting the exemption. The Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries shall assess that scientific information by 31 July every year. The exemption applies to:

- All skates and rays (except *L. naevus*) caught by all fishing gears in subareas 8 and 9;
- *L. naevus* caught by trammel nets in subareas 8 and 9 (until 31 December 2022);
- *L. naevus* caught by trawls in Subarea 8 (until 31 December 2022).

#### 19.2.4.1 Regional management measures

##### Portugal

The Portuguese Administration adopted, on 29 December 2011, national legislation (Portaria no 315/2011) that *prohibits the catch, the maintenance on board and the landing of any skate species belonging to the Rajidae family, during the month of May along the whole continental Portuguese EEZ*. This applies to all fishing trips, except bycatch of less than 5% in weight. The legislation was updated on 21 March 2016 (Portaria no 47/2016) by extending the fishing prohibition period to June.

By 22 August 2014, the Portuguese Administration adopted a national legislation (Portaria no 170/2014) that *establishes a minimum landing size of 52 cm total length ( $L_T$ ) for all *Raja* spp. and*

*Leucoraja* spp. In 2022, the minimum landing size was updated to 60 cm total length for all *Raja* spp. and *Leucoraja* spp. (Portaria nº 255/2022).

On 19 May 2016, Portugal adopted a legislative framework (Portaria no. 96/2016) regarding the 2016 quota of *Raja undulata* in Division 9.a assigned to Portugal. This framework includes a set of conditions for licensing specific fishing permits to vessels on the owner's request, provided that each vessel fulfils the set of specific conditions which include fishing vessel type, fishing license and historical skate landings. Vessels having the specific fishing permit shall comply with a set of rules, which include obligation to transmit, to both the General Directorate of Natural Resources, Maritime Security and Services (DGRM) and to IPMA, specific fishing data using a form designed by DGRM and IPMA to register haul and catch data on a haul-by-haul basis; the obligation to accept scientific observers duly accredited by IPMA onboard, except in situations where, demonstrably, due to vessel's technical characteristics, it affects the normal activity of the vessel. In 2019, the DGRM introduced a landing control process according to which, in addition to licensed vessels, vessels not possessing the special fishing license were allowed to land a maximum of one specimen per trip and were also obliged to provide additional information on their fishing activity related to *R. undulata* captures (Portaria no. 4/2019).

On each fishing trip, vessels are prohibited from targeting undulate ray and are obliged to land the species under specific conditions: a maximum of 30 kg of undulate ray live weight (for licensed vessels) or one specimen per trip (for non-licensed vessels) is allowed; only whole or gutted specimens can be landed and a minimum (78 cm  $L_T$ ) and a maximum (97 cm  $L_T$ ) landing sizes are adopted. During the months of May, June and July of each year the capture, retention onboard and landing of undulate ray is prohibited, but data on catches should be recorded.

### France

Based on feedback from scientific programs carried out since 2011 in close partnership with fishers, it was decided in December 2013 to remove undulate ray from the list of prohibited species, without landings permitted (Total Allowable Catch of zero). In December 2014, a small TAC has been allowed for France in ICES divisions 7.de and 8.ab, with limited bycatch but no targeted fishing. Since then, the French authorities adopted different decrees to regulate bycatch and landings of undulate ray. Starting in 2016, a legislative framework similar to the one adopted by Portugal was implemented, with landing of undulate ray allowed for a limited number of vessels conditioned by the systematic reporting of catches of this species, a minimum landing size of 78 cm and landing limitations per trip and time period. The obligation of possessing a special permit to land *R. undulata*, which was in place since the dedicated TAC for this species in ICES divisions 8.a and 8.b was set over 0, was lifted in 2019. For more details on the different modalities of this bycatch by year, see Gadenne (2017 WD).

All skates are subject to a minimum landings size of 45 cm in France (JORF, 2017).

### Spain

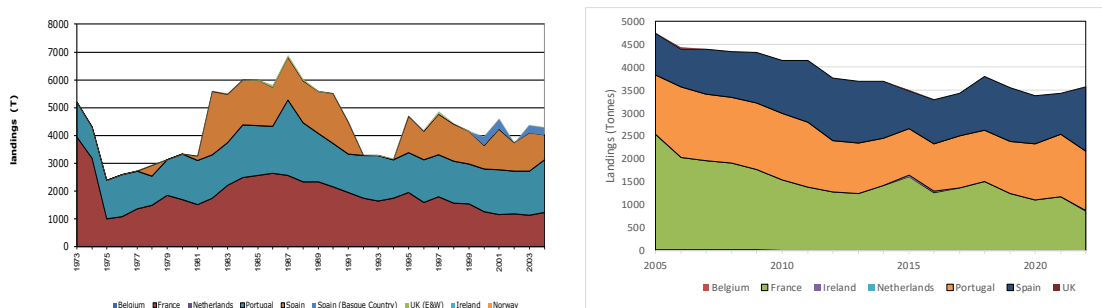
The Spanish Ministerio de Agricultura, Pesca y Alimentación published in the Resolution of 1 July 2019 the list of species for 2019 that have high survival and that can be released into the sea once captured that affected the stocks of *Raja microcellata* in 7.fg, Rajiformes in 6, 7, 8, 9 and *Raja undulata* in 8.c and 9.

In March 2020, the list of species with exemption of the landing obligation based on high survival was updated (Boletín Oficial Del Estado nº 66, sec. III), following the Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2019/2237. The updated list includes all skates and rays (except *L. naevus*) caught by all fishing gears in Divisions 8 and 9, *L. naevus* caught with trawl in Division 9 and *L. naevus* caught with trammel nets in Divisions 8 and 9. The recommendation is to release immediately the unwanted catch of those species below the sea surface.

## 19.3 Catch data

### 19.3.1 Landings

Although historical data are incomplete with some national data missing in some years and some year to year variations suggesting changes in reporting practices rather than actual variations in landings, reported landings suggest a long-term decrease since the early 1970s (Figure 19.1). Landings data for all Rajiformes combined are considered reliable since 2005 (but species-specific landings are not reliable before 2009 for most stocks). Landings have declined since 2005. Detailed landings by area, species and stock are presented in Tables 19.1a-f and 19.2a-d at the end of this chapter. Table 19.1f gives annual ICES landings by stock and country. Tables 19.2a-c present the annual ICES landing estimates, by division for each skate and ray species and Table 19.2d landings of Dasyatidae, Myliobatidae, Rhinobatidae, Torpedinidae and Gimmuridae species



**Figure 19.1. Skates in the Bay of Biscay and Iberian Waters.** ( Left): historical landings of Rajidae in subarea 8 and 9 from 1973 to 2004 from STATLANT data (with WGEF corrections using national data provided by WGEF members for some countries and years), ( right): landings in 2005-2022 from data submitted to ICES.

#### Skates in Bay of Biscay and Cantabrian Sea (Subarea 8)

Since 2005 approximately 73% of landings in Subarea 8 have been caught by France and 27% by Spain. Since 1973, skate landings show no clear trend, although at the earlier years of the time-series (1973–1974) and in the period from 1982–1991 remarkably high values were registered. Data before the 2000s are considered incomplete.

Since 2010, divisions with the highest landings have been 8.a–b (around 76%), and these were mostly from France). In Division 8.c, landings represented 22% of the total landing of Subarea 8 and were mainly from Spain. Landings from Divisions 8.d-e have been low and decreasing since 2005, around 30 tonnes or less in the two last years.

#### Skates in Division 9.a

Portuguese and Spanish historical landings since 2005 account for *ca.* 78% and 22%, respectively of reported skate landings. Since 2005, total landings of skates remained relatively stable, in the range 1265–1863 tonnes.

### 19.3.2 Discards

Discard quantities available to ICES for Subarea 8 and Division 9.a by country are presented in Table 19.3a at the end of this chapter.

High survival rate of discarded skates have been estimated for several stock in subareas 8 and 9 and elsewhere so that discards do not correspond to dead catch. Discard survival is considered in more detail where discards are accounted for in stock assessments.

In the two last data years included in assessment carried out in 2022, on-board observation programmes have been disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The sampling was overall lesser than in previous years resulting in a general increase uncertainty and some gaps in discard data.

### 19.3.3 Discard survival

WKSHARK3 (ICES, 2017a) and WKSHARK 5 (ICES, 2020) reviewed available studies to identify where there are existing data on at-vessel mortality and post-release mortality of elasmobranch species by area, gear type and identified important data gaps.

Discard survival data available on skates caught in trammel net fisheries (mesh size  $\geq 100$  mm) in ICES Division 27.9.a, collected under the Portuguese DCF pilot study on skates (2011–2013), and presented in previous reports was re-analyzed and the results summarized in Serra-Pereira and Figueiredo (2019 WD). Experiments were conducted on categorical vitality assessment (CVA) after capture of *R. clavata*, *L. naevus*, *R. montagui*, *R. brachyura* and *R. undulata* and indicate that it is generally high for all species, as the percentage of skates in Excellent and Good vitality status was above 75% for all species, mesh size and soak time considered (Table 19.3.3.1).

- *R. clavata* - specimens caught in both mesh size groups with soak time < 24h were mainly found in “excellent” condition (100% and 92%, respectively), while those from hauls > 24h, although most specimens were caught in “excellent” condition (72% and 52%), the percentage of “poor/dead” vitality status was comparatively higher (16% and 24%, respectively for each mesh size);
- *R. brachyura* - most specimens were caught in “excellent” conditions, representing 67% of the observations from mesh size < 180 mm and soaking time < 24h, 92% for the same mesh and soaking time > 24h, 57% and 70% for mesh size > 180 mm for each soaking time period, respectively. The highest percentage of specimens in “poor/dead” status for that species was observed for mesh size > 180 mm and soaking time < 24h (24%);
- *R. montagui* - specimens caught with mesh size < 180 mm and in “excellent” vitality represented 100% and 67% depending on the soaking time; specimens caught with mesh size > 180 mm and in “excellent” vitality represented 40% and 37%. The percentage of specimens in “poor/dead” conditions was higher for the larger mesh size group (30%) than for the smaller one (0% and 12%);
- *L. naevus* - representative data was only obtained for mesh size > 180 mm and soaking time > 24h. Under this situation 58% was the percentage of specimens in “excellent” condition while 21% and 21% corresponded to specimens in “good” and 21% “poor/dead” condition respectively;
- *R. undulata* - the percentage of specimens in “excellent” conditions was higher than 79% for all mesh sizes and soak times; highest values observed for mesh size > 180 mm and soaking time > 24h (96%). The percentage of specimens in “poor/dead” conditions was 2% and 5% for mesh size < 180 mm and 3% and 14% for mesh size > 180 mm, respectively for each of the two soaking times considered.

Results suggest that the vitality after capture of a specimen is not related to its size, as for all the species, and regardless of specimens’ size (TL < 52 cm and > 52 cm), the majority was found in “excellent” vitality condition (60–92%). This indicate that fish below the formerly established minimum landing size of 52 cm for all Rajiformes (except *R. undulata*) and 78 cm for *R. undulata* and below the maximum landing size 97 cm for the latter, if released immediately to the water after capture have a potentially high survival capacity.



**Table 19.3.3.1. Skates in the Bay of Biscay and Iberian Waters. Percentage of individuals by vitality status after capture (1 = Good; 2 = Moderate; 3 = Poor) in relation to mesh size and soak time in the Portuguese polyvalent fleet operating with trammel nets for *Raja clavata*, *Raja montagui*, *Raja brachyura*, *Leucoraja naevus* and *Raja undulata*. The total length range is also given.**

Species	Mesh size (mm)	Soak time (h)	Vitality status			n	TL range (cm)
			1	2	3		
<i>Raja clavata</i>	< 180	< 24	100%	0%	0%	17	23-72
		> 24	72%	12%	16%	25	39-80
	> 180	< 24	92%	4%	4%	26	48-88
		> 24	52%	23%	24%	103	40-96
<i>Raja brachyura</i>	< 180	< 24	67%	22%	11%	9	39-66
		> 24	92%	4%	4%	24	27-75
	> 180	< 24	57%	19%	24%	21	49-95
		> 24	70%	20%	10%	143	18-106
<i>Raja montagui</i>	< 180	< 24	100%	0%	0%	18	21-64
		> 24	67%	21%	12%	42	10-60
	> 180	< 24	40%	30%	30%	20	46-62
		> 24	37%	33%	30%	43	37-68
<i>Leucoraja naevus</i>	< 180	< 24	1	-	-	1	53
	> 180	< 24	1	-	-	1	61
		> 24	58%	21%	21%	24	46-62
<i>Raja undulata</i>	< 180	< 24	82%	16%	2%	44	40-89
		> 24	90%	5%	5%	58	43-92
	> 180	< 24	79%	7%	14%	71	32-92
		> 24	96%	1%	3%	174	44-92

Additionally, a mark-recapture study (UNDULATA project, 2014–2015) of *R. undulata* caught by trammel nets obtained a return rate of 11% and the mean observed time-at-liberty was of 54 days and maximum of 313 days. These results are a good indication that the species has a potential high long-term survival.

In 2017, an experiment was carried out in the Bay of Bourgneuf (Division 8.a) during which 163 undulate rays were caught using a bottom otter trawl (Morfin *et al.*, 2019). 144 individuals in a good-enough physical condition were equipped with acoustic transmitters and fixed receivers were deployed in the semi-enclosed bay, in addition to occasional tracking with a mobile antenna. The study concluded that a minimum of 49% of the skates survived at least 2 weeks after tagging (with a maximum estimated survival of 97.5% considering at deck mortality). The 49% estimate is a minimal survival rate because it could not be established whether individuals that were not detected after 2 weeks were dead or had wandered outside the detection range of the receivers during the time of the experimentation.

In 2018, new experiments were conducted onboard PTGFS-WIBTS-Q4 and PT-CTS (UWTV (FU 28–29)) surveys to collect CVA and short-term survival estimates (only in the former) for *R. clavata* caught by otter trawl. Overall, most of the specimens were found in “excellent” or “good” conditions (60–72%), with an at-vessel-mortality of 6–7% (Table 19.3.3.2). All specimens in “excellent” vitality status showed tail grab, spiracles and body flex reflexes. The percentage of body flex and tail grab reflexes decreased with vitality status, 71% to 29% and 48% to 29%, respectively.

The preliminary estimated survival, based on captivity observations of *R. clavata* during a maximum of 4 days, was 64%.

**Table 19.3.3.2. Skates in the Bay of Biscay and Iberian Waters. Percentage of individuals by vitality status (1 = Excellent; 2 = Good; 3 = Poor; 4 = Dead) of each species assessed onboard IPMA's otter trawl surveys, for different deck times. For  $n \leq 5$ , observed numbers by vitality are shown instead of percentages.**

Species	Survey	Deck time	Length class	1	2	3	4	n	TL range (cm)
<i>Raja clavata</i>	PT-CTS	< 108 min	< 52 cm	47%	13%	33%	7%	30	
		< 108 min	> 52 cm	4	-	1	-	5	
		> 108 min	< 52 cm	0%	0%	0%	100%	25	
		> 108 min	> 52 cm	-	1	-	3	4	
	PTGFS-WIBTS-Q4	< 108 min	< 52 cm			1	1	2	
		< 108 min	> 52 cm	26%	46%	23%	6%	35	

In 2018, the Project DESCARSEL, conducted by IEO (Spain), performed survivability experiments to evaluate and estimate the survival of the rays usually discarded in the bottom trawl and trammel fisheries (Valeiras and Alvarez-Blazquez, 2018). A proportion of 93.46% and 100% of discarded rays assessed for vitality in bottom trawling and trammel nets survive to fishing operations and handling onboard. *Raja clavata* scored the lower survivability (58%-100%), *Raja montagui* (100%) and all specimens of *Raja undulata* survived the 36 hours first phase trial without mortality events (100% survivability). In bottom trawler the estimated survival for *R. clavata* at 36h was 58% (47.7-69.9) while in trammel net the estimated survival at 48h was 95.5% (87.1-100). Long-term survivability in *Raja clavata* was 17% (10.1-27.4) at the end of the observed period (one month). Stress and conditions at captivity should be a factor to take into account in this study and to analyze in future works. Most of the thornback rays did not feed till 3 weeks at captivity. Many factors influence survival and some of them are poorly understood and difficult to control across species, such as characteristics of the fishing haul (time, depth, speed, gear...), composition and volume of fish in the cod-end, time of hauling onboard, etc. (Valeiras and Alvarez-Blazquez, 2018).

In 2019, the Project DESCARSEL, performed survivability experiments focused on cuckoo ray (*L. naevus*) in trawl fisheries operating in northern Portugal fishing grounds (Division 9.a) (Valeiras *et al.*, 2019). The study was conducted in April–May 2019 onboard a Spanish commercial trawler and included vitality and captivity observations. From a total of 503 individuals captured, 141 were placed in tanks for survival monitoring. The vitality results showed that 7.6% of the skates ( $n = 38$ ) were assessed as Excellent condition, 24.1% ( $n = 121$ ) as Good and 35.2% ( $n = 177$ ) as Poor, and 33.2% ( $n = 167$ ) were Dead. Estimated survival at 36h was 27% (21–36%). Maximum survivability at tank captivity was 7 days. Estimated 50% survivability was different for each vitality status. Skates assessed as Poor vitality died in 12 hours after hauling, while those with Excellent vitality lasted 41 hours (1.7 days) and those with Good vitality lasted 24 hours. The low survival estimates obtained from this study resulted on the removal of *L. naevus* caught by trawl in Division 9.a. from the exemption of the landing obligation (BOE, 2020, N<sup>o</sup> 66, sec. III).

In 2020, the project SURF (Baulier *et al.* 2021) studied the survivability of cuckoo ray (*L. naevus*) discarded by French trawlers targeting demersal fish and operating in the Celtic Sea (Division 7h) and northern Bay of Biscay (Division 8a). The sampling, realised on a French commercial trawler, was stratified by vitality class and sampled individuals were landed and their state was monitored during up to three weeks in aquarium facilities in September 2020. Beside this, the vitality status of other discarded individuals was reported by an onboard observer during fishing trips carried out during winter, spring and summer aboard four different trawlers. The final

survival rate ranged from 12% to 22% and was mainly influenced by haul duration and weather conditions (wave height).

In 2021, an Irish study aimed to estimate the survival rate of discarded cuckoo ray caught by a bottom trawler in Division 7a (Oliver *et al.* 2021). Like for the SURF project, individuals were brought ashore and monitored in captivity. Similar outcomes were obtained, with estimated final survival rate comprised between 11% and 16%.

Experiments described here followed the procedures described in previous studies on the survival of this group of species and the recommendations made by the STECF and the ICES Working Group on Methods to Estimate Discard Survival.

In early 2021, ICES conducted a workshop on the inclusion of discard survival in stock assessments (WKSURVIVE; ICES, 2021a). It was recognized that this continues to be an active research, particularly in what regards discard survival of skates and rays, due to its link to the EU conditional survivability exemption and associated evidence roadmap. Due to the complexity and specifications across stocks, it was recommended that the task of including discard survival into stock assessments should be driven by stock assessment groups. To avoid the long benchmark process, this group recommended an inter-benchmark meeting to address the inclusion of discard survival across multiple stocks within the same meeting, to accelerate the process.

### 19.3.4 Quality of the catch composition data

Species composition of landings in Subarea 8 and Division 9.a, corrected according to the WKSHARK2 reporting guidelines (ICES, 2016) are presented (Tables 19.1a-f and 19.2a-d at the end of the chapter). In the past decade, official landings reported as Rajiformes (indet.) have declined because of the EU mandatory species-specific reporting. In the case of the Portuguese official landings statistics, eight commercial designations were reported in 2017: “raia lenga” (*R. clavata*), “raia pontuada” (*R. brachyura*), “raia manchada” (*R. montagui*), “raia-de-dois-olhos” (*L. naevus*), “raia de S. Pedro” (*L. circularis*), “raia-zimbreira” (*R. microocellata*), “raia-de-quatro-olhos” (*R. miraletus*) and “raia bicuda” (*D. oxyrinchus*).

Landings misidentifications and/or coding errors still occur in Subarea 8 and Division 9.a. In Division 9.a, statistical procedures were developed to better estimate species-specific landings during the DCF skate pilot study (2011–2013) (for details see Stock Annexes of Division 9a stocks and Figueiredo *et al.*, 2020b). Since 2017, a dedicated sampling programme on skate and ray species composition, incorporated in the DCF, was implemented in the main landing ports (Matosinhos, Póvoa do Varzim, Peniche, Sesimbra and Setubal). In France, sampling in auction market is carried out in a dedicated project “Elasmobranch on Shore” since 2012 (Mayot and Barreau, 2021) to assess the proportions of mislabelled landings.

## 19.4 Commercial catch composition and length frequency distribution

Length distribution of landings and discards are collected for all stocks in national programmes carried out in application of EU data collection regulations. However, reliable length distributions are seldom available for the smaller stocks in relation to small number of individuals caught. In 2022, length distributions have been used for assessment and advice of a larger number of stocks following the implementation of the new WKLIFE methods (rfb rule) instead of the previous 2/5 rule.

## 19.5 Commercial catch–effort data

### 19.5.1 Portuguese data for Division 9a.

#### 19.5.1.1 Effort data

In the Portuguese continental coast, Rajidae species are mainly landed by the polyvalent segment followed by trawl. In 2022, the landed weight of Rajidae derived from the polyvalent segment represented 80% of the total landings. This fishing segment is characterized by multi-species and mixed fisheries and includes vessels with length overall (LOA) ranging from 5 to 27 m, which generally operate between 10 to 150 m deep (occasionally down to 600 m). The analysis of DCF sampling data indicates that Rajidae are mainly caught by trammel nets, which is considered to be the most appropriated gear to catch these species.

Annual landings by species are calculated using the official daily landings data set and market sampling data collected under DCF according to the procedure described in Figueiredo *et al.* (2020b).

Fishing effort time series (2008–2022) for each fleet segment, polyvalent and trawl, were analysed. Consistently increasing or decreasing trends (monotonic) on the fishing effort data collected over time were investigated and the non-parametric Mann-Kendall trend test was applied (<https://cran.r-project.org/web/packages/Kendall/Kendall.pdf>). For each fishing segment, the test was applied to the last 10 years of the fishing effort series, considering the number of fishing trips with landings of Rajidae species as sampling unit (Table 19.5.1.1.1). Fishing effort time series (in number of trips) suggests a downward trend and the autocorrelation in data series does not appear significant for both fleets, polyvalent (Mann-Kendall trend test:  $\tau = -0.16$ ,  $p$ -value = 0.59) and trawl (Mann-Kendall trend test:  $\tau = -0.33$ ,  $p$ -value = 0.21). Additionally, fishing effort for bottom otter trawls targeting demersal fish in kW\*days based on logbook data (DGRM data base) combined with vessel's technical characteristics (EU Fleet Register) for the period 2010-2021 is also presented in Table 19.5.1.1.1. The overall decrease in fishing effort observed for both fleets may be related to several factors including the inclusion of *R. undulata* in the prohibited species list in 2009, the implementation of seasonal closures since 2012, and changes in the target species in some polyvalent fleets.

**Table 19.5.1.1.1. Skates in Division 9.a. Fishing effort (number of trips) from the Portuguese polyvalent and trawl fleets for all species of skates and rays in the period 2008–2022. Fishing effort for demersal fish bottom otter trawl in kW\*days for the period 2010–2021 is also presented.**

Year	No Fishing trips		kW*days Demersal fish otter trawl
	Polyvalent	Trawl	
2008	36149	6513	
2009	36239	5683	
2010	34767	5461	3783454
2011	36761	5139	3436491
2012	32565	5158	3867366
2013	28007	4658	3860658
2014	25779	4471	3983152
2015	25723	4325	4301238
2016	24476	4593	4533480
2017	25296	4237	3170657
2018	24761	4566	3389243
2019	24561	4492	3396599
2020	27464	4650	3046189
2021	29470	5021	3459537
2022	24675	4692	4264803

### 19.5.1.2 CPUE and Effort data

In 2023, standardized LPUE was updated for *R. brachyura* (see Section 19.9.12 for more details) *R. montagui* (see Section 19.9.8 for more details), *R. clavata* (see Section 19.9.3 for more details), *R. undulata* (see Section 19.9.11 for more details) and *L. naevus* (see Section 19.9.6 for more details) in Division 9.a.

## 19.6 Fishery-independent surveys

Groundfish surveys provide data on the spatial and temporal patterns in species composition, size composition, relative abundance and biomass for various skates. The fishery-independent surveys operating in the Bay of Biscay and Iberian Waters are discussed briefly below (see Stock Annexes for further details).

Due to the patchy (mainly coastal) distribution and habitat specificity of some skate species (e.g. *R. undulata*, *R. brachyura* and *R. microocellata*), existing surveys do not provide reliable information on abundance and biomass. In order to gather information on the distribution and spatio-temporal dynamics, and on abundance and biomass for those species, WGEF recommends dedicated surveys using an appropriate fishing gear be developed in this ecoregion.

### 19.6.1 French EVHOE survey (Subarea 8)

The EVHOE-WIBTS-Q4 (G9527) survey has been conducted annually in the Bay of Biscay since 1987 (excluding 1993, 1996 and 2017). Data are used to calculate biomass indices of two stocks (rjc.27.8abd and rjn.27.678abd (see the corresponding stock annexes for method).

## 19.6.2 Spanish survey data (divisions 8.c and 9.a)

The Spanish North Coast Bottom Trawl Survey (SP-NORTH, G2784),

This is an annual survey in the Cantabrian Sea and Galician waters (divisions 8.c and 9.a) has covered this area since 1983 (except in 1987). An extensive revision of the historical series of biomass, abundance and length frequencies of the skates and rays in this survey can be found in the WD of Fernández-Zapico *et al.* (2023) and in the Stock Annex of the stocks corresponding to Div. 8c (rjn-27-8c and rjc.27.8c) and WSKKATE report (ICES, 2021b).

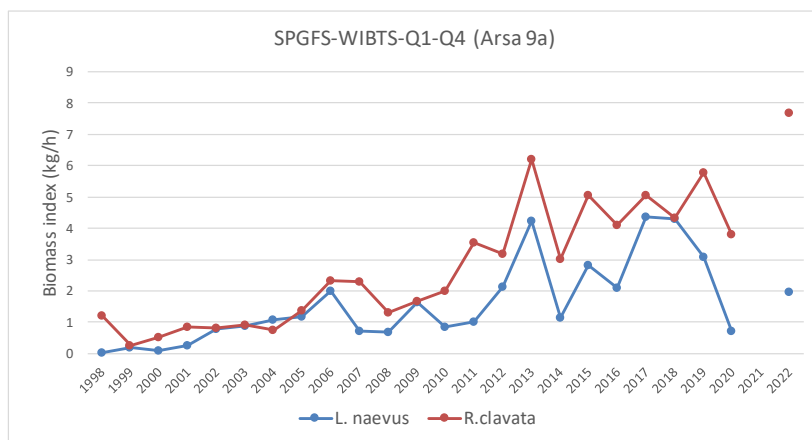
The Spanish bottom trawl survey IBTS-GC-Q1-Q4 (ARSA, G4309).

This survey take place in the Gulf of Cadiz (Division 9.a) has been carried out in spring since 1993 and in autumn since 1997 up to 2022. Despite COVID-19 issues both surveys were conducted in 2020. The surveyed area corresponds to the continental shelf and upper-middle slope (depths of 15–800 m) and from longitude 6°20'W to 7°20'W, covering an area of 7224 km<sup>2</sup>.

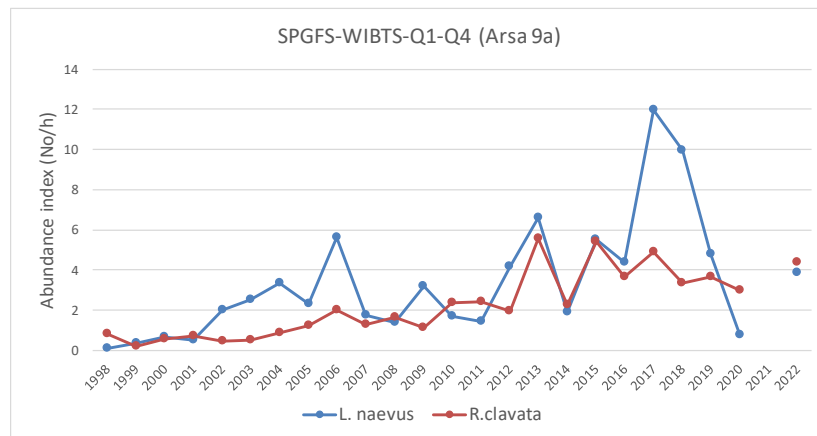
In the ARSA time series survey (1993–2020), the most abundant skates are *L. naevus* and *R. clavata*. In 2022, the biomass of *R. clavata* increased compared to 2020, particularly in the spring survey in which the highest value of the series was recorded, In the case of *L. naevus* the biomass index sharply decreased in the last two years 2019 and 2020 in both surveys but recovered slightly in 2022 (Figure 19.6.2.1).

Both species showed an increasing trend in biomass since 1997, with the highest values reached in 2013, 2015, 2018 and 2022, although since 2013 the biomass shows large year-to-year variations. The biomass values for *R. clavata* in 2022 increased to the highest peak of the series reaching 7.7 kg haul whereas *L. naevus* shows a decreasing trend since 2018 although the biomass index recovered in 2022 to 1.96 kg haul) (Figure 19.6.2.2).

Despite being variable, abundance indices (n° ind per haul) of *R. clavata* and *L. naevus* show an increasing trend over the time series since 1997. The highest abundance values of *R. clavata* were recorded in 2013 and 2015, and slightly decreased until 2020. In 2022 the abundance recovered to 4.4 individuals/haul. The abundance of *L. naevus* after the peak in 2017 has strongly decreased in 2019–2020 to the lowest values of the time series, although as it is observed in *R. clavata* the values slightly recovered in 2022 (Figure 19.6.2.2).



**Figure 19.6.2.1. Skates in the Bay of Biscay and Iberian Waters. Trend of the yield of *R. clavata* and *L. naevus* expressed as kg per haul from the Spanish bottom trawl survey ARSA carried out in spring and autumn in the Gulf of Cadiz (9.a South) from 1997 to 2022. The average of both surveys Q1 and Q4 has been represented.**



**Figure 19.6.2.2. Skates in the Bay of Biscay and Iberian Waters. Trend of the yield of *R. clavata* and *L. naevus* expressed as number per haul from the Spanish bottom trawl survey ARSA carried out in spring (Q1) and autumn (Q4) in the Gulf of Cadiz (9.a South) from 1997 to 2022. The average of both surveys Q1 and Q4 has been represented.**

### 19.6.3 Portuguese survey data (Division 9.a)

#### Portuguese Autumn Groundfish Survey (PtGFS-WIBTS-Q4)

This survey has been conducted by the Portuguese Institute for the Sea and Atmosphere (IPMA, ex-IPIMAR) and has the main objective to monitor the abundance and distribution of hake (*Merluccius merluccius*) and horse mackerel (*Trachurus trachurus*) recruitment (Cardador *et al.*, 1997). PtGFS-WIBTS-Q4 is performed along the Portuguese continental coast, extending from latitude 41°20'N to 36°30'N (ICES Division 9.a) from 20 to 500 m deep. For details on vessels characteristics, survey stratification and technical characteristics of fishing operations see ICES (2017b). The survey was not conducted in 2012 and 2019. In 2018, the survey had technical problems, and part of the stations were sampled using a commercial trawler and a different fishing net (using FGAV019 instead of NCT). In 2021 and 2022, the survey was conducted with a new vessel and the effect of vessel (or gear) could not be evaluated as more years of survey data are needed. The vessel (or gear) effect can be further included in the model used to estimate the skates and rays biomass indexes from this survey.

#### Portuguese crustacean surveys/Nephrops TV Surveys (PT-CTS (UWTV (FU 28-29)))

This survey has been conducted by the Portuguese Institute for the Sea and Atmosphere (IPMA) and the main objective is to monitor the abundance and distribution of the main crustacean species, namely Norway lobster (*Nephrops norvegicus*), rose shrimp (*Parapenaeus longirostris*) and red shrimp (*Aristeus antennatus*). The PT-CTS (UWTV (FU 28-29)) have been carried out during the 2nd quarter (May–July) of the year and covers the southwest coast (Alentejo, FU 28) and south coast (Algarve, FU 29) from 200–750 m. For details on vessels characteristics, survey stratification and technical characteristics of fishing operations see ICES (2018). No vessel was available to conduct this survey in 2004, 2010, 2012, 2019 and 2020 (ICES, 2012). In 2021 and 2022, the survey was conducted with a new vessel and although the gear used is the same, the trawling speed and the doors characteristics may affect the net geometry and the performance of the fishing operation so, more years of survey data are needed.

*Raja clavata* and *Raja brachyura* are the main skate species caught in Portuguese crustacean survey. These species showed an increase in the biomass trend from 2008 to 2022, doubling the catches from 26 to 53 kg/trip and from 15 to 32 kg/trip respectively (Figure 19.6.3.1).

Other species with significant catches in the survey are *Leucoraja naevus* and *R. montagui* with values with not a clear trend in the series and values from 0.6 to 18.2 kg/trip. ). *Leucoraja naevus* is found along the whole Portuguese coast, from 55 to 728 m deep, but is more common south of Cabo Espichel and in waters shallower than 500 m (Figure 19.6.3.2).

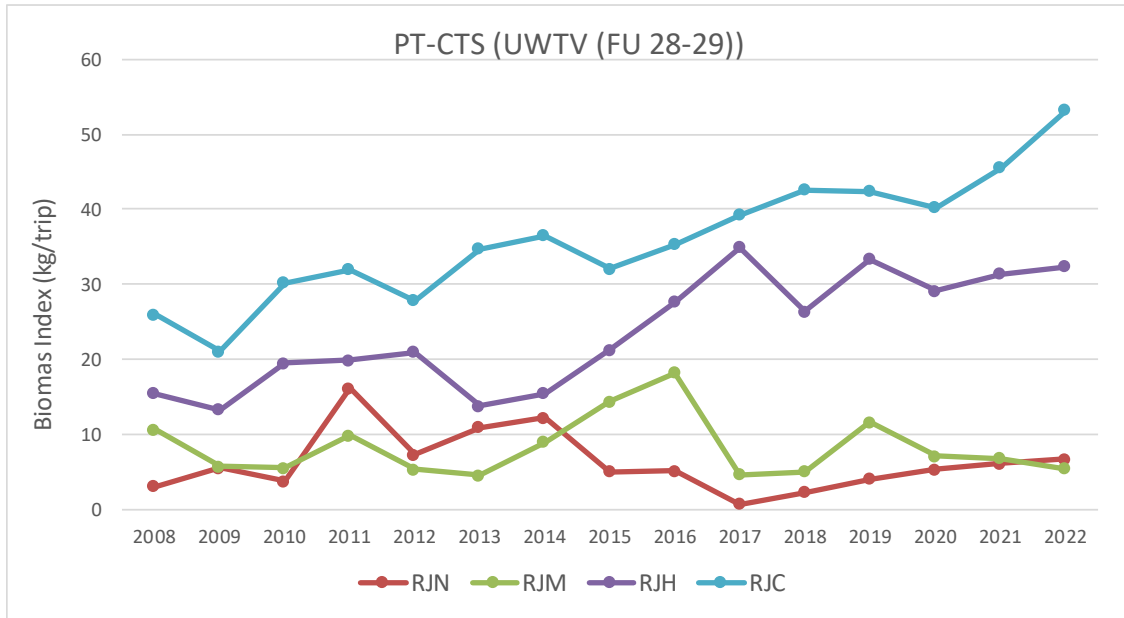


Figure 19.6.3.1. Skates in the Bay of Biscay and Iberian Waters. Biomass index (kg trip<sup>-1</sup>) on PT-CTS (UWTV (FU 28-29)) from 2008 to 2022 o *L. naevus* (RJN), *R. montagui* (RJM), *R. brachyura* (RJH) and *R. clavata* (RJC).

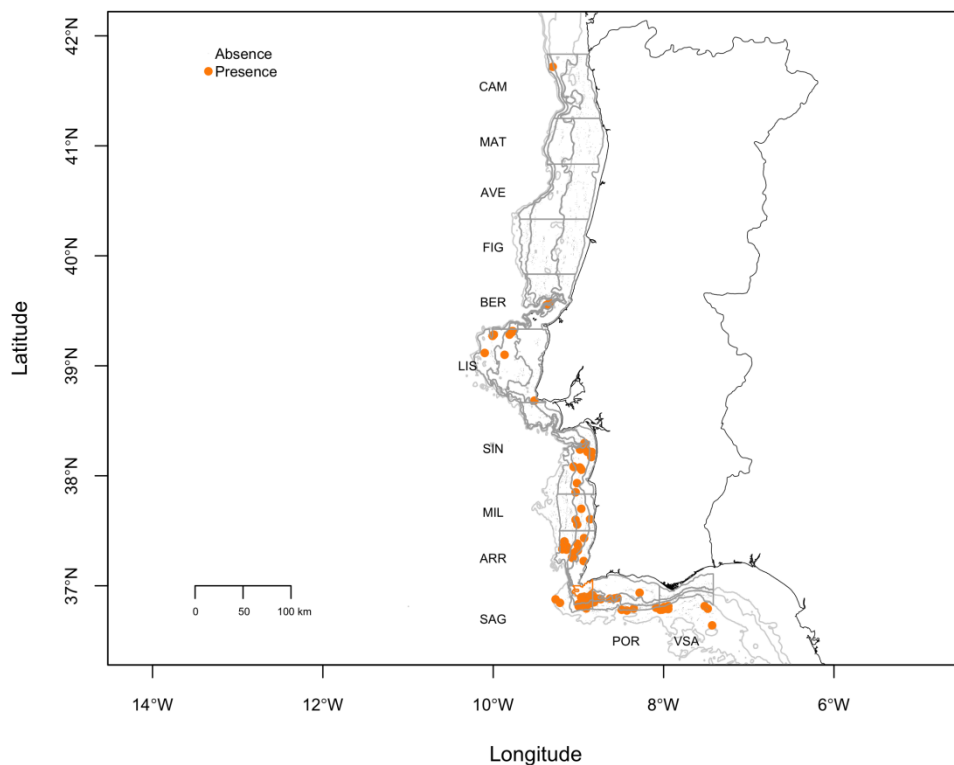




Figure 19.6.3.2. Skates in the Bay of Biscay and Iberian Waters. *Leucoraja naevus* distribution from 1981 to 2018 in the Portuguese Autumn Groundfish Surveys (PtGFS-WIBTS-Q4), and Portuguese crustacean surveys/*Nephrops* TV surveys (PT-CTS (UWTV (FU 28-29)).

## 19.7 Life history information

Available biological parameters of the main species from Portuguese Iberian waters are shown in table 19.7. In 2022, a new WD on the reproductive biology of *Raja brachyura* is available (Maia *et al.*, 2022a).

Data on the life-history traits of *R. undulata* in the Bay of Biscay are also available (Stéphan *et al.*, 2014). The length of first maturity was estimated to be 81.2 cm for males (n = 832) and 83.8 cm for females (n = 94). Exploratory growth analyses based on increase in size between tagging and recapture of a small number of tagged *R. undulata* for which size-at-recapture was recorded were consistent with growth estimates for the species in Portuguese waters. More information including diet and a trophodynamic model for the northern part of Division 9.a is available in the Stock Annex.

**Table 19.7. Skates in the Bay of Biscay and Iberian Waters. Life-history information. Biological parameter estimates available for skate species inhabiting Portuguese Iberian waters. Growth models: VBR – von Bertalanffy Growth Model; GG – Gompertz Growth Model.**

Species	TL range (cm)	L50 (cm) F	L50 (cm) M	I50 (years) F	I50 (years) M	Fecundity	Reproductive period	Growth model	Growth parameters estimates					Period	Region	Source	
									L $\infty$ (cm)	k (y <sup>-1</sup> )	t0 (years)	Lmax (cm)	lmax (years)				I $\infty$ longevity (years)
<i>R. undulata</i>	19.4–88.2	76.2	73.6	8.98	7.66	-	-	VBG	110.2	0.11	-1.58	88.2	13	-	1999–2001	Algarve	[1,2]
	23.7–90.5	83.8	78.1	9	8	-	Feb–May	VBG	113.7	0.15	-0.01	90.5	12	23.6	2003–2006	Centre	[3]
	32.0–83.2	-	-	-	-	-	-	VBG	119.3	0.12	-0.41	83.2	9	28.9	1999–2001	Algarve	[3]
	23.5–95.9	86.2 ±2.6	76.8 ±2.4	8.7 ±0.3	7.6 ±0.4	69.8 ±3.4	Dec–May	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2003–2013	North /Centre	[4]
<i>R. clavata</i>	14.3–91.3	-	-	-	-	-	-	VBG	128.0	0.112	-0.62	91.3	10	-	2003–2007	All	[5]
	12.5–105.0	78.4	67.6	7.5	5.8	136	May–Jan	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2003–2008	All	[6]
<i>R. brachyura</i>	37.4–106.1	97.9	88.8	-	-	-	Mar–Jul	VBG	110.51	0.12	0.26	106.1	-	-	2003–2004	All	[7]
	37.6–108.8	96.6	88.6	-	-	-	Mar–Jul	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2003–2012	North /Centre	[10]
	37–111	95.2	90.0	-	-	-	Apr–Sep	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2003–2020	All	[11]
<i>R. montagui</i>	25.2–76.1	59.4	50.4	-	-	-	Apr–Jun	VBG	75.9	0.23	0.16	76.1	7	-	2003–2004	All	[8]
	36.8–70.2	56.7	48.0	-	-	-	Apr–Jul	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2003–2012	All	[10]
<i>L. naevus</i>	12.7–71.8	55.6	56.5	-	-	-	-	VBG	79.2	0.24	0.12	71.8	-	-	2003–2004	All	[7]
	13.3–71.8	56.5	56.0	-	-	63	Jan–May	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2003–2010	All	[9]

[1] Coelho and Erzini, 2002; [2] Coelho and Erzini, 2006; [3] Moura *et al.*, 2008; [4] Serra-Pereira *et al.*, 2015; [5] Serra-Pereira *et al.*, 2008; [6] Serra-Pereira *et al.*, 2011; [7] Farias, 2005; [8] Serra-Pereira, 2005; [9] Maia *et al.*, 2012; [10] Pina Rodrigues, 2012; [11] Maia *et al.*, 2022a.

## 19.8 Exploratory assessments

Previous analyses of the skates in this ecoregion were based on commercial LPUE data and on survey data. Updated analyses were conducted (see below).

### 19.8.1 *Raja undulata* in Divisions 8.a-b

An exploratory assessment based on a mark-recapture approach using data from two project (RAIEBECA and RECOAM) collected from 2011 to mid-2014 in the Bay of Biscay contributed greatly to the knowledge of the spatial distribution, movements and biology of *R. undulata* (see ICES (2020) for a full account). An explanatory assessment using length-based indicators was performed for years 2016–2017 and 2018–2019 based on data collected by the onboard observation programme (DCF programme) on French fishing vessels in divisions 8.a-b (Baulier, 2020 WD). The assessment used the eight indicator ratios recommended by WKLIFE (ICES, 2015) and combined catch data from bottom trawls and trammel nets raised to the corresponding fleets. The reference indicator ratio  $L_{\text{mean}}/L_{F=M}$  (mean length of individuals larger than the length at first capture over the theoretical average length resulting from exploitation with a fishing mortality equal to natural mortality, which is a proxy for  $F_{\text{MSY}}$ ) suggested that the stock was exploited with a fishing mortality lower than  $F_{\text{MSY}}$ . However, due to deviations from assumptions necessary to the derivation of reference points (especially steady state and knife-edge selectivity), the actual difference between current fishing mortality and  $F_{\text{MSY}}$  could not be estimated. Nevertheless, this diagnosis appeared to be robust to the values survival rate of discards applied, the degree of smoothing of the length distribution and the time period considered (2016–2017 or 2018–2019).

### 19.8.2 *Raja brachyura* in Division 9.a

The stock rjh.27.9a has been assessed under category 3 (trend-based assessment) with input from standardized LPUE time-series as stock indicator. Considering data issues and best knowledge on species biology and distribution, trials with the stochastic production model in continuous-time (SPiCT) (Pedersen and Berg, 2017) were run in line with ICES WKLIFE X guidelines for category 3 stocks (ICES, 2021b). No significant bias or autocorrelation were found and both QQ-plot and the Shapiro test show normality in the residuals. Regarding the retrospective pattern, Mohn's  $\rho$  is  $<0.2$  for both  $B/B_{\text{MSY}}$  and  $F/F_{\text{MSY}}$  (of 0.029 for  $B/B_{\text{MSY}}$  and of -0.025 for  $F/F_{\text{MSY}}$ ). However, only three peels were included in the analysis due to the small time series. The checklist for the acceptance of a SPiCT model (Mildenberger *et al.*, 2020) was followed and no issues were found. Despite the large confidence intervals for  $B/B_{\text{MSY}}$  and  $F/F_{\text{MSY}}$  those do not span more than 1 order of magnitude. More tests and sensitivity analyses, particularly concerning the data to be used and the choice of priori distributions, may be considered in the future. Methodological procedures and results can be found in Maia *et al.* (2022d).

### 19.8.3 *Raja montagui* in Division 9.a

The stock rjm.27.9a has been assessed under category 3 (trend-based assessment) with input from standardized LPUE time-series as stock indicator. Considering data issues and best knowledge on species biology and distribution, trials with the stochastic production model in continuous-time (SPiCT) (Pedersen and Berg, 2017) were run in line with ICES WKLIFE X guidelines for category 3 stocks (ICES, 2021b). Preliminary essays were conducted and no significant bias or autocorrelation were found and both QQ-plot and the Shapiro test show normality in the residuals. Regarding the retrospective pattern, Mohn's  $\rho$  is  $<0.2$  for both  $B/B_{\text{MSY}}$  and  $F/F_{\text{MSY}}$

(of -0.022 for  $B/B_{MSY}$  and of 0.122 for  $F/F_{MSY}$ ). More tests and sensitivity analyses, particularly concerning the data to be used and the choice of priori distributions, may be considered in the future. Methodological procedures and results can be found in Maia *et al.* (2022c).

### **19.8.4 *Raja clavata* in Division 9.a**

The stock rjc.27.9a has been assessed under category 3 (trend-based assessment) with input from standardized LPUE time-series as stock indicator. Considering data issues and best knowledge on species biology and distribution, trials with the stochastic production model in continuous-time (SPiCT) (Pedersen and Berg, 2017) were run in line with ICES WKLIFE X guidelines for category 3 stocks (ICES, 2021b). Preliminary essays were conducted and no significant bias or autocorrelation were found and both QQ-plot and the Shapiro test show normality in the residuals. Regarding the retrospective pattern, Mohn's rho is  $<0.2$  for both  $B/B_{MSY}$  and  $F/F_{MSY}$  (of -0.045 for  $B/B_{MSY}$  and of -0.085 for  $F/F_{MSY}$ ). Despite the large confidence intervals for  $B/B_{MSY}$  and  $F/F_{MSY}$  those do not span more than 1 order of magnitude. More tests and sensitivity analyses, particularly concerning the data to be used and the choice of priori distributions, may be considered in the future. Methodological procedures and results can be found in Maia *et al.* (2022b).

## **19.9 Stock assessment carried out in 2022**

Given the limited time range of species-specific landing data, and that commercial and biological data are often limited, the status of most skate stocks in this ecoregion is based primarily on survey data and length distribution, following the Category 3 of the ICES approach to data-limited stocks. Further analyses of survey data (see Section 19.6) and catch rates were undertaken. Due to the absence of survey data for some of the species in this ecoregion (e.g. rjh.27.9a, rju.27.9a, rjm.27.9a), other approaches were adopted for the advice (e.g. LPUE or self-sampling data).

In this section, data and analyses are summarized by stock units for which ICES provides advice.

Although the assessments are carried biennially and were updated in 2022, data of the landings and the survey trend indexes have been updated in the WGEF 2023 for some of the stocks in the Division 9a: rjc.27.9a, rjm.27.9a, rju.27.9a and rjh.27.9a.

### **19.9.1 Thornback ray (*Raja clavata*) in divisions 8abd (Bay of Biscay). (rjc.27.8abd)**

The stock identity of thornback ray in the Bay of Biscay was considered by the Benchmark WKE-LASMO (ICES 2022b). Results of a genetic-study where more than 7000 individuals were genotyped to carry out a close-kin mark-recapture (CKMR) together with data on the geographical distribution of landings, location of catches from on-board observations and surveys and length distribution from surveys allowed to conclude that there was limited flow of individuals between thornback ray from divisions 8.abd and thornback ray from Division 8.c (see ICES 2022b for details). Genetics clearly showed further meta-population structure within divisions 8.abd. There was no or limited flow between individuals from the Gironde estuary and individuals from the offshore continental shelf and probably other local coastal populations. Nevertheless, quantitative assessment of every small populations is not feasible and the only way forward is to assess larger units comprising meta-populations, some of which being possibly disconnected such as the Gironde and offshore shelf. Assessing two stock units for 8.abd and 8.c (see section 19.9.2) separately is achievable because there is a survey index for each.

Following WKELASMO, this stock is assessed in the ICES stock data category 2 using a tailored Bayesian Surplus Production Model (BSPM). The model is described in the new stock annex for

rjc.27.8abd. The assessment used landings only data because dead discards were estimated to be 0.2-3% depending on the year.

The description of the index calculation is included in the stock annex.

The biomass index was derived from the EVHOE-WIBTS-Q4 survey [G9527] using DATRAS data for the period 2009 to 2021 (no data in 2017 due to vessel breakdown). Sampling strata were used to delineate the area where the bulk of catch was made in the commercial fisheries and in the survey. Sampling strata where the species was not caught in the survey or with only occasional catches were excluded. Hence only the two largest survey strata (GN4 and GN3) were retained for index calculation (Figure 19.9.1.1).

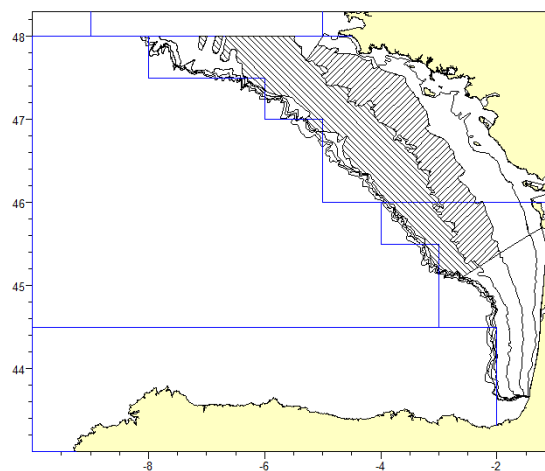
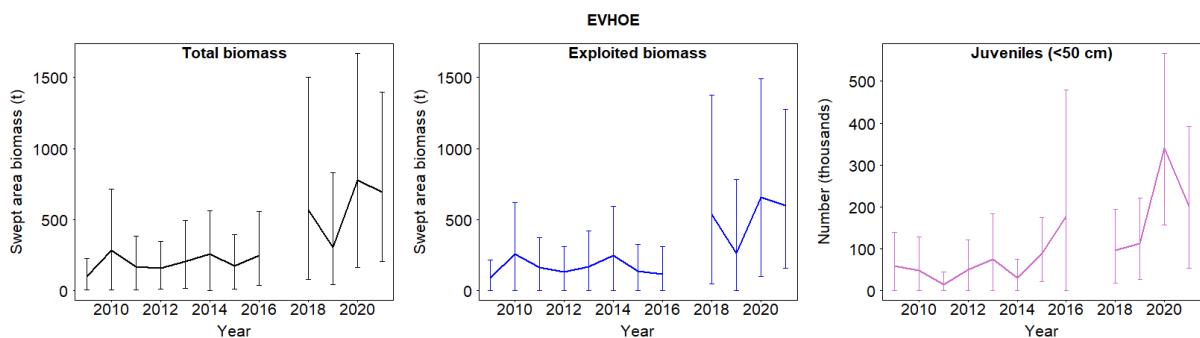


Figure 19.9.1.1. Strata used in the calculation of the survey index from EVHOE-WIBTS-Q4 [G9527].

The biomass index was calculated using a swept area approach where the biomass caught in the area swept by the sampling trawl was raised to the survey area for the two selected strata. Confidence intervals and the variance of the biomass index were obtained using a non-parametric data bootstrap conditioning on the total number of hauls in a given year and assigning resamples to the appropriate strata. Note that confidence intervals were rather symmetrical, justifying the use of a normal distribution for the observation error in the production model. Indices of total and exploited (individuals  $\geq 50$  cm TL) biomass and an index of abundance of juveniles (individuals  $< 50$  cm TL) were calculated (Figure 19.9.1.2). Only the index of total biomass was used in the assessment.



**Figure 19.9.1.2. Estimates of total biomass (tonnes), exploited biomass (tonnes) and juveniles (thousands) from EVHOE-WIBTS-Q4 [G9527], 95% CI from bootstrap.**

The indices of total and exploitable biomass were very similar (Figure 19.9.1.2), so that using one or the other is not expected to have a significant impact on the assessment results. Note that the recent increase in biomass seems to have been preceded by an increase in the abundance of juveniles in 2015-2016. Abundance of juveniles is higher in 2015-2021 than in preceding years.

**Table 19.9.1.1. Thornback ray in divisions 8.a-b and 8.d. Time-series of biomass index used for the advice, with 95% confidence intervals. The biomass per km<sup>2</sup> is also presented.**

Year	Biomass	Low 95% CI	High 95% CI	kg.km <sup>-2</sup>
2009	102	8	230	2.42
2010	284	12	705	6.73
2011	166	6	382	3.94
2012	156	11	348	3.69
2013	205	15	492	4.86
2014	257	0	608	6.11
2015	173	8	407	4.11
2016	247	38	530	5.87
2017				
2018	566	89	1439	13.43
2019	304	40	849	7.21
2020	776	188	1668	18.41
2021	692	236	1416	16.41

### Close-kin mark-recapture estimate

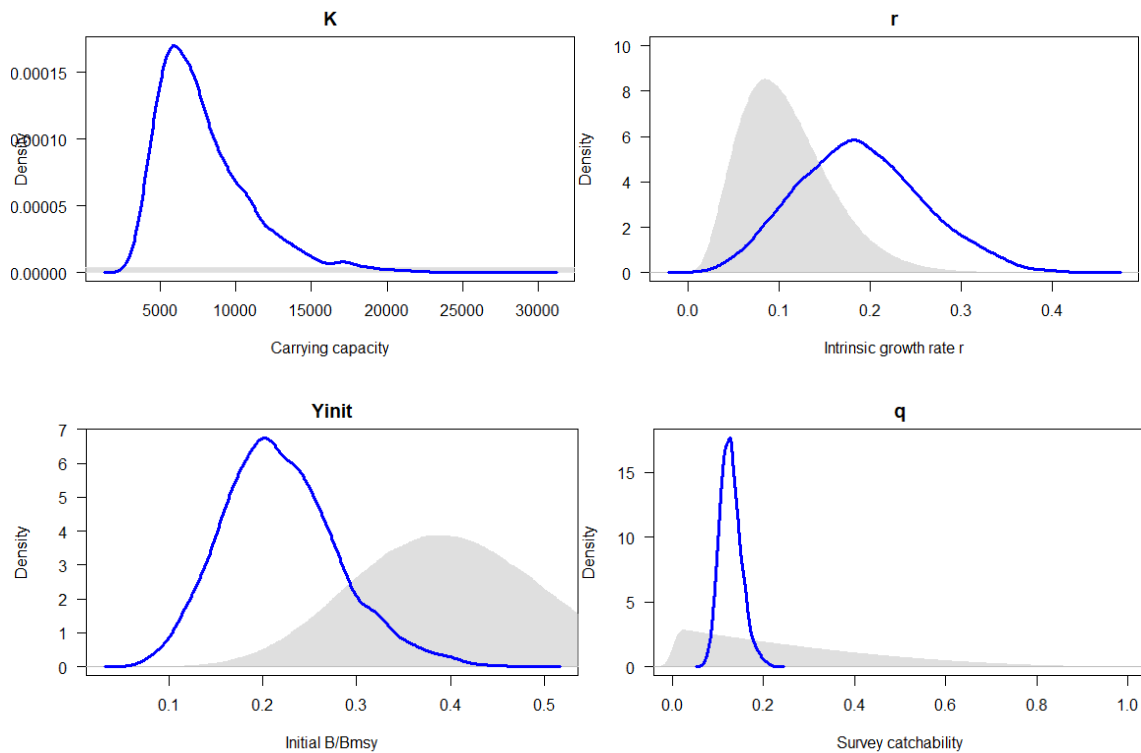
A close-kin mark-recapture (CKMR) estimate of abundance was available for this stock (see stock annex, Trenkel and Lorange, 2022 WD, Trenkel *et al.*, 2022). Total biomass was derived from estimated abundance for years 2012–2015 (Table 19.9.1.2).

**Table 19.9.1.2. Thornback ray in divisions 8.a-b and 8.d. CKMR derived estimate of total abundance.**

Year	Lower CI	Biomass	Higher CI
2012	558.84	1257.93	1957.02
2013	885.59	1271.99	1658.4
2014	921.45	1452.14	1982.84
2015	626.47	1781.2	2935.94

The model description, priors applied and the forecast method can be found in the stock annex.

In the 2022 assessment, convergence was achieved for all parameters and state variables. All posterior parameter distributions differed markedly from their prior distributions, indicating the important contribution made by the data (Figure 19.9.1.3).



**Figure 19.9.1.3. Prior (grey surfaces) and posterior (blue lines) distributions for parameter estimates for production model.**

Model parameter estimates are given in table 19.9.1.3. Reference points were directly derived from two estimated model parameters, intrinsic population growth rate  $r$  and carrying capacity  $K$ , using the median of the posterior distribution (Table 19.9.1.4).

**Table 19.9.1.3. Bayesian production model posterior parameter estimates and credible interval points.**

Parameter	Description	Posterior median	Lower 5 percentile	Upper 95 percentile
$r$	intrinsic population growth rate	0.19	0.08	0.31
$K$	carrying capacity (tonnes)	7932	4245	14043
$Q$	EVHOE survey catchability	0.13	0.09	0.17
$Y_{init}$	depletion rate in 2009 ( $B_{2009}/K$ )	0.22	0.13	0.33

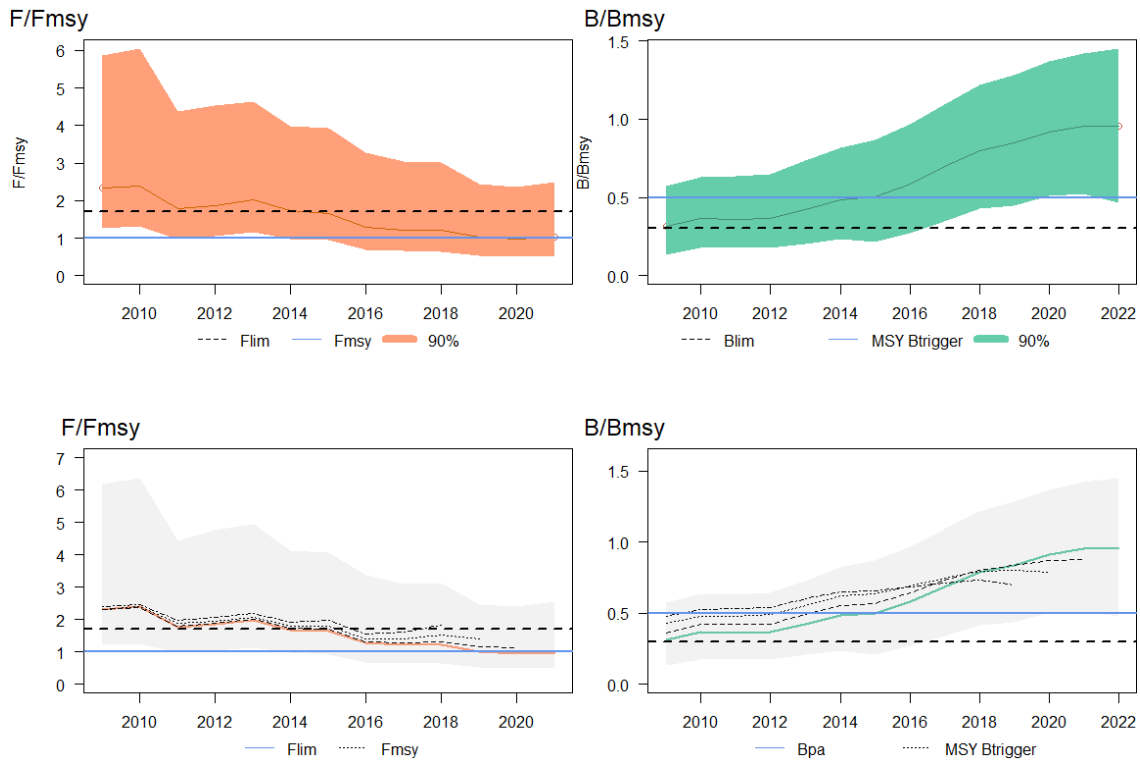
**Table 19.9.1.4. Thornback ray in divisions 8abd. Reference points, values and their technical basis.**

Framework	Reference points	Value	Technical basis
MSY approach	MSY $B_{trigger}$	$0.5 B_{MSY} = 0.25 K$	Relative value. $B_{MSY}$ is estimated directly from the assessment model and changes when the assessment is updated.
	$F_{MSY}$	$r/2$	Relative value. $F_{MSY}$ is estimated directly from the assessment model and changes when the assessment is updated
Precautionary approach	$B_{lim}$	$0.3 \times B_{MSY}$	Relative value. (equilibrium yield at this biomass is 50% of MSY)
	$F_{lim}$	$1.7 F_{MSY}$	Relative value (the $F$ that drives the stock to $B_{lim}$ )

Harvest rate estimates as well as total biomass estimates are presented relative to their maximums sustainable yield values, i.e.  $F/F_{MSY}$  and  $B/B_{MSY}$  respectively. The estimated biomass increased over time, while the harvest rate decreased, though neither were above respectively below the MSY value by 2020 (Figure 19.9.1.4 top). Note that the uncertainty of both biomass and harvest rate estimates is rather large but still possibly somewhat underestimated. As the length of the data time series increases, precision of estimates can be expected to improve.

The retrospective analysis which consisted of sequentially removing data corresponding to the three final years showed that estimates were sensitive to this, though median posterior estimates remained within the 80% credible of the full data time series (2009–2020) (Figure 19.9.1.4 bottom). This result is not surprising given the time trend in survey index that appeared at the end of the time series. Mohn's rho was 0.19 for biomass  $B$  and 0.09 for harvest rate  $F$ . Further, in this retrospective pattern, harvest rate  $F$  tends to be overestimated and the biomass in the last years to be underestimated when years are removed, suggesting that the model tends to underestimate the increasing trend of the stock.





**Figure 19.9.1.4. Top row: Relative estimates for harvest rate as a proxy for fishing mortality (left) and total biomass (right) as well as precautionary ( $p_a$ ) and MSY reference points. Median estimates (solid lines) and 80% credible intervals. Bottom row: Retrospective analysis of harvest rate (left) and total biomass (right) removing final years in model fitting. Grey surface and coloured continuous line correspond to full assessment results in top row.**

The results for the interim year projection under status quo harvest rate are given in table 19.9.1.5 and two-year ahead forecasts for status quo and  $F_{MSY}$  exploitation in tables 19.9.1.6 and 19.9.1.7. Applying the precautionary approach, the 35th percentile of projected catches was used for the two years of forecast. The uncertainty impacting projected catch distributions differs between the two presented catch scenarios. For the status quo harvest rate scenario, the uncertainty comes solely from uncertainty in projected biomass (harvest rate=catch/biomass). In contrast, the distribution of catches in the  $F_{MSY}$  scenario is impacted both by the uncertainty in projected biomass as well as the uncertainty in growth rate  $r$  ( $F_{MSY} = r/2$ ). Hence the uncertainty is wider in the second scenario leading to a substantial lower 35% catch percentile value despite the fact that the median harvest rate for this stock was close to  $F_{MSY}$  in recent years.

**Table 19.9.1.5. Thornback ray in division 8abd. The basis for the catch scenarios.**

Basis	Value	Notes
Median $F_{2022}/F_{MSY}$	1.02	harvest rate in 2022
Median $B_{2023}/MSY\ B_{trigger}$	1.91	$B_{2023}$ is at the beginning of the year 2023
Median $B_{2023}/B_{MSY}$	0.95	$B_{2023}$ is at the beginning of the year 2023
Catch (2022)	314	Assumed catch data for 2022 $HR_{statusquo}$

**Table 19.9.1.6 Thornback ray in division 8abd. Annual catch scenarios for 2023.**

Basis	Status quo harvest rate	F <sub>MSY</sub> Harvest rate
Catch (t)	309	254
Stock size (B <sub>2024</sub> /MSY B <sub>trigger</sub> ), median	1.92	1.96
Fishing mortality (F <sub>2023</sub> /F <sub>MSY</sub> ), median	0.97	0.79
Probability of B <sub>2024</sub> falling below B <sub>lim</sub>	0	0
Probability of B <sub>2024</sub> falling below B <sub>trigger</sub>	0	0
Probability of F <sub>2023</sub> exceeding F <sub>lim</sub>	0.17	0.11
Probability of F <sub>2023</sub> exceeding F <sub>MSY</sub>	0.48	0.35
% Advice change*	3	-16

**Table 19.9.1.7 Thornback ray in divisions 8abd. Annual catch scenarios for 2024.**

Basis	Status quo harvest rate	F <sub>MSY</sub> harvest rate
Catch (t)	304	257
Stock size (B <sub>2025</sub> /MSY B <sub>trigger</sub> ), median	1.93	1.99
Fishing mortality (F <sub>2024</sub> /F <sub>MSY</sub> ), median	0.94	0.79
Probability of B <sub>2025</sub> falling below B <sub>lim</sub>	0	0
Probability of B <sub>2025</sub> falling below B <sub>trigger</sub>	0	0
Probability of F <sub>2024</sub> exceeding F <sub>lim</sub>	0.18	0.12
Probability of F <sub>2024</sub> exceeding F <sub>MSY</sub>	0.46	0.35
% Advice change*	1	-15

\*Advice value relative to catch in 2021.

The stock is estimated to have creased over years 2009-2021 and the current biomass (at the start of year 2022) is estimated to be close to MSY level with  $B_{2022} = 0.96 \cdot B_{MSY}$  (Table 10).

### Catches

Landings were derived from InterCatch data and treated in the WGEF file for landings. Corrections of reported landings for this stock were minor or no-existent.

Dead discards were estimated to represent less than 5% of total catch and were therefore considered negligible for assessment purpose and ignored. Landings varied from 200 to 300 tonnes in 2009–2021. Landings before 2009 were considered unreliable.

**Table 19.9.1.8 Thornback ray in divisions 8.a-b and 8.d. Landings (tonnes).**

Year	Landings
2009	239
2010	246
2011	217
2012	227
2013	244
2014	241
2015	266
2016	211
2017	232
2018	273
2019	266
2020	266
2021	305

**Table 19.9.1.9. Thornback ray (*Raja clavata*) in divisions 8abd. Assessment summary. Biomass is relative to Bmsy at the end of the year and fishing mortality relative to Fmsy. High and low values are 90% probability intervals of the posterior distribution**

Year	Low_BB <sub>MSY</sub>	Value_BB <sub>MSY</sub>	High_BB <sub>MSY</sub>	Catch (tonnes)	Low_FF <sub>MSY</sub>	Value_FF <sub>MSY</sub>	High_FF <sub>MSY</sub>
2009	0.14	0.31	0.57	239	1.27	2.32	5.87
2010	0.18	0.37	0.63	246	1.3	2.39	6.04
2011	0.18	0.36	0.63	217	0.98	1.79	4.37
2012	0.17	0.37	0.65	227	1.06	1.88	4.54
2013	0.2	0.42	0.73	244	1.15	2.02	4.63
2014	0.24	0.48	0.82	241	0.98	1.72	3.97
2015	0.22	0.5	0.87	266	0.94	1.65	3.93
2016	0.27	0.58	0.97	211	0.7	1.29	3.28
2017	0.35	0.7	1.09	232	0.65	1.21	3.05
2018	0.43	0.8	1.22	273	0.64	1.21	3.01
2019	0.45	0.85	1.28	266	0.54	1.03	2.43
2020	0.51	0.92	1.37	266	0.51	0.97	2.37
2021	0.52	0.95	1.42	305	0.51	1.02	2.5
2022	0.47	0.96	1.45	NA	NA	NA	NA

## 19.9.2 Thornback ray (*Raja clavata*) in Division 8.c (Cantabrian Sea) (rjc.27.8c)

As commented in previous section 19.9.1 the stock identity of thornback ray in the Bay of Biscay was considered by the Benchmark WKELASMO (ICES 2022b). According to the information presented and discussed at WKELASMO (Lorance, 2022; Rodriguez-Cabello and Sánchez, 2022 two

stock units were split from rjc.27.8 stock. The last assessment was conducted in 2020 on rjc.27.8 stock therefore this is the first assessment on rjc.27.8c.

A proposal for assessing the status of the stock using the ICES rfb rule (ICES, 2021a) was presented at WGEF 2022. Following the ICES guidance on the parameter determination for the rfb rule (ICES, 2021a; ICES, 2022a), the input values for applying rfb rule are presented in Table 19.9.2.1. Following the rfb rule, the advised catches for this stock (rjc.27.8c) in 2023 and 2024 should not be more than 201 tonnes. If discard rates do not change from the average of the last 3 years (2019–2021), this implies landings of no more than 173 tonnes. The stability clause was considered and applied to limit the reduction in the catch advice to 30%. The discard rate (average 2019–2021) was 14%.

**Table 19.9.2.1. *Raja clavata* in ICES Division 8c (rjc.27.8c). Estimates used in the rfb rule, with comments.**

Variable	Estimate	Input data	Comment
r: Stock biomass trend	0.71	Stock-size indicator: Biomass survey index from North Spanish survey (SpNGFS-WIBTS-Q4)	Index A (2020*) = 3.28 kg.haul <sup>-1</sup> Index B (2017, 2018, 2019)= 4.62 kg.haul <sup>-1</sup>
b: Biomass safeguard $= \min(1, I_{y-1} / I_{\text{trigger}})$  $I_{\text{trigger}} = I_{\text{loss}} \omega$ Considering $\omega = 1.4$	1	Stock indicator; $I_{\text{loss}}$ , minimum estimate (1995) =  $I_{\text{trigger}} = 0.36$  $(\frac{I_{y-1}}{I_{\text{trigger}}} = 9.10)$	The biomass index has been fluctuating inter-annually since the beginning of the time series with an increasing trend.
m linked to von Bertalanffy k	0.95	k estimated from the Von Bertalanffy model adopted for the species	Growth rate estimates for this species in div. 9a is k=0.117
f: Fishing proxy	1.00	Length data collected under the sampling program raised to the overall landings. See Table 19.9.2.4	To overcome deficiencies in sampling in 2020 due to covid disruption, data from 2019–2021 was combined.
Stability clause	30%	Applied	Due to a decreased in 32.6%
$A_y \times r \times f \times b \times m$	201 t		Decrease of 30% in relation to the average catch of the last 3 years. Limited by the stability clause applied.

#### Stock indicator (for the definition of r and b)

The biomass index used for this stock corresponds to the standardized biomass index obtained from the annual bottom trawl survey carried out in autumn in the north of Spain (SpNGFS-WIBTS-Q4). Index values are presented in Table 19.9.2.2.

During the time series standardized since 1991, the biomass of *R. clavata* has an increasing trend from the beginning of the time series with inter-annual fluctuations (Figure 19.9.2.1). In 2021 a severe breakage of the ship used to conduct the survey, forced to change the vessel (Blanco et al., 2022). Although the gear used was the same standard gear used on previous surveys (SPNGFS-WIBTS-Q4) during the WGEF it was decided for precaution not to use the index of 2021 in the analysis.

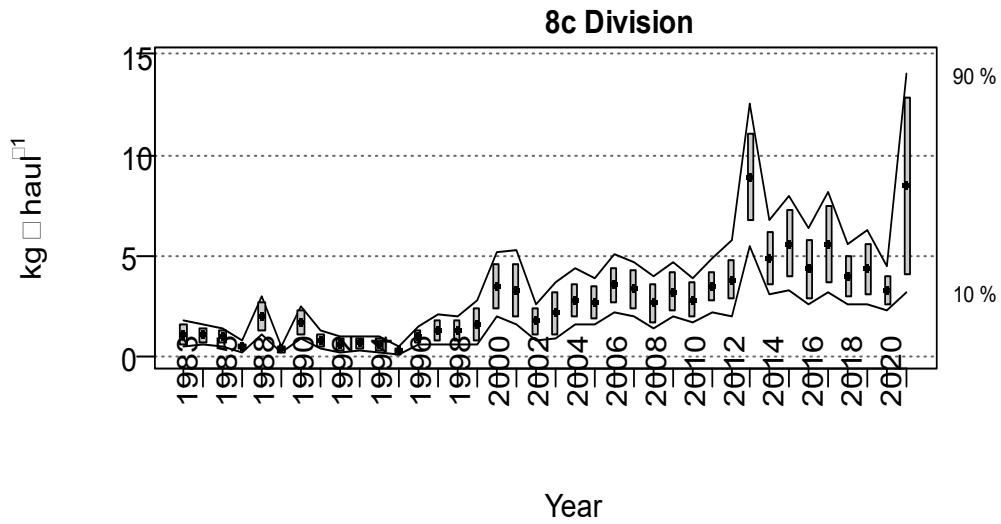


Figure 19.9.2.1. Skates in the Bay of Biscay and Iberian waters. Time-series of *Raja clavata* biomass indices, in ICES Division 8.c, during the North Spanish bottom trawl survey (1983–2021). Boxes mark parametric standard error of the stratified biomass index. Lines mark bootstrap confidence intervals ( $\alpha = 0.80$ , bootstrap iterations = 1000).

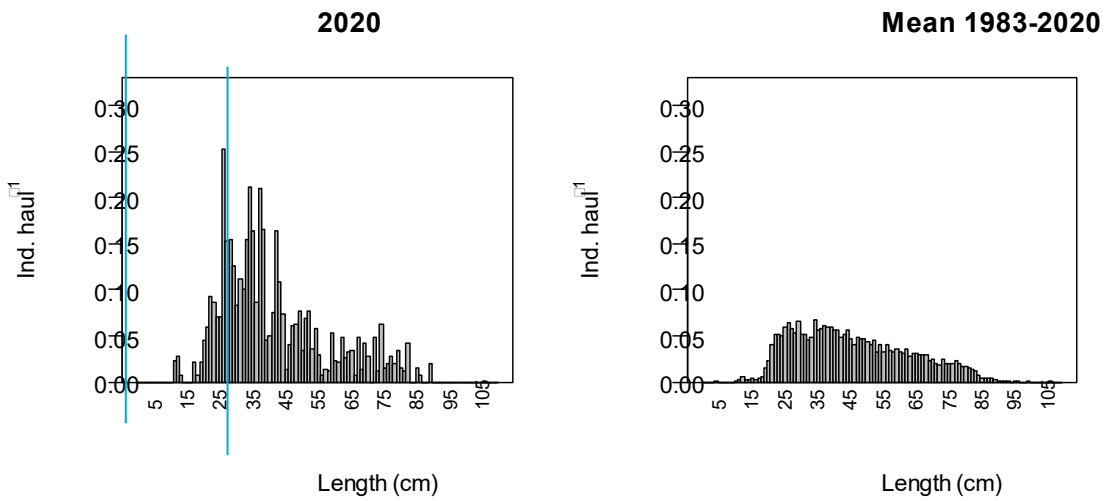


Figure 19.2.2.2. *Raja clavata* in ICES Division 27.8c. Landings, discards and yearly values of the stock indicator for the period 1997–2021. It corresponds to the biomass index from Spanish groundfish surveys (SpN-GFS-WIBTS-Q4).

**Table 19.9.2.3. Stock assessment summary: biomass index and catches**

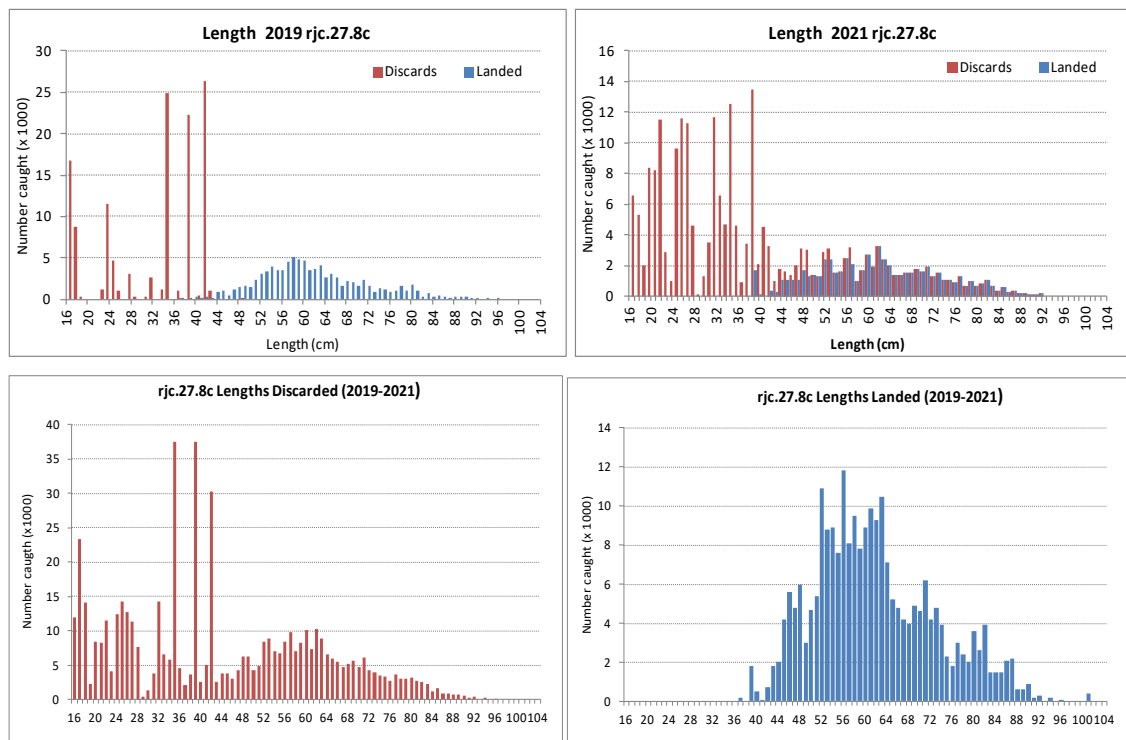
Year	Biomass index	Landings	Discards	Catch
1988	2.02			
1989	0.35			
1990	1.67			
1991	0.78			
1992	0.60			
1993	0.65			
1994	0.62			
1995	0.26			
1996	1.02			
1997	1.28			
1998	1.25			
1999	1.59			
2000	3.48			
2001	3.28			
2002	1.75			
2003	2.17			
2004	2.81			
2005	2.64			
2006	3.55			
2007	3.36			
2008	2.64			
2009	3.22	94.1	27.9	122.0
2010	2.81	186.1	30.7	216.7
2011	3.47	207.2	29.1	236.3
2012	3.82	223.7	21.1	244.9
2013	8.86	238.5	36.6	275.1
2014	4.86	248.0	72.8	320.8
2015	5.62	149.9	86.6	236.5
2016	4.33	161.2	61.2	222.4

Year	Biomass index	Landings	Discards	Catch
2017	5.57	136.4	13.0	149.4
2018	3.97	256.0	27.6	283.6
2019	4.33	247.4	31.4	278.8
2020	3.28	257.1	61.4	318.4
2021*		233.0	33.0	266.0

\*Biomass index in 2021 not used due to vessel change during the survey.

### Estimation of length-based indicators (F proxy)

Assessment was done using landings length distribution of *Raja clavata* in ICES division 8c for the Spanish fleet (mainly trawl fleet). Alternative analysis were done using discard length data (Rodríguez-Cabello and Velasco, 2022). Due to Covid 19 and other issues discard length data for 2019 was constrained and no length data was recorded in 2020 (Figure 19.9.2.3). Following WGEF 2022 discussions f proxy was determined using length frequency distributions of landings raised from combined sampling data from 2019 to 2021 (Figure 19.9.2.2).



**Figure 19.9.2.3. Skates in the Bay of Biscay and Iberian waters. Length frequency distributions of *Raja clavata* landed and discarded in 2021 and combined sampling data from 2019 to 2021.**

To determine F proxy, estimates of  $L_{inf}$ ,  $L_{50}$  and parameters of the weight-length relationship were used. These parameters are defined for this stock (Table 19.9.2.3). Length classes of 2 cm were adopted.

The length distributions obtained from surveys (Figure 19.9.2.3) ranged from 12 to 102 cm along the time series (Blanco et al., 2022). Maximum recorded length from commercial fishing sampling in Division 8c is 104 cm and in general the length distributions ranged from 30 to 90 cm for all gears combined. According to this the relation  $L_{obs} = L_{\infty} * 0.95$  (Froese & Binohlan, 2000; Froese, 2004) has been applied to estimate asymptotic length.

Length at first capture ( $L_c$ ), mean length ( $L_{mean}$ ), and F proxy ( $LF=M$ ) differ if considering catch length or only landings length frequency (Table 19.9.2.4). However, in both cases, data combined (2019-2021) provided a f proxy equal to or above 1.



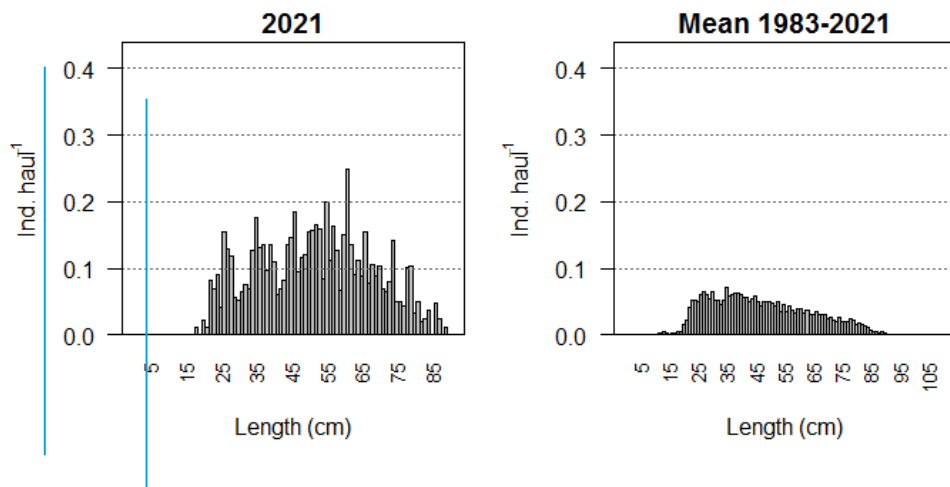


Figure 19.9.2.3. Skates in the Bay of Biscay and Iberian waters. Stratified length distribution of *R. clavata* obtained from Spanish bottom trawl surveys time-series in the last survey (left) and in the period 1983–2021 (right) in Division 8.c of the North Spanish Shelf.

Table 19.9.2.3. Biological parameters used for calculating the LBI parameters (rjc.27.8c).

Parameter	Value	Definition	Source
$L_{\infty}$ (cm)	110	Asymptotic average maximum length	$L_{inf}=L_{obs} / 0.95$ (Froese, 2004)
Lmat	73.2	Length at 50% maturity	Serra-Pereira et al., 2011
K	0.117	growth coefficient ( $year^{-1}$ )	Serra-Pereira et al., 2008
a	0.0018	Condition factor parameter of length-weight relationship	IEO Data base (DELASS)
b	3.33	Slope parameter of length-weight relationship	IEO Data base (DELASS)
M/K	1.5	ratio of natural mortality to von Bertalanffy growth rate	Jensen, 1996

Table 19.2.2.4. *Raja clavata* in ICES Division 8c stock (rjc.27.8c). Results summary of length based indicators obtained using the length distribution of catch (landings + discards) or landings only from the Spanish fleet for 2021 and for the period 2019-2021 combined.

Catch used	Year	Lc	Lmean	LFEM	Lmean_LFeM
Landings and discards	2021	17.0	43.85	40.25	1.09
Landings and discards	2019-2021	17.0	49.45	40.25	1.23
Landings	2021	47.0	63.50	62.75	1.01
Landings	2019-2021	45.0	61.71	61.25	1.01

### Fishery data

No previous catch advice was given as this stock resulted from the split of rjc.27.8 into rjc.27.8abd and rjc.27.8c following the WKELASMO benchmark (ICES, 2022b). Therefore, following ICES guidelines the catch average of the last three years was considered (Table 19.2.2.2). This value accounts for 288 tonnes.

Data used correspond to landings (t) of *Raja clavata* by the Spanish fleet operating in ICES Division 8c (Cantabrian Sea). Species-specific landings are available only from 2009. Discard estimates are also available from that period and are variable ranging from 8 % to 37% (Figure 19.9.2.4).

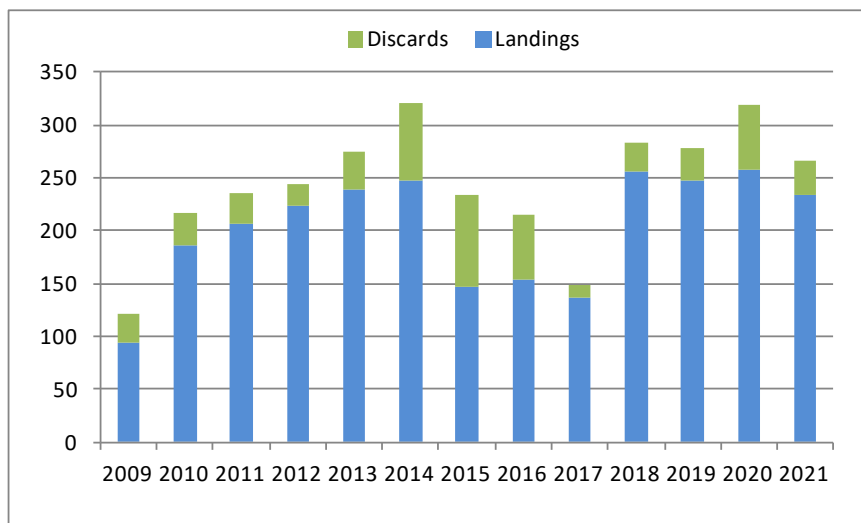


Figure 19.9.2.4. Landings and discards (tonnes) of *Raja clavata* by the Spanish fleet in Division 8.c for the period 2009–2021.

## 19.9.3 Thornback ray (*Raja clavata*) in Division 9.a (west of Galicia, Portugal, and Gulf of Cadiz) (rjc.27.9a)

### 19.9.3.1 Assessment carried out in 2022

For the period 2008–2022, *Raja clavata* landings are mainly derived from Portugal (Table 19.9.3.1), in particular from the polyvalent fleet which represents around 80% of the total annual landed weight of the species (Maia et al., 2022b). Spain landings only represent up to 31% for the period 2009–2022.

Discards information on skates and rays from the Portuguese polyvalent and bottom otter trawl segments operating in the ICES Division 9.a has been collected by the Data Collection Framework (EU DCF). The routine estimator used to estimate total discards in the Portuguese crustacean and demersal fish bottom otter trawl does not apply to species with occurrence lower than 30% of the trips sampled under the DCF Portuguese on-board sampling program, which is the case of all skate and ray species (Serra-Pereira et al., 2017). The low frequency of occurrence registered for the species in bottom otter trawl fisheries indicates that discards can be considered negligible (Fernandes, 2021). Regarding the polyvalent fleet, discards are known to take place but are not fully quantified and information available is insufficient to estimate discards of the species. Discard survival studies suggest that *R. clavata* has relatively high survivorship after capture (for details see Section 19.3.3.).

**Table 19.9.3.1. *Raja clavata* in ICES Division 27.9a. ICES estimates of landings by country (in tonnes) for the period 2009-2022. In 2003–2008 species-specific landings data are only presented for Portugal, as Spanish species-specific landings are not available in this period.**

Year	Spain	Portugal	Total
2003		351	351
2004		516	516
2005		480	480
2006		569	569
2007		472	472
2008		745	745
2009	29	739	768
2010	115	611	725
2011	139	811	950
2012	194	570	764
2013	166	643	809
2014	215	585	800
2015	120	578	697
2016	123	559	682
2017	124	620	744
2018	152	654	806
2019	181	621	802
2020	178	670	848
2021	174	768	942
2022	339	751	1090

A proposal for assessing the status of the stock using the ICES rfb rule (ICES, 2021a) was presented at WGEF 2022. Following the ICES guidance on the parameter determination for the rfb rule (ICES, 2021a; ICES, 2022a), the input values for applying rfb rule are presented in Table 19.9.3.2. Following rfb rule, the advised landings in 2023 and 2024 should not exceed 1296 t. Since the advice for 2023 and 2024 corresponds to a decrease of 24% in relation to the previous advice (Ay of 1717 t), the stability clause was not applied.

**Table 19.9.3.2. *Raja clavata* in ICES Division 27.9a. Estimates used in the rfb rule, with details and comments.**

Variable	Estimate	Input data	Comment
r: Stock biomass trend	0.82	Stock indicator (Commercial LPUE from Portuguese polyvalent fleet and ARSA surveys in Q2 and Q4, previously scaled by the respective long-term mean).	Index A (2020, 2021) = 1.31 Index B (2017, 2018, 2019) = 1.60
b: Biomass safeguard $= \min\left(1, \frac{I_{y-1}}{I_{\text{trigger}}}\right)$  $I_{\text{trigger}} = I_{\text{loss}} \omega$ (considering $\omega = 1.4$ )	1	Stock indicator; $I_{\text{loss}}$ , minimum estimate (1997) = 0.07 $I_{\text{trigger}} = 0.102$  $\left(\frac{I_{y-1}}{I_{\text{trigger}}} = 12.83\right)$	The stock shows a continuous increasing trend since the beginning of the series.
m linked to von Bertalanffy k	0.95	$k = 0.117 \text{ year}^{-1}$ ; estimated from the Von Bertalanffy growth model (Serra-Pereira et al., 2008)	$k$ estimated for males and females since no significant differences in growth parameters were observed between sexes (Serra-Pereira et al., 2008).
f: Fishing proxy	0.97	Length data collected under the sampling program from 2019 to 2021, raised to the overall landings.  $L_{\text{mean}} = 70.37 \text{ cm}$ $L_{F=M} = 72.5 \text{ cm}$	F proxy was estimated from length-based indicators. To overcome deficiencies in sampling in 2020 due to covid disruption, data from 2019-2021 was combined. See more information below.
$A_y \times r \times f \times b \times m$	1296 t		Decrease of 24% in relation to the previous advice ( $A_y$ of 1717 t). The stability clause was thus not applied.

Up to 2018, this stock was assessed using data derived from the Spanish ARSA survey in Gulf of Cadiz (SpGFS-GC-WIBTS-Q1 and SpGFS-GC-WIBTS-Q4, Figure 19.9.3.1) and the Portuguese Autumn Groundfish Surveys (PtGFS-WIBTS-Q4). However, because of the problems with the PtGFS-WIBTS-Q4 survey data availability for the period 2018–2020 (see details in Section 19.6.3) and uncertain future, an alternative assessment approach using a standardized commercial LPUE series was reviewed and accepted at WSKATE (ICES, 2021b).

Data used as stock indicator corresponds to the mean normalized biomass index from Spanish groundfish surveys in the Gulf of Cadiz (SpGFS-GC-WIBTS-Q1&Q4, Figure 19.9.3.1), averaged with the normalized LPUE standardized index from the Portuguese polyvalent fleet and the MSY related indicator ( $L_{\text{mean}}/L_{F=M}$ ) as F proxy (see details above).

In the ARSA survey time series (1993–2020), *R. clavata* is one of the most abundant skate species. In 2021, the survey was not performed. In 2020, the biomass of *R. clavata* decreased compared to 2019, particularly in the autumn survey, however it remains amongst the high values of the time series. The species shows an increasing trend in biomass since 1997, with the highest values reached in 2022, although since 2013 the biomass shows large year-to-year variations. The values in 2022 increased slightly for *R. clavata* remaining close to 2.8 kg haul (Figure 19.9.3.1).

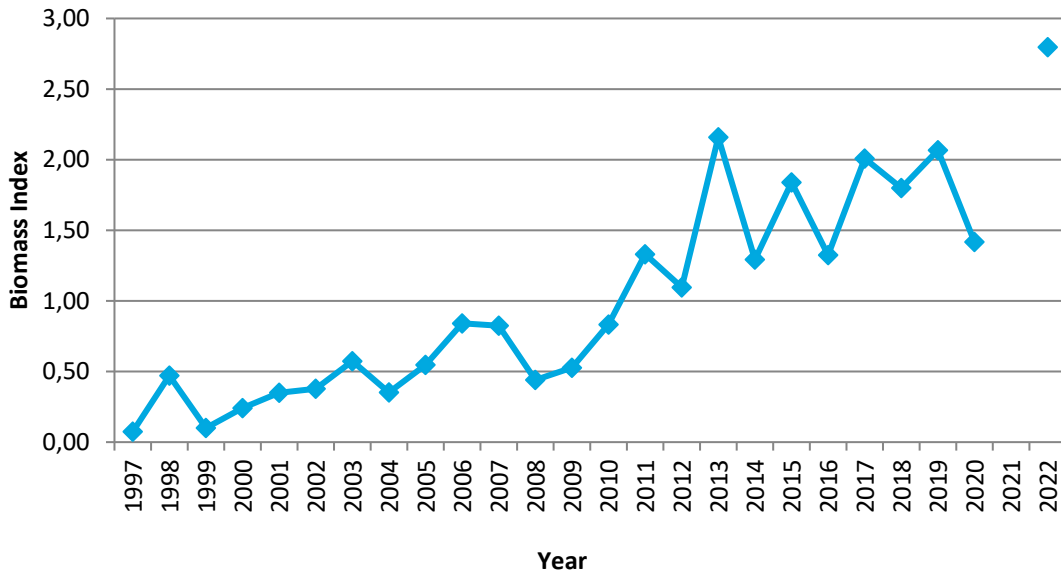


Figure 19.9.3.1. *Raja clavata* in ICES Division 27.9a. Mean normalized biomass index from Spanish groundfish surveys (SpGFS-GC-WIBTS-Q1&Q4) for the period from 1997 to 2022.

Details on the LPUE estimation methodology can be found in Serra-Pereira *et al.* (2020) and ICES (2021c). In 2023, the model was updated (explained variance = 0.81, AIC = 815289). The best model selected with the updated dataset included the variables years, quarter, landing port, vessel size, fishing seasonality on skates and fishing gear (trammel nets or gillnets). More details and results can be found in Maia *et al.*, 2022b WD. The mean annual biomass index (kg/trip) scaled by the overall mean for 2021–2022 (1.37) was 15% greater than the observed in the preceding three years (2018–2020: 1.16) (Figure 19.9.3.2).

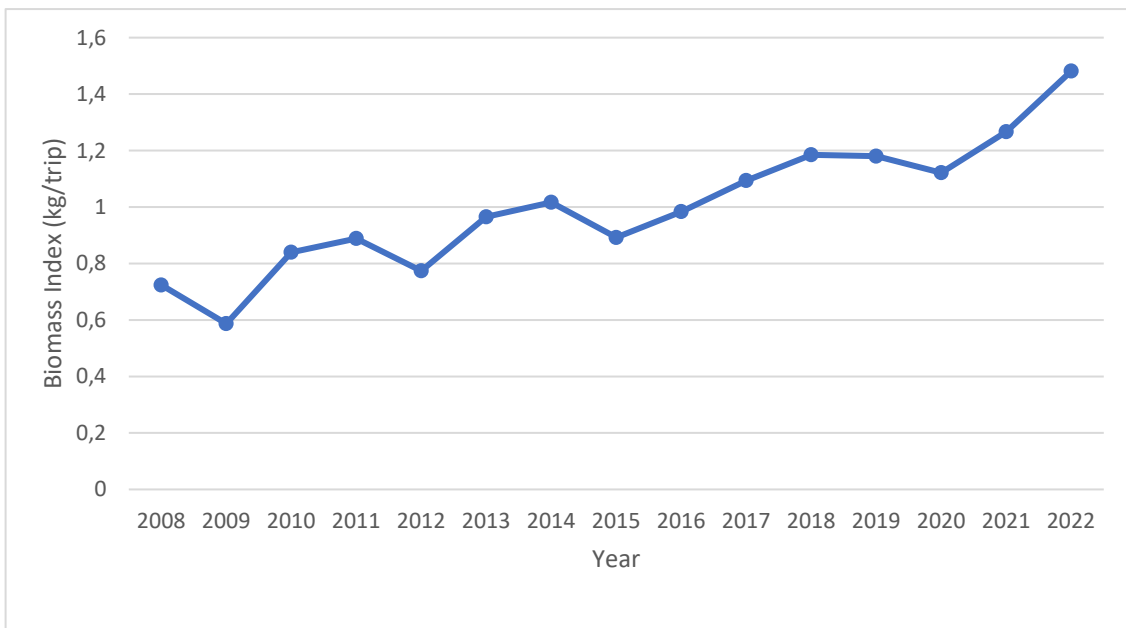


Figure 19.9.3.2. *Raja clavata* in ICES Division 27.9a. Standardized LPUE from the polyvalent segment for the period 2008–2022.

Annual length frequency distributions for the Portuguese combined trawl and polyvalent landings are presented in Figure 19.9.3.3. Spanish landings length data were not used since it is only available for trawlers, as well as discards length data that only represents ~1% of the stock catches in weight. Due to Covid related data collection constraints, data for the period 2019-2021 was combined, according to WGEF decision.

To determine F proxy based on length-based indicators, estimates of  $L_{inf}$  (128 cm; Serra-Pereira et al., 2008),  $L_{50}$  (78.4 cm; Serra-Pereira et al., 2011) and parameters from the weight-length relationship  $a=0.0052$  and  $b=3.05$  (Serra-Pereira et al., 2010) were used. Length classes of 4 cm were adopted as this creates a smooth and unimodal distribution. LBI analysis resulted in a  $L_c=42.0$  cm,  $L_{mean}=68.74$  cm and  $L_{F=M}=63.5$  cm for 2022.

The  $L_c$  estimated value of the exploited length frequency population is constrained by the Portuguese technical measures adopted, in particular the minimum landing size (MLS). Therefore, the  $L_c$  estimate is high and is likely to be biased against the  $L_c$  of the fishing gears capturing the species. The adoption of a MLS leads to the increase of smaller specimens discarding. Survivorship of *R. clavata* after capture with trammel nets in 9a is estimated as 54% (Castelo, 2021).

The ratio of mean length in the catch over  $F_{MSY}$  proxy ( $L_{mean}/L_{F=M}$ ) suggests that the stock is exploited at sustainable levels ( $L_{mean}/L_{F=M}=1.08$  in 2022), with values above or very close to 1 (Table 19.9.3.3) (for details on procedures see Maia et al., 2022c).

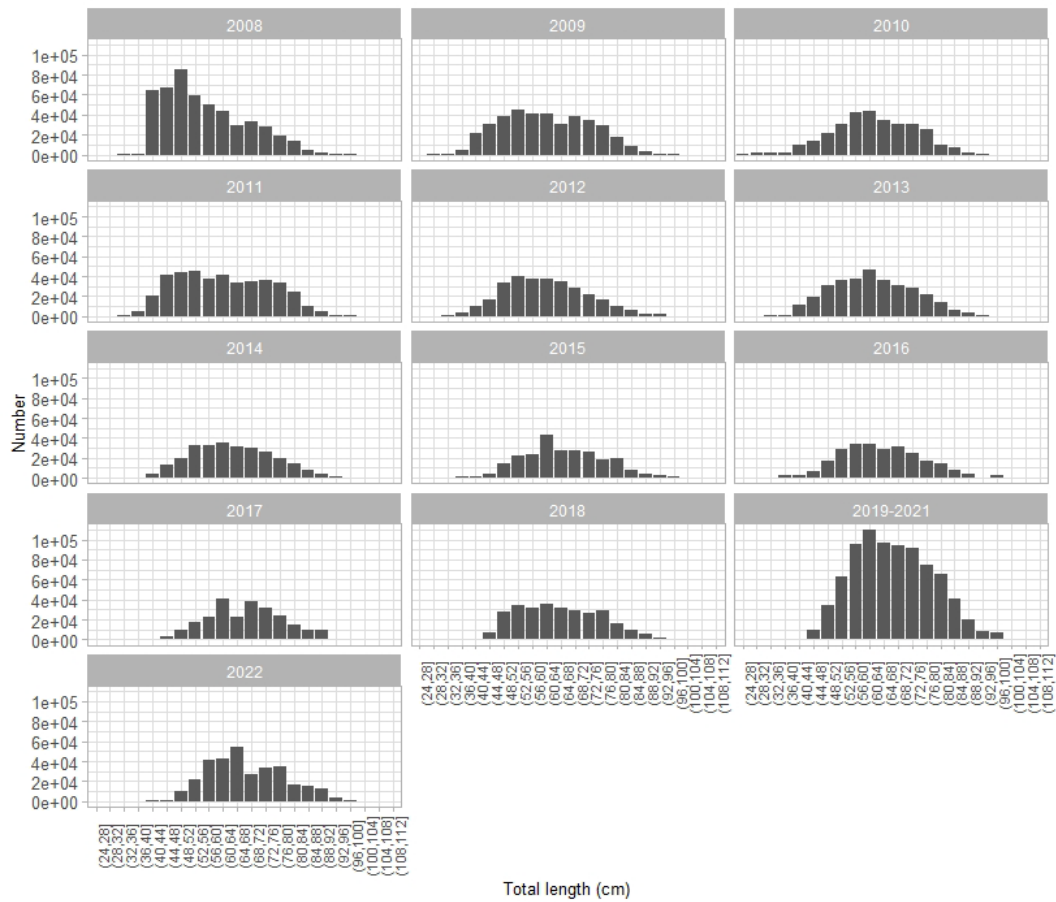


Figure 19.9.3.3. *Raja clavata* in ICES Division 27.9a. Length–frequency distribution (4 cm length classes) for the period for 2008-2022 with polyvalent and trawl fleets combined. Data for the period 2019-2021 is combined. Numbers of individuals correspond to raised numbers.

Table 19.9.3.3. *Raja clavata* in ICES Division 27.9a. Indicator table for LBI analysis for the period 2008-2022.

Year	Conservation				Optimizing Yield	MSY
	$L_c/L_{mat}$	$L_{25}/L_{mat}$	$L_{max}/L_{inf}$	$P_{mega}$	$L_{mean}/L_{opt}$	$L_{mean}/L_{FeM}$
	>1	>1	>0.8	>30%	~1	≥1
2008	0.54	0.61	0.65	0.00	0.67	0.90
2009	0.59	0.67	0.67	0.00	0.75	0.96
2010	0.38	0.71	0.67	0.00	0.74	1.16
2011	0.59	0.66	0.68	0.00	0.76	0.97
2012	0.64	0.68	0.67	0.00	0.76	0.93
2013	0.64	0.70	0.68	0.00	0.77	0.94
2014	0.38	0.71	0.69	0.00	0.76	1.19
2015	0.69	0.75	0.71	0.01	0.81	0.96
2016	0.64	0.72	0.70	0.01	0.78	0.96
2017	0.74	0.78	0.71	0.00	0.84	0.95
2018	0.64	0.72	0.71	0.01	0.79	0.97
2019-2021	0.69	0.77	0.72	0.01	0.82	0.97
2022	0.54	0.77	0.72	0.02	0.81	1.08

### 19.9.4 Cuckoo ray (*Leucoraja naevus*) in subareas 6-7 (Celtic Sea and West of Scotland) and divisions 8.a-b,d (Bay of Biscay) (rjn.27.678abd)

This stock is addressed in Section 18, Skates and rays in the Celtic Seas

### 19.9.5 Cuckoo ray (*Leucoraja naevus*) in Division 8.c (Cantabrian sea) (rjn.27.8.c)

A proposal for assessing the status of the stock (rjn.27.8c) using the ICES rfb rule (ICES, 2021a) was presented at WGEF 2022. Following the ICES guidance on the parameter determination for the rfb rule (ICES, 2021a; ICES, 2022a), the input values for applying rfb rule are presented in Table 19.9.5.1. According to the assessment, the advised catches for this stock (rjn.27.8c) in 2023 and 2024 should not be more than 38 tonnes. If discard rates do not change from the average of the last 5 years (2017–2021), this implies landings of no more than 36 tonnes. The stability clause was not applied since catch advised have decreased by less than 20%. The discard rate (average 2017-2021) was 14%.

**Table 19.9.5.1. *Leucoraja naevus* in ICES Division 8c (rjn. 27.8c). Estimates used in the rfb rule, with comments.**

Variable	Estimate	Input data	Comment
r: Stock biomass trend	0.94	Stock-size indicator: Biomass survey index from North Spanish survey (SpNGFS-WIBTS-Q4)	Index A (2020*) = 0.60 kg.haul <sup>-1</sup> Index B (2017, 2018, 2019)= 0,64 kg.haul <sup>-1</sup>
b: Biomass safeguard $= \min(1, I_{y-1} / I_{\text{trigger}})$ $I_{\text{trigger}} = I_{\text{loss}} \omega$ Considering $\omega = 1.4$	1	Stock indicator; $I_{\text{loss}}$ , minimum estimate (1991) = $I_{\text{trigger}} = 0.07$ $(\frac{I_{y-1}}{I_{\text{trigger}}} = 8.60)$	The biomass index has been fluctuating inter-annually since the beginning of the time series with an increasing trend reaching the top of the time series in 2017.
m linked to von Bertalanffy k	0.95	k estimated from the Von Bertalanffy model adopted for the species.	
f: Fishing proxy	1.00	Length data collected under the sampling program raised to the overall landings. No length data was available in 2020 Length data 2019-2021 combined. $L_{\text{mean}}=53.8 \text{ cm}$ , $L_{F=M}= 53.6 \text{ cm}$	To overcome deficiencies in sampling in 2020 due to covid disruption, data from 2019-2021 was combined.
$A_y \times r \times f \times b \times m$	38 t		Decrease of 10% in relation to the previous advice ( $A_y$ of 42 t). The stability clause was thus not applied.



### Stock indicator (for the definition of $r$ and $b$ )

The status of this stock in Division 8.c is evaluated based on survey data from the Spanish (IEO) survey. The biomass index used for this stock corresponds to the standardized biomass index obtained from the annual bottom trawl survey carried out in autumn in the north of Spain (SpNGFS-WIBTS-Q4).

During the time series standardized since 1991 the biomass of *L. naevus* has been fluctuating between 0.2 and 0.6 (kg.haul<sup>-1</sup>) with an increasing trend reaching the top of the time series in 2017 (Figure 19.9.5.1). More information on survey data, species distribution, etc. (Blanco *et al.*, 2022; ICES, 2021b) In 2021 the survey was carried out with two different vessels, due to technical problems with the ordinary vessel for that reason the index of 2021 has not been used in the analysis.

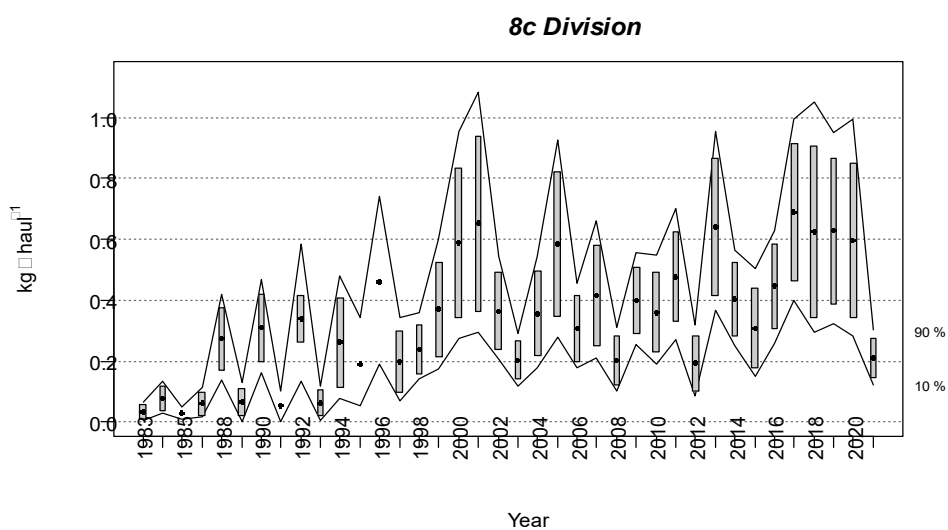


Figure 19.9.5.1. Evolution of *Leucoraja naevus* biomass index (kg.haul<sup>-1</sup>) during the north Spanish bottom trawl survey (ICES Division 8c). Boxes mark parametric standard error of the stratified biomass index and black lines mark bootstrap confidence intervals ( $\alpha = 0.80$ , bootstrap iterations = 1000).

Since the last assessment conducted in 2020, the advice for this stock is given as catch advice instead of landings advice which was done in previous assessments (issue 2018). This is due to the ADG recommendation of including discard data when this information is available and reliable. Data on discards were available for this stock since 2015 and although variable, it is considered reliable and thus has been included in the assessments (see section below, Figure 19.9.5.3).

### Estimation of length-based indicators (F proxy)

Following WGEF 2022 discussions and to consolidate length frequency data due to Covid-19 data collection constraints,  $f$  proxy was determined using length frequency distribution based on combined sampling landing data from 2019 to 2021 (Figure 19.9.5.2). Not landings length frequency distribution was available in 2020.

To determine F proxy based on length-based indicators estimates of  $L_{inf}$ ,  $L_{50}$  and  $a$  and  $b$  parameters from the weight-length relationship were used. These parameters are defined for this stock (Table 19.9.5.2). Length classes of 2 cm were adopted. LBI analysis resulted in a  $L_c = 46.5$  cm,  $L_{mean} = 53.79$  cm and  $LF = M = 53.63$  cm for the period 2019-2021 (Table 19.9.5.3).

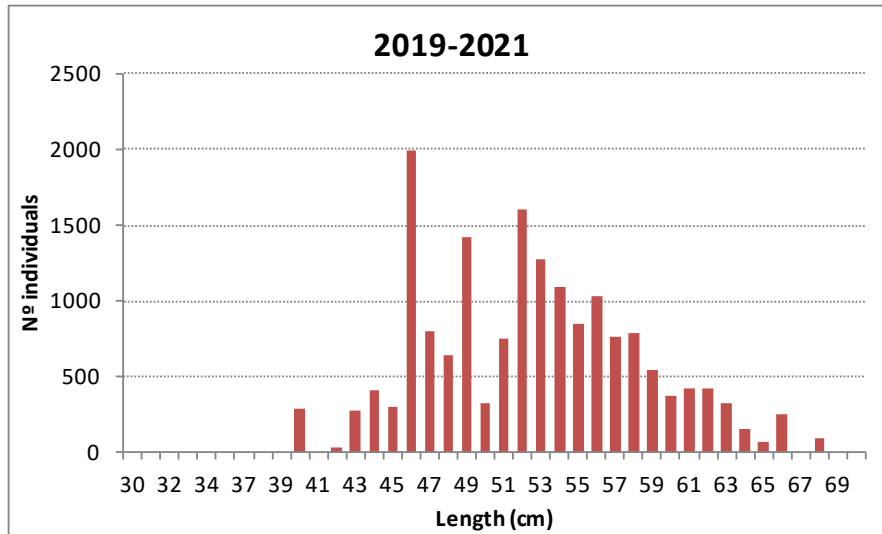


Figure 19.9.5.2. *Leucoraja naevus* in ICES Division 27.8c. Length–frequency distribution (2 cm classes) for the period 2019-2021 (combined).

Table 19.9.5.2. Biological parameters used for calculating the LBI parameters (rjn.27.8c).

Parameter	Value	Definition	Source
$L_{\infty}$ (cm)	75	Asymptotic average maximum length	$L_{inf} = L_{obs} / 0.95$ (Froese, 2004)
$L_{mat}$	56.2	Length at 50% maturity	Maia et al., 2012
a	0.0027	Condition factor parameter of length-weight relationship	IEO Data base (DELASS)
b	3.204	Slope parameter of length-weight relationship	IEO Data base (DELASS)

Table 19.9.5.3. *Leucoraja naevus* stock in ICES Division 8c (rjn.27.8c). Results of length-based indicators obtained from landings length frequency of the Spanish fleet (2019-2021 combined). No length data available for 2020.

Year	$L_c/L_{mat}$	$L_{25}/L_{mat}$	$L_{max}/L_{inf}$	$P_{\omega}$	$L_{mean}/L_{opt}$	$L_{mean}/L_{FeM}$	$L_c$	$L_{mean}$	$L_{FeM}$
2019-2021	>1	>1	>0.8	>30%	~1	≥1	Lc	Lmean	LFeM
	0.83	0.86	0.87	0.35	1.08	1	46.5	53.8	53.6

### Fishery Data

Data used correspond to landings (t) of *Leucoraja naevus* mainly from Spanish fleet which majority operates in this area ICES Div. 8c. Some landings are also reported by the French fleet usually fluctuating from 0 to 0.2 tonnes. Species-specific landings are available only since 2009 (Figure 19.9.5.3). Discard data for the Spanish fleet is available since 2015, discards are relatively low but highly variable (Figure 3).

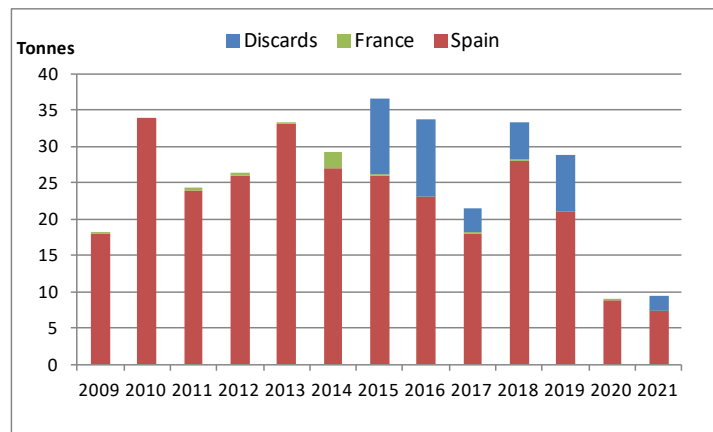


Figure 19.9.5.3. Landings (tonnes) of cuckoo ray (*Leucoraja naevus*) in Div.8c (rjn.27.8c) and discards of the Spanish fleet.

### 19.9.6 Cuckoo ray (*Leucoraja naevus*) in Division 9.a (west of Galicia, Portugal, and Gulf of Cadiz) (rjn.27.9a)

The rfb rule (ICES, 2021a) was applied for the first time during the WGEF 2022 to assess the status of cuckoo ray (*Leucoraja naevus*) in Iberian waters ICES Division 9.a (stock rjn.27.9a).

Following the ICES guidance on the parameter determination for the rfb rule (ICES, 2021a; ICES, 2022), the input values for applying rfb rule on rjn.27.9a are presented in Table 19.9.6.1.

Previous catch advice (Ay) was 120 t. catches corresponding to 84 t. landings. According to the rfb guidelines the catch advice for 2023 and 2024 should not exceed 84 t. which implies landings no more than 71 t. This corresponds to a decrease of 30 % compared to previous advice since the stability clause was considered and applied to limit the reduction in landings advice to 30%.

**Table 19.9.6.1. *Leucoraja naevus* in ICES Division 9a (rjn.27.9a). Estimates used in the rfb rule, with comments.**

Variable	Estimate	Input data	Comment
r: Stock biomass trend	0.57	Stock-size indicator: Biomass survey index and standardized commercial LPUE from Portuguese polyvalent fleet.	Index A (2020, 2021) = 0.82 Index B (2017, 2018, 2019) = 1.433
b: Biomass safeguard $= \min(1, I_{y-1} / I_{\text{trigger}})$ $I_{\text{trigger}} = I_{\text{loss}} \omega$ Considering $\omega = 1.4$	1	Stock indicator; $I_{\text{loss}}$ , minimum estimate (1998) = $I_{\text{trigger}} = 0.035$ $(\frac{I_{y-1}}{I_{\text{trigger}}} = 13.57)$	The series shows an increasing trend since its beginning but in the last 2 years index values decreased.
m linked to von Bertalanffy k	0.95	k estimated from the Von Bertalanffy model adopted for the species.	
f: Fishing proxy	1.14	Length data collected under the sampling program raised to the overall landings. Length data were from 2019 to 2021. $L_{\text{mean}}=56.4$ cm, $L_{F=M}= 49.5$ cm	To overcome deficiencies in sampling in 2020 due to covid disruption, data from 2019-2021 was combined. See more information below.
$A_y \times r \times f \times b \times m$	84 t		The stability clause was applied to limit the reduction in landings advice to 30% in relation to the previous catch advice ( $A_y$ of 120 t).

**Stock indicator (for the definition of r and b)**

The stock indicator is given by the average of the normalized biomass index from Spanish groundfish surveys in Gulf of Cadiz (SpGC-GFS-WIBTS-Q1-Q3) and the standardized LPUE series from the Portuguese polyvalent fleet (presented, reviewed and accepted at WSKATE; ICES, 2021b). The index is presented in Table 19.9.6.2 and Figure 19.9.6.1. In 2021 only data from LPUE was available since the Spanish survey was not conducted due to a vessel breakdown (Rodríguez-Cabello *et al.*, 2022).

**Table 19.9.6.2. *Leucoraja naevus* in ICES Division 27.9a. Landings and yearly values of the stock indicator, it corresponds to the average of the normalized biomass index from Spanish groundfish surveys in Gulf of Cadiz (SpGC-GFS-WIBTS-Q1-Q3) and the Portuguese LPUE series.**

Year	Landings	Stock Indicator	Survey index	LPUE index
1998		0.025	0.025	
1999		0.114	0.114	
2000		0.060	0.060	
2001		0.172	0.172	
2002	12.7	0.548	0.548	
2003	18.0	0.494	0.494	
2004	113.0	0.640	0.640	
2005	42.8	0.816	0.816	
2006	50.8	1.262	1.262	
2007	78.8	0.481	0.481	
2008	49.8	0.423	0.418	0.429
2009	53.1	0.920	0.988	0.853
2010	59.4	0.686	0.551	0.821
2011	68.0	1.772	0.656	2.887
2012	52.6	1.290	1.309	1.272
2013	28.6	1.948	2.586	1.309
2014	34.4	1.345	0.782	1.908
2015	19.7	1.252	1.750	0.755
2016	58.6	1.093	1.278	0.909
2017	40.7	1.423	2.769	0.077
2018	24.8	1.552	2.816	0.287
2019	38.4	1.324	2.026	0.622
2020	23.0	0.687	0.459	0.914
2021	22.7	0.956		0.956

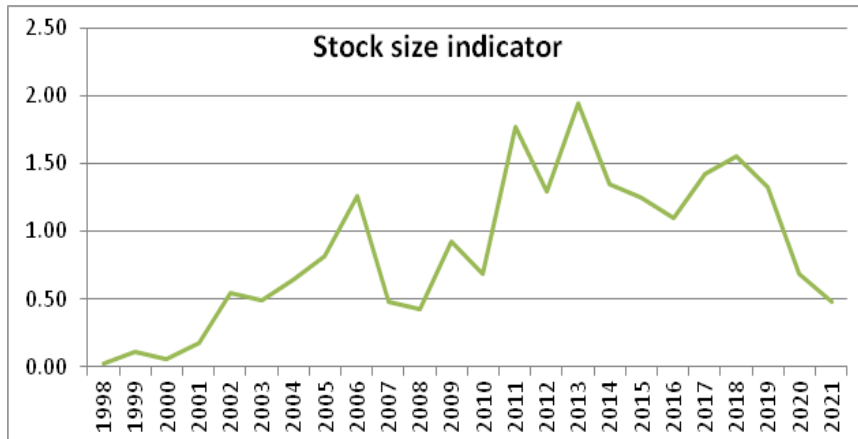


Figure 19.9.6.1. *Leucoraja naevus* in ICES Division 27.9a. Biomass indicator for the period 1998-2021. It corresponds to the standardized average of biomass index from Spanish groundfish surveys in Gulf of Cadiz (SpGC-GFS-WIBTS-Q1-Q3) and the LPUE index from the Portuguese polyvalent fleet.

**Estimation of length-based indicators (F proxy)**

Landing length frequency distributions for the combined trawl and polyvalent Portuguese fleet were used to determine f proxy (Figure 19.9.6.2). Due to Covid related data collection constrains, data for the period 2019-2021 was combined, according to WGEF decision. Only Portuguese length data was available. It should be remarked that the Portuguese landings represented ~85% of the total landings of the stock in 2019-2021 and that trawl and polyvalent fleets combined correspond to ~100% of the Portuguese landings. Discard data are only available from the Spanish trawl fleet for the period 2015-2019 but length information is deficient.

To determine F proxy based on length-based indicators estimates of  $L_{inf}$ ,  $L_{50}$  and  $a$  and  $b$  parameters from the weight-length relationship were used. These parameters are defined for this stock (Table 19.9.6.3). Length classes of 2 cm were adopted. LBI analysis resulted in  $L_c = 41.0$  cm,  $L_{mean} = 56.36$  cm and  $L_{F=M} = 49.50$  cm for the period 2019-2021.

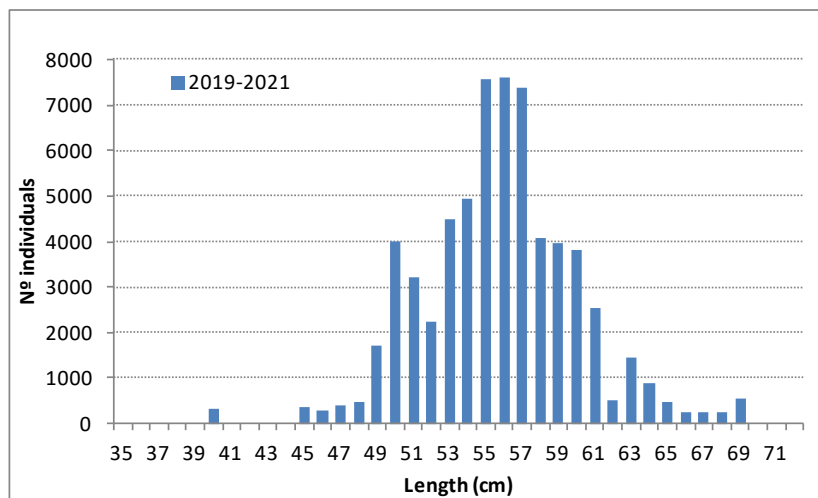


Figure 19.9.6.2. *Leucoraja naevus* in ICES Division 27.9a. Length-frequency distribution of landings for the Portuguese fleet, polyvalent and trawl fleets combined, and for the period for 2019-2021 (combined).

**Table 19.9.6.3. Biological parameters used for calculating the LBI parameters (rjn.27.9a).**

Parameter	Value	Definition	Source
$L_{\infty}$ (cm)	75	Asymptotic average maximum length	$L_{inf} = L_{obs} / 0.95$ (Froese, 2004)
$L_{mat}$	56.2	Length at 50% maturity	Maia et al., 2012
a	0.0027	Condition factor parameter of length-weight relationship	IEO Data base (DELASS)
b	3.204	Slope parameter of length-weight relationship	IEO Data base (DELASS)

### Management measures

On 22 August 2014 the Portuguese government adopted national legislation (Portaria no. 170/2014) that established a minimum landing size of 520 mm (total length) for specimens of the genus *Leucoraja* or *Raja*, covering all of the continental Portuguese EEZ. This minimum landing size was then increased to 60 cm TL in 2022 (Portaria nº 255/2022). Portuguese regulations (Portaria no. 315/2011, updated by Portaria no. 47/2016) also prohibits the catch, retention onboard, and landing of any skate species belonging to Rajiformes during the months of May and June, which covers the spawning period of the species. During these two months, vessels are permitted to retain on board and to land a maximum of 5% bycatch, in weight, of the Rajiformes species per trip.

### Further information

Exploratory assessments using SPiCT model were also conducted with this stock. Data and more information on rjn.27.9a can be found in Rodríguez - Cabello *et al.*, (2022).

### 19.9.6.4. Exploratory LPUE

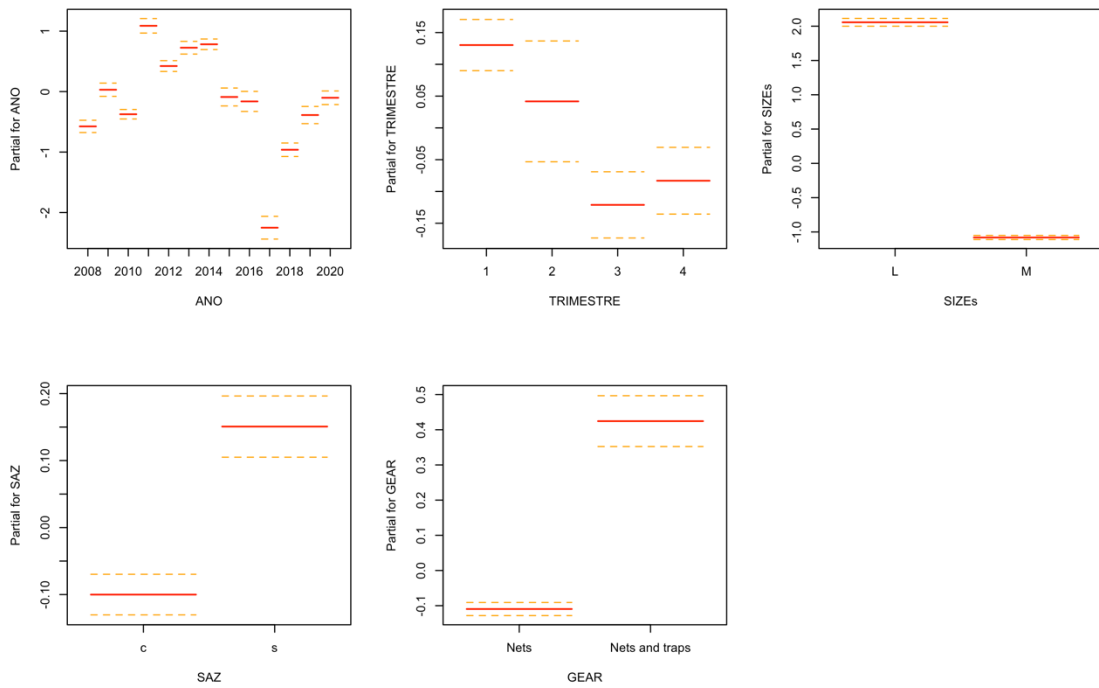
As the PtGFS-WIBTS-Q4, the NepS (FU 28–29) survey was not conducted in recent years (2019–2020) and the continuity of the series is uncertain. And although not used to provide advice for rjn.27.9a, due to the irregularity in the series, it is used as auxiliary information. Considering this, and the fact that the ARSA surveys used currently as basis to provide advice only covers a small part of the stock area, an alternative assessment approach using a standardized commercial LPUE series was explored and presented in the WKS KATE meeting (Serra-Pereira *et al.*, 2020 WD; ICES, 2021b). The method is the same as that used for rjh.27.9a and is described in the stock annex for rjh.27.9a (see also LPUE in Section 19.9.3, rjc.27.9a). In brief, it considers the estimated landed weight of the species per trip (fishing effort unit) from the Portuguese polyvalent fleet using nets. Portuguese landings represented, on average, 92% of the total reported landings and the polyvalent fleet represented 67–81% in the last three years for the overall stock. The landed weight per trip is obtained by applying the stepwise statistical methodology described in Figueiredo *et al.* (2020b), in which the vessels are stratified by size and fishing seasonality. Vessels classified in the same *strata* are known to operate similarly in terms of fishing time, size of gear and fishing areas. As for rjc.27.9a, no changes in the fishing areas explored or in the distributional area for this stock were observed over the years. Therefore, it is considered unlikely that LPUE are not reflecting the biomass in the exploited areas. The fishing trip was adopted as the effort unit because most of the vessels from the polyvalent fleet do not have log-book. The inclusion of variables in the model that inform on the stratification of the fleet allows to have homogenous vessel *strata* with similar fishing operations. Also, from information collected through inquiries to the Portuguese fleet, the duration of fishing trips from most vessels is around 24h which is equivalent to using the “trip” as fishing effort unit.

Several explanatory variables were investigated as potential candidates and the selection of the best model was done through residual graphical analysis and AIC comparison. Those included in the best GLM model (explained variance = 0.58) were: year, quarter, vessel size, fishing seasonality on skates and rays and fishing gear (Figure 19.9.6.3). Two fishing gears are used: trammel nets and gillnets. Annual standardized estimates of CPUE and the corresponding standard error were determined for a reference condition of the variables included in the model apart from the year level (Figure 19.9.6.4).

So, in order to include the new LPUE series as basis to provide advice for rjn.27.9a in 2022, the method was presented (Serra-Pereira *et al.*, 2020 WD) and evaluated during WSKATE and peer-reviewed by an external review group, as a recommendation from ICES ACOM (ICES, 2021b). In brief, WSKATE acknowledged the adequacy of the Portuguese commercial LPUE series to assess the status of this stock and accepted its use for the next advice, due in 2022; the reviewers also recognized the choice made by the group to look at the use of LPUEs as an alternative to surveys and made suggestions for further improvement (see Section 19.9.2 and ICES (2021b) for more details). The main concern from the reviewers about the methodology proposed was the non-inclusion of the zeroes in the analysis. The rationale for choosing this approach is described in detail in ICES (2021b) and in Section 19.9.3 of this report. Additional analysis to justify the choice of not including the zeroes in the model will be presented in 2022.

In 2021, the model was updated (explained variance = 0.56, AIC = 23 589) (Figure 19.9.6.4). The best model selected with the updated dataset included all the variables mentioned for the previous model. The mean annual biomass index (kg/trip) scaled by the overall mean for 2019–2020 was 11% smaller than the observed in the preceding five years. For comparison purposes with the current assessment methodology, the LPUE data series was normalized to the long-term mean and compared with the normalized biomass Index obtained from the NepS (FU 28–29) survey (Figure 19.9.6.4). In general, followed similar trends, although the survey series has gaps in 2010, 2012, 2019 and 2020. Also, to note that the survey index is a screenshot in time during a specific time of the year (Q2) whilst the LPUE series is based on information collected throughout the year, so a lag between the two is to be expected. Also, as cuckoo ray is not very abundant in the surveys, the uncertainty of the estimates is larger than those for the thornback ray; considering that, most of the LPUE estimates are within the range of the CI.





**Figure 19.9.6.3. Skates in the Bay of Biscay and Iberian Waters. Effect of each explanatory variable included in the standardization of the LPUE for *L. naevus* caught by the polyvalent segment in mainland Portugal (Division 9.a): year, quarter, landing port, vessel size (“SIZEs”), fishing seasonality (“SAZ”) and fishing gear (trammel nets or gillnets).**



**Figure 19.9.6.4. Skates in the Bay of Biscay and Iberian Waters. Standardized LPUE from the polyvalent segment in mainland Portugal vs standardized Neps (FU 28–29) Survey biomass Index for *L. naevus* (Division 9.a). Both series are normalized to the long-term mean and present the standard errors in shade.**

### 19.9.7 Spotted ray (*Raja montagui*) in Subarea 8 (Bay of Biscay and Cantabrian Sea) (rjm.27.8)

In 2022, the assessment was carried out applied the *rfb* rule (Table 19.9.7.1). Data used were the Spanish SpGFS-WIBTS-Q4 [G2784] survey and the length distribution from French and Spanish landings. Spotted ray is caught sporadically in divisions 8abd during the EVHOE survey so that this survey does not provide a reliable index. Therefore, the biomass index used for assessment comes from Division 8.c only (Figure 19.9.7.1). In Division 8.c, the species has been frequent, especially in the central area Sea during the time-series of the Spanish survey.

In 2021, following a breakdown, the survey was carried out from a different vessel, using the same gear. As the biomass indices of some skate species showed unexpected variations between 2020 and 2021, it was decided to excluded year 2021 for all species until the possible difference in catchability resulting from the vessel change is clarified. Therefore, the change in the biomass index to calculate the *r* of the *rfb* rule was the ratio of the biomass index in 2020 to the average of the biomass index in the three preceding years (2017-2019).

Table 19.9.7.1. *Raja montagui* in ICES Subarea 27.8. Estimates used in the *rfb* rule, with details and comments.

Variable	Estimate	Input data	Comment
<i>r</i> : Stock biomass trend	0.85	Biomass index from SpGFS-WIBTS-Q4 [G2784] excluding year 2021 for vessel breakdown	After an increase from 2011, the stock trend shows a rather stable pattern since 2013
<i>b</i> : Biomass safeguard = $\min(1, I_{y-1} / I_{trigger})$ $I_{trigger} = I_{loss} \omega$ Considering $\omega = 1.4$	1	$I_{loss}$ minimum estimate (2011) = 0.46 (last smallest value between 1999 and 2020) $I_{trigger} = 0.644$ $(\frac{I_{y-1}}{I_{trigger}} = 2.06)$	After an increase from 2011, the stock trend shows a rather stable pattern since 2013
<i>f</i> : fishing proxy	1.04	Length data were collected on French and Spanish landings then raised to the fleet. Length data were collected from 2019 to 2021.	Data above 80 cm have been removed because they are considered to be misreporting. Data on discard were considered unreliable.
<i>m</i> linked to Von Bertalanffy <i>k</i>	0.95	<i>k</i> estimated from Von Bertalanffy model adopted for the species which is also considered in the assessment model adopted for the species	<i>k</i> (= 0.24) for this stock is based on the $L_{\infty} (= L_{max} / 0.95$ with $L_{max} = 78$ cm)
$A_y \times r \times f \times b \times m$	103		Decrease of 20% in relation to the previous advice ( $A_{y-1}$ of 129 t). The stability clause was thus not applied.

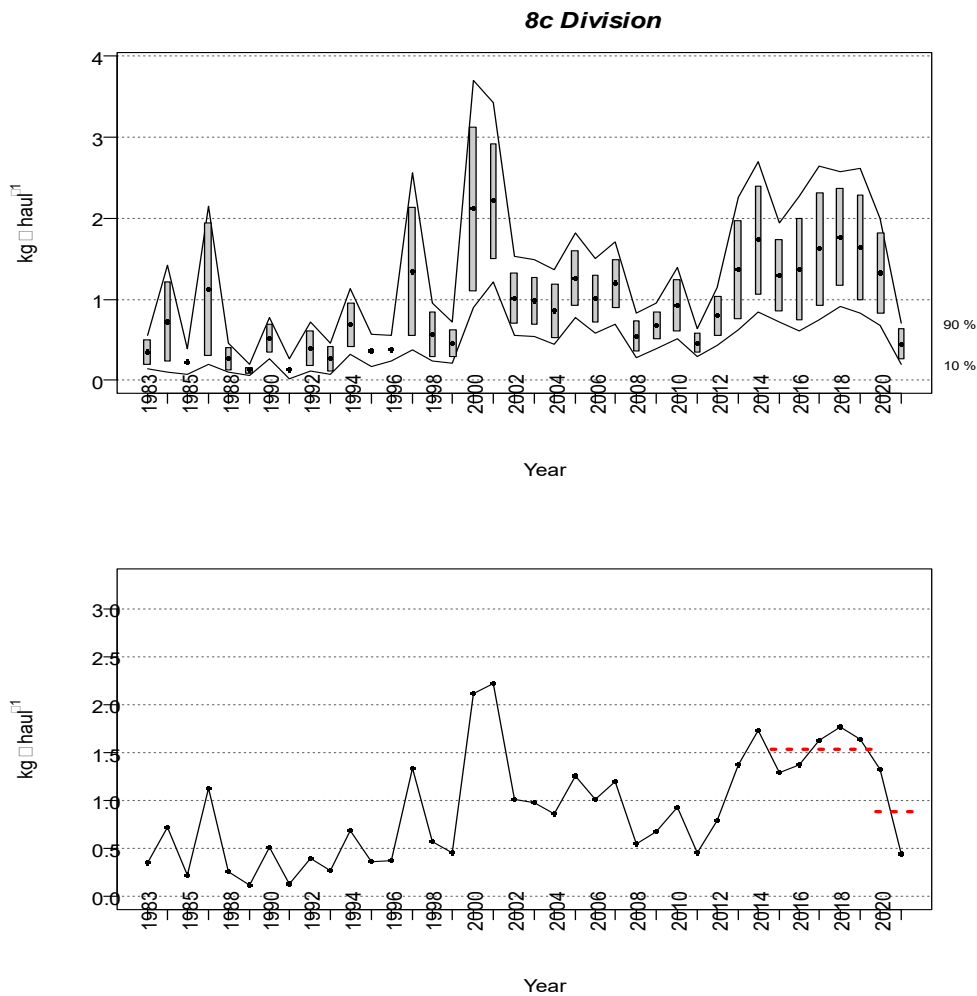


Figure 19.9.7.1. Skates in the Bay of Biscay and Iberian Waters. Time-series of *Raja montagui* biomass index during North Spanish shelf bottom trawl survey (1983–2021) in Division 8.c covered by the survey. Top: boxes mark parametric standard error of the stratified biomass index. Lines mark bootstrap confidence intervals ( $\alpha = 0.80$ , bootstrap iterations = 1000). Bottom: red lines show the average index in the two last years and in the five previous.

### 19.9.8 Spotted ray (*Raja montagui*) in Division 9.a (west of Galicia, Portugal, and Gulf of Cadiz) (rjm.27.9a)

For the period 2008-2022, *Raja montagui* landings are mainly derived from Portugal (Table 19.9.8.1), in particular from the polyvalent fleet which represents between 67 and 90% of the total annual landed weight of the species (Maia et al., 2022c). Spain landings only represent up to 11%.

Discards information on skates and rays from the Portuguese polyvalent and bottom otter trawl segments operating in the ICES Division 9.a has been collected by the Data Collection Framework (EU DCF). The routine estimator used to estimate total discards in the Portuguese crustacean and demersal fish bottom otter trawl does not apply to species with occurrence lower than 30% of the trips sampled under the DCF Portuguese on-board sampling program, which is the case of all skate and ray species (Serra-Pereira et al., 2017). The low frequency of occurrence registered for the species in bottom otter trawl fisheries indicates that discards can be considered negligible (Fernandes, 2021). Regarding the polyvalent fleet, discards are known to take place but are not fully quantified and information available is insufficient to estimate discards of the

species. Discard survival studies suggest that *R. montagui* has relatively high survivorship after capture (for details see Section 19.3.3.).

**Table 19.9.8.1. *Raja montagui* in ICES Division 27.9a. ICES estimates of landings by country (in tonnes). In 2003–2008 species-specific landings data are only presented for Portugal, as Spanish species-specific landings are not available in this period.**

Year	Spain	Portugal	Total Landings
2003		56	56
2004		82	82
2005		76	76
2006		90	90
2007		119	119
2008		144	144
2009	7	184	191
2010	10	275	284
2011	3	121	124
2012	2	108	110
2013	4	111	115
2014	2	91	93
2015	1	67	68
2016	5	68	73
2017	5	94	99
2018	5	57	62
2019	9	82	90
2020	12	58	69
2021	9	104	113
2022	9	78	87

A proposal for assessing the status of the stock using the ICES rfb rule (ICES, 2021a) was presented at WGEF 2022. Following the ICES guidance on the parameter determination for the rfb rule (ICES, 2021a; ICES, 2022a), the input values for applying rfb rule are presented in Table 19.9.8.2. Following rfb rule, the advised landings in 2023 and 2024 should not exceed 98 t. Since the advice for 2023 and 2024 corresponds to a decrease of 9% in relation to the previous advice (Ay of 108 t), the stability clause was not applied.

**Table 19.9.8.2. *Raja montagui* in ICES Division 27.9a. Estimates used in the rfb rule, with details and comments.**

Variable	Estimate	Input data	Comment
r: Stock biomass trend	0.99	Stock-size indicator: standardized commercial LPUE from the Portuguese polyvalent fleet.	Index A (2020, 2021) = 6.65 kg.trip <sup>-1</sup> Index B (2017, 2018, 2019) = 6.69 kg.trip <sup>-1</sup>
b: Biomass safeguard $= \min(1, I_{y-1} / I_{\text{trigger}})$  $I_{\text{trigger}} = I_{\text{loss}} \omega$ Considering $\omega = 1.4$	1	Stock indicator;  $I_{\text{loss}}$ , minimum estimate (2013) = 4.25  $I_{\text{trigger}} = 5.95$  $(\frac{I_{y-1}}{I_{\text{trigger}}} = 1.09)$	The series is relatively stable but short.
m linked to von Bertalanffy k	0.90	$k > 0.2$ (See comments)	There are no reliable growth studies for this species in ICES division 9a. $K$ estimates from studies in other areas of the northeast Atlantic vary from values less than 0.2 year <sup>-1</sup> (Holden, 1972; Ryland and Ajayi, 1984) to higher than 0.2 year <sup>-1</sup> (Gallagher et al., 2005). Given the uncertainty on this parameter estimate, the $m$ adopted for the calculation of rfb rule was 0.90, following the decisions for other spotted ray stocks. However, stock specific studies are needed.
f: Fishing proxy	1.02	Length data collected under the sampling program raised to the overall landings. Length data were from 2019 to 2021.  $L_{\text{mean}} = 59.64$ cm  $L_{F=M} = 58.55$ cm	To overcome deficiencies in sampling in 2020 due to covid disruption, data from 2019-2021 was combined. See more information below.
$A_y \times r \times f \times b \times m$	98 t		Decrease of 9% in relation to the previous advice ( $A_y$ of 108 t). The stability clause was thus not applied.

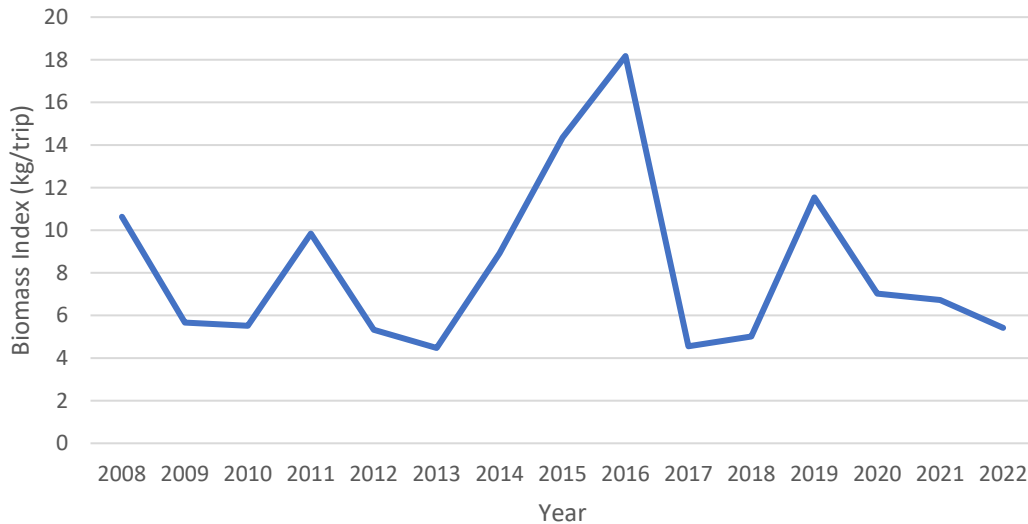
Data used included a standardized LPUE time-series as stock indicator and the MSY related indicator ( $L_{\text{mean}}/L_{F=M}$ ) as F proxy (see details above).

Up to 2018, this stock was assessed using data from the Portuguese Autumn Groundfish Survey (PtGFS-WIBTS-Q4). However, because of the problems with the PtGFS-WIBTS-Q4 survey data availability for the period 2018–2020 (see details in Section 19.6.3) and uncertain future, an alternative assessment approach using a standardized commercial LPUE series was reviewed and accepted at WKSKATE (ICES, 2021b).

The time-series for *R. montagui* in the ARSA surveys is irregular and with very low catches although a high peak in the biomass and abundance values was observed in 2015 and 2016. There are no records of this species in the Spanish IEO Q4-IBTS survey in Division 9.a over the whole time-series. For these reasons the Spanish surveys are not used in the assessment.

Details on the LPUE estimation methodology can be found in Serra-Pereira *et al.* (2020 WD) and ICES (2021, report). In 2023, the model was updated (explained variance = 0.75, AIC = 136981).

The best model selected with the updated dataset included the variables years, quarter, landing port, vessel size and fishing seasonality on skates. More details and results can be found in Maia *et al.*, 2022c WD. The mean annual biomass index (kg/trip) scaled by the overall mean for 2021–2022 (6.07) was 17% smaller than the observed in the preceding five years (2018–2020: 6.69) (Figure 19.9.8.1).



**Figure 19.9.8.1. *Raja montagui* in ICES Division 27.9a. Standardized LPUE from the polyvalent segment for the period 2008–2022.**

Annual length frequency distributions for the Portuguese combined trawl and polyvalent landings are presented in Figure 19.9.8.2. Spanish landings data were not used since it is only available for trawlers, as well as discards data that are only available for 2019. Due to Covid related data collection constraints, data for the period 2019–2021 was combined, according to WGEF decision.

To determine F proxy based on length-based indicators, estimates of  $L_{inf}$  ( $L_{max}/0.95$ ;  $L_{max}=80$  cm; based on Pauly, 1984),  $L_{50}$  (56.7 cm; Pina-Rodrigues, 2012) and parameters from the weight-length relationship  $a=0.000000344$  and  $b=3.47$  (Serra-Pereira *et al.*, 2010) were used. Length classes of 4 cm were adopted as creates a smooth and unimodal distribution. In 2023, LBI analysis was updated. LBI analysis resulted in a  $L_c=50.0$  cm,  $L_{mean}=57.05$  cm and  $L_{F=M}=58.55$  cm for 2022.

The  $L_c$  estimated value of the exploited length frequency population is constrained by the Portuguese technical measures adopted, in particular the minimum landing size (MLS). Therefore, the  $L_c$  estimate is high and is likely to be biased against the  $L_c$  of the fishing gears capturing the species. The adoption of a MLS leads to the increase of smaller specimens discarding. Survivorship of *R. montagui* after capture with trammel nets in 9a is estimated as 54% (Castelo, 2021).

The ratio of the mean length in the catch to the  $F_{MSY}$  proxy ( $L_{mean}/L_{F=M}$ ) suggest that the stock is exploited at sustainable levels ( $L_{mean}/L_{F=M}=0.97$  in 2022), with values since 2014 very close or above 1 (Table 19.9.8.3) (for details on procedures see Maia *et al.*, 2022d).

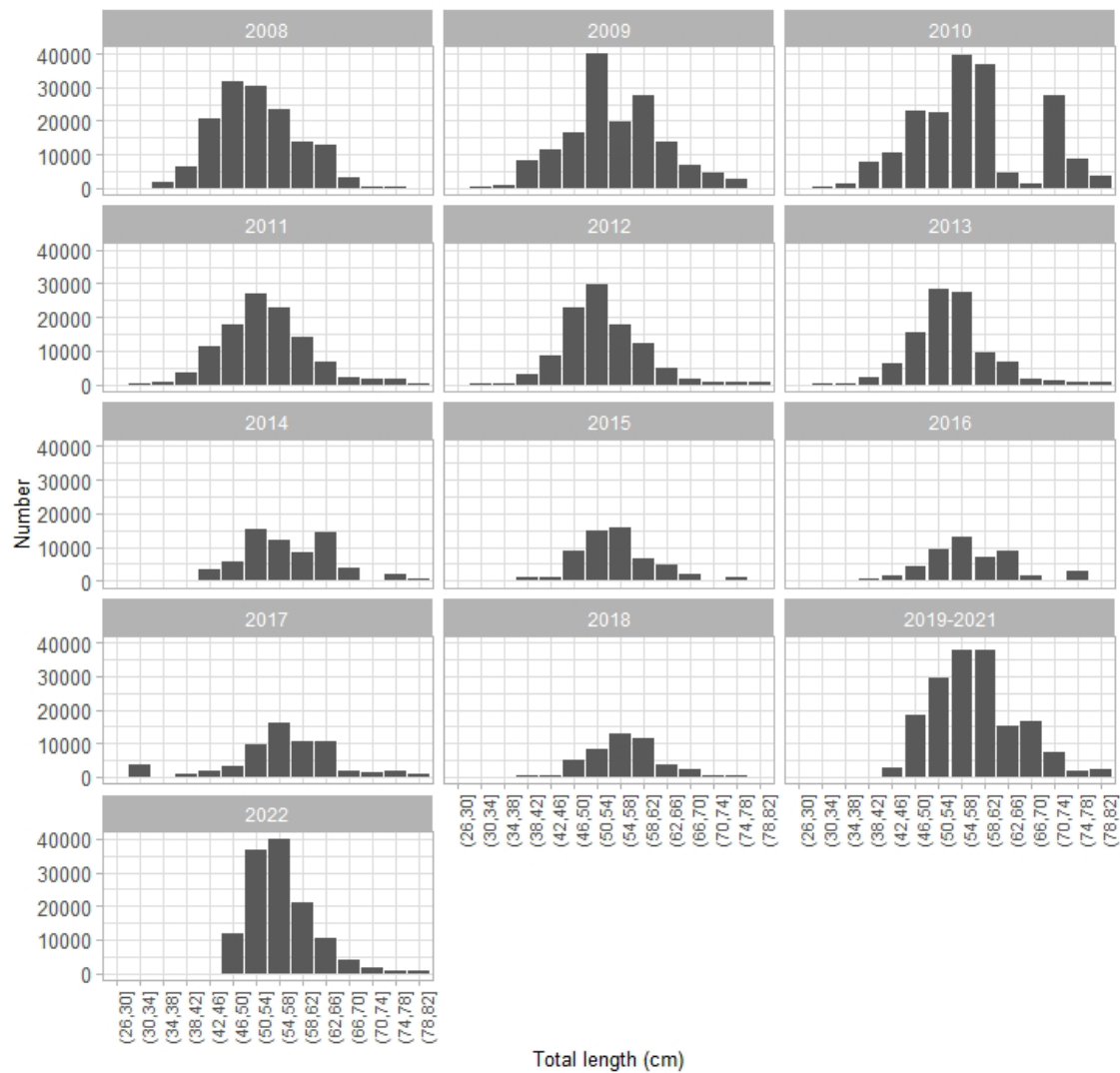


Figure 19.9.8.2. *Raja montagui* in ICES Division 27.9a. Length–frequency distribution (4 cm length classes) for the period for 2008-2022 with polyvalent and trawl fleets combined. Data from 2019-2022 are combined. The numbers of individuals correspond to raised numbers.

Table 19.9.8.3. *Raja montagui* in ICES Division 27.9a. Indicator table for LBI analysis for the period 2008-2022.

Year	Conservation				Optimizing	MSY
	$L_c/L_{mat}$	$L_{25}/L_{mat}$	$L_{max}/L_{inf}$	$P_{mega}$	Yield	
	>1	>1	>0.8	>30%	~1	≥1
2008	0.81	0.84	0.80	0.11	0.97	0.98
2009	0.88	0.89	0.86	0.18	1.04	0.99
2010	0.88	0.91	0.92	0.25	1.09	1.04
2011	0.81	0.87	0.86	0.11	0.99	1.00
2012	0.81	0.86	0.83	0.08	0.97	0.98
2013	0.88	0.89	0.84	0.11	1.01	0.96
2014	0.88	0.91	0.89	0.32	1.05	1.01
2015	0.67	0.91	0.83	0.14	0.98	1.11
2016	0.60	0.91	0.90	0.27	1.02	1.23
2017	0.53	0.93	0.91	0.27	1.01	1.30

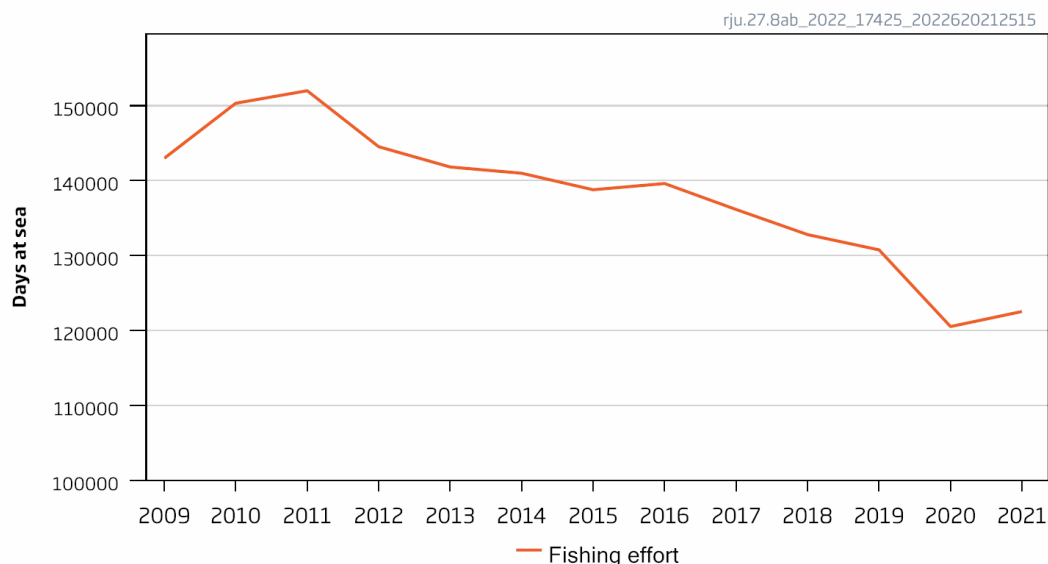
2018	0.67	0.93	0.83	0.15	1.01	1.15
2019-2021	0.88	0.94	0.88	0.25	1.06	1.02
2022	0.88	0.93	0.85	0.14	1.02	0.97

### 19.9.9 Undulate ray (*Raja undulata*) in divisions 8.a-b (Bay of Biscay) (rju.27.8ab)

The EVHOE survey is uninformative for this stock because the distribution of *R. undulata* is more coastal than the area surveyed. Exploratory assessments were presented by Biais *et al.* (2014 WD) and summarized in Section 19.8.2.

As the discard rate for this stock is very high (0.94) in the period 2017–2021 and the advised catches issued in 2020 were 202 tonnes, the latest assessment advised that no more than 12 tonnes should be landed in years 2023–2024. The advised catches have remained constant since 2018.

The reduction of the corresponding landings relative to the previous advice (13 tonnes to 12 tonnes) is due to a slight increase in the average discard rate. Despite the fact that it was last applied in 2018, the PA buffer was not applied in 2022 due to a significant reduction of the fishing effort in métiers likely to catch significant amounts of undulate ray over the period 2012–2021 (Figure 19.9.9.1). The selected gears are: GNS, GTR, LLS, LHM, OTB, OTM, OTT, SSC and TBB. The target species are: DEF and CRU. In order to exclude offshore-operating vessels not fishing in the coastal habitat of undulate ray, only vessels shorter than 24 m were considered.

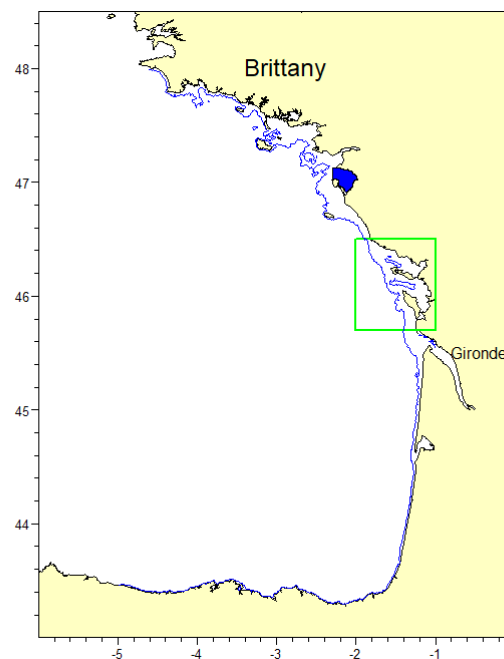


**Figure 19.9.9.1. Time series of fishing effort of vessels likely to catch undulate ray in ICES divisions 8a and 8b, expressed in days at sea.**

AGEPPOP, a project for estimating the biomass of undulate ray in divisions 8ab was started in March 2023. The project has several objectives including conducting a close-kin mark-recapture (CKMR) estimation of the abundance of the population, estimating age and estimating the stress status of individuals from physiological markers.

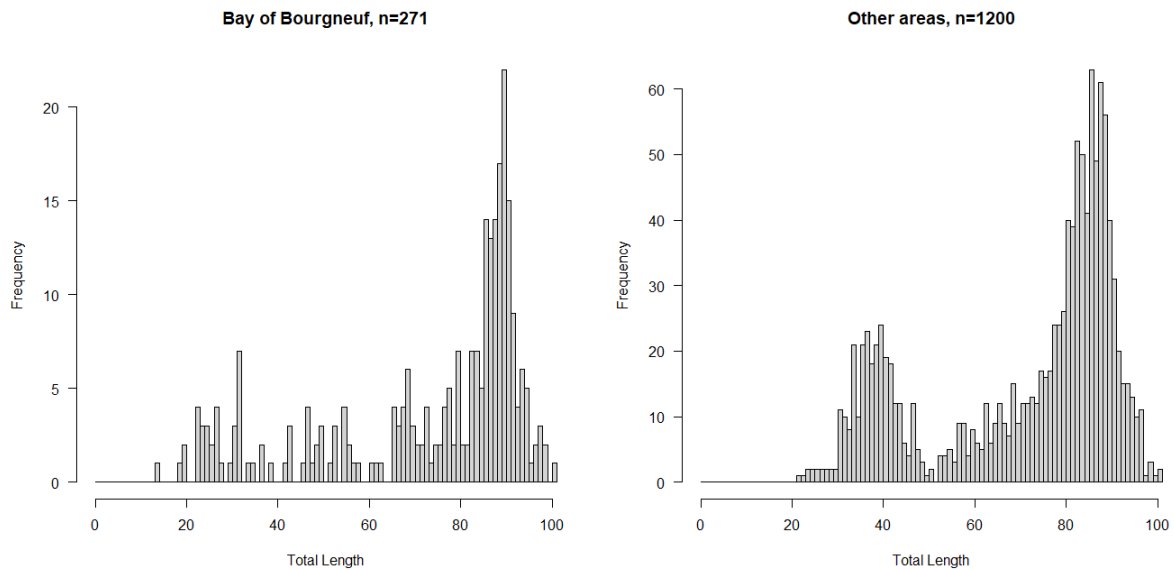


Sampling for the CKMR estimation is being carried out at auction markets and onboard fishing vessels. Because of the small TAC, landings at auction markets are not sufficient to collect the large sample of individual biopsies required for this approach (genotyping 4000 individuals is planned). The first few sampling months allowed collecting more than 1500 biopsies, mostly from dedicated surveys and boarding on commercial fishing trips. A dedicated survey was carried out in the Bay of Bourgneuf (Figure 19.9.9.2), where 42 trawl hauls of one hour were carried out. This survey yielded 271 individuals for a total weight of 950 kg. The total swept area (wing spread multiplied by towed distance) was 2.6 km<sup>2</sup>. Raising the biomass caught to the total area of Bay of Bourgneuf suggests a biomass of 134 tonnes in this small bay. In divisions 8ab, undulate ray occurs all along the southern coast of Brittany, is more abundant in the central area of the Bay of Biscay (green square, figure 19.9.9.2) and is probably less abundant to the south of the Gironde estuary. Therefore, the Bay of Bourgneuf is a small fraction of the stock area, and represents also a small fraction of the biomass, suggesting that the current 30 t TAC, is well below sustainable limits.



**Figure 19.9.9.2. Maps of the Bay of Biscay with the Bay of Bourgneuf (blue area) and the central Bay of Biscay (green square).**

Individuals sampled were mostly large adults both in the Bay of Bourgneuf and from other areas (Figure 19.9.9.3). In the Bay of Bourgneuf, small individuals were not abundant. This may come from the more coastal distribution of juveniles, but also reflects the occurrence of numerous large adults in the stock. Individuals from other areas were mostly from sampling on-board commercial trips in the central area of the Bay of Biscay. More juveniles were caught in the area, but again large adults were the most abundant component of the catch. Samples from auction markets (about 100 out of 1200 included in figure 19.9.9.3, right) included only individuals larger than 78 cm, as this size is the MCRS for undulate ray.



**Figure 19.9.3.** Length distribution of undulate ray sampled during the first months of the project. Left: individuals sampled during a dedicated trawl survey in the Bay of Bourgneuf. Right: individuals sampled in other areas, mostly the central part of the Bay of Biscay.

### 19.9.10 Undulate ray (*Raja undulata*) in Division 8.c (Cantabrian Sea) (rju.27.8c)

There are no longer-term survey data to assess temporal trends in this stock.

Scientific studies carried out in the eastern parts of Division 8.c have been conducted to characterize the specific composition of the landed skates, the species-specific CPUE and the geographical distribution of the catches (Diez *et al.*, 2014). During the period, 2011–2013, up to 118 trips/hauls of 21 vessels of the trammel net fleet from the nine main ports of the Basque Country were sampled. *Raja undulata* was the fifth species in quantity caught and made up only 5% of the total skates catches.

Whilst the total estimated ICES landings from 2005–2014 were 0 t, this period covers several years for which species-specific data were not required and then a period for which *R. undulata* could not be landed legally. Following relaxation of the prohibited status in 2015, and allowance for small quantities of bycatch, landings between 5–9 tonnes were reported (Figure 19.9.10.1).

The historical landings data is uninformative and unrepresentative of population levels. Partial discards are available in two years since 2015 therefore it is considered very incomplete. According to fishing interviews, this species is locally frequent and distributed in the coastal waters of Division 8.c, although not very abundant in catches. This situation may not have changed over the years.

*R. undulata* is very scarce in the Spanish IEO Q4-IBTS survey in Division 8.c and usually lower than 0.1 kg haul<sup>-1</sup> in any year of the series. In 2019, nine individuals of this species, ranging from 38 to 93 cm, were captured between 40 and 84 m deep in the Central and Eastern Cantabrian Sea. This due to the fact this species is distributed mainly out of the surveyed ground, in shallower areas not covered because they are not accessible to the vessel and the gear used.

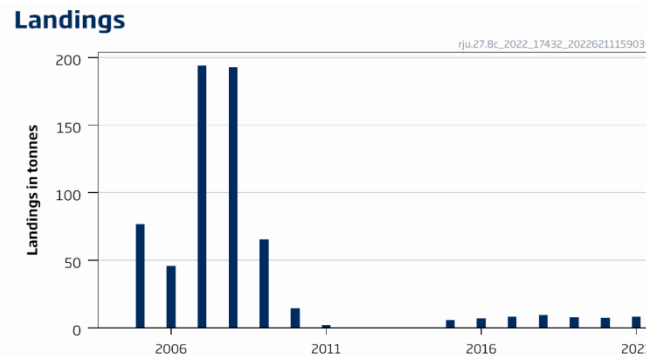


Figure 19.9.10.1. Landings (tonnes) of *Raja undulata* in ICES Div. 8.c.

### 19.9.11 Undulate ray (*Raja undulata*) in Division 9.a (west of Galicia, Portugal, and Gulf of Cadiz) (rju.27.9a)

#### Fishery Overview

Historically and prior the inclusion of *R. undulata* in the European list of prohibited species in 2009, official landings on the species were not informative once landings were not discriminated by species. Portuguese historical landings of *R. undulata* were estimated from aggregated Rajidae multispecies landings following the procedure proposed by Shelton et al. (2012) and using a multinomial–Poisson transformation (Baker 1994). Landings estimates ranged from 157 and 271 tonnes for the period 2003–2008 (Maia et al., 2015).

#### Portuguese management measures under the experimental quota

In Portugal, the use of *R. undulata* small experimental quota assigned since 2016 has been guided by scientific protocols and national regulations adopted, which were in turn conditioned by the EU quota assigned.

The legislative framework includes a set of conditions for licensing specific fishing permits to around 60 vessels operating along the Portuguese coast, following a set of criteria which include fishing vessel type, fishing license already assigned to the vessel and historical skate landings. Vessels possessing the specific fishing permit shall comply with a set of rules, which include obligation to transmit, to both the General Directorate of Natural Resources, Maritime Security and Services (DGRM) and to IPMA, fishery data using a form designed by DGRM and IPMA to register haul and catch data on a haul-by-haul basis (including hauls performed with trammel nets with no catch of the species). Furthermore, vessels are prohibited from targeting the species and are constrained to land a maximum of 30 kg per trip and the total length of landed specimens should be in the range 78–97 cm. As additional management measure adopted is prohibition of retaining the species onboard and of landing during the months of May, June and July. Additionally, in 2019, the DGRM introduced a landing control process under which, vessels not possessing the special fishing license are also allowed to land a maximum of one specimen per trip and are also required to provide additional information on their fishing activity related to *R. undulata* catches. Since in this new data collection scenario the forms with information on the species catches are delivered when the fish enters the auction. Because of this new data collection scenario, fishery data on trammel nets hauls with null catches of *R. undulata* were no longer mandatory.

### Portuguese Fishery data after the moratorium period

Data collected under the quota management scenario and comments on its quality/application are summarized in Maia *et al.* (2022e).

### Species biology and population parameters

Main biological information available for *R. undulata* in Portuguese waters is summarized in Table 19.7.

### Species distribution, abundance and behaviour

Along the Portuguese continental coast, *R. undulata* bathymetric distribution varies from 4 to 128 m deep, being more abundant at depths ranging from 30 to 40 m which hinders the collection of adequate data from both Spanish IEO Q4-IBTS survey or the Portuguese demersal survey (PtGFS-WIBTS-Q4). The inadequacy of surveys is related with its design which has few fishing stations in shallow areas, where the species is known to occur predominantly.

A mark-recapture study in Portuguese waters - UNDULATA project- showed that *R. undulata* perform short distance movements confirming the species high degree of site fidelity (For details on the results see Maia *et al.* (2022e).

Under the self-sampling program adopted for vessels with specific license for *R. undulata*, a methodology was adopted to estimate the density and abundance of the species. Geo-referenced fishery data collected in 2017 were used. A binomial mixture model (Kéry *et al.*, 2005) was the adequate statistical approach to be used as it accommodates the temporally and spatially replicated count data available. For details on species abundance and main conclusions see Figueiredo *et al.* (2020a).

### Survivorship – health status after capture

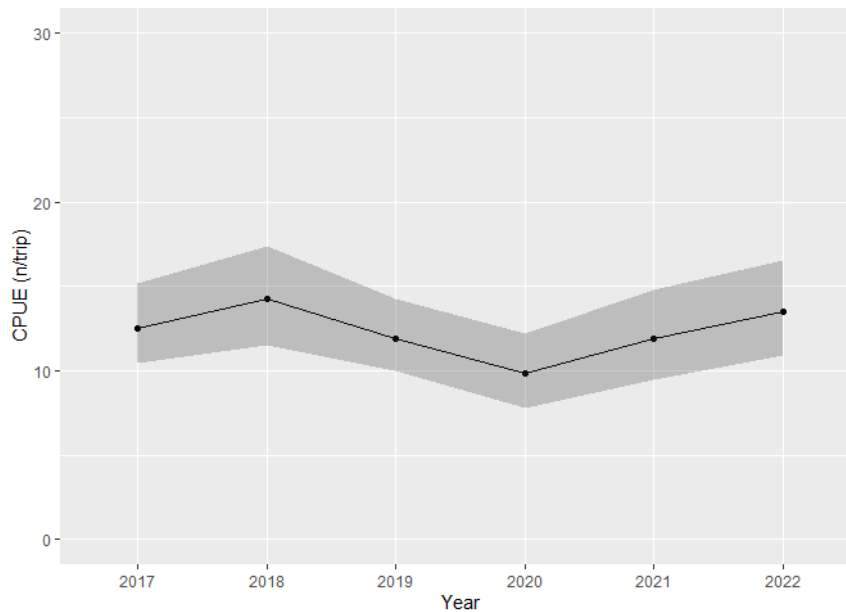
The assessment of the health status after capture is considered a good indication of the survivorship index of skates. A qualitative assessment of the health status of the captured specimens of *R. undulata* in Portuguese continental waters was performed using the scale from Enever *et al.* (2009). The size of the specimens is the variable with more influence in the survivorship of the species. However irrespective of specimen size, the percentage individuals in “good” health status was always higher than 80%. In conclusion the species in subarea 27.9a is mainly caught by nets and have a high survivorship after capture (see Section 19.3.3).

### Fishing effort and harvest rate

The harvest rate for 2017 was calculated using *R. undulata* biomass estimate for Portuguese continental coast (Figueiredo *et al.*, 2020a) and catches of the year (official data). The resulting harvest rate is 0.003 (see details in Maia *et al.*, 2022e), that corresponds to a fishing mortality of 0.00129, which is well below the FMSY estimated for *R. undulata* stock in ICES Division 27.7d-e (0.131) and the empirical estimate determined using the method proposed by Zhou *et al.* (2012) (0.1107) for Chondrichthyes (FMSY=0.41M).

### Temporal evolution of abundance index for licensed vessels

Data used for abundance index standardization process comprised the fishery data collected from vessels with a special license for *R. undulata* for the period 2017-2022, which was adjusted to a zero-truncated Poisson regression model (for details on the methodology see Maia *et al.*, 2022e). The standardized abundance index show stability along the 6-year period (Figure 19.9.11.11).



**Figure 19.9.11.1. *Raja undulata* in ICES Division 27.9a. Standardized CPUE index (n/trip) and respective standard error from 2017 to 2022.**

#### **Final considerations to be considered in the advice**

The standardized abundance index for the studied period shows a stability on abundance indicating that the harvest rates throughout the period had no impact on the stock status. Given the high constraints on fishing opportunities for the species, fishery data derived from it do not enable the definition of sustainable exploitation levels particularly in accordance to the FMSY approach. The main deficiencies on the data collected under the quota assigned to ICES Division 27.9.a are:

- the spatial and temporal coverage of fishing is limited as the number of licenses is dependent on the quota available (Figure 19.9.11.2 shows the self-sampling data available by year enlightening the deficient spatial coverage along the coast);
- data from areas where the species is known to concentrate are not available to the fishing as only by-catch is allowed and because fishermen highly avoid those areas;
- length data from landings are limited and considered not representative of the exploitable population mainly because minimum and maximum landing sizes adopted and the total number of specimens allowed to be landed per trip (making it impossible to construct length frequencies for LBI estimation)

In conclusion, the small quota assigned to Portugal since 2016 is considered not to have a negative impact on the stock, but on other hand has had a great impact on the self-sampling program as fishermen's motivation and collaboration has been continuously decreasing. Fishermen considered that despite their effort to collect data, results are not reflected in the scientific advice provided by ICES; following the guidelines for category 6 stocks, advice on fishing opportunities maintains or reduces in 20% the latest advice.

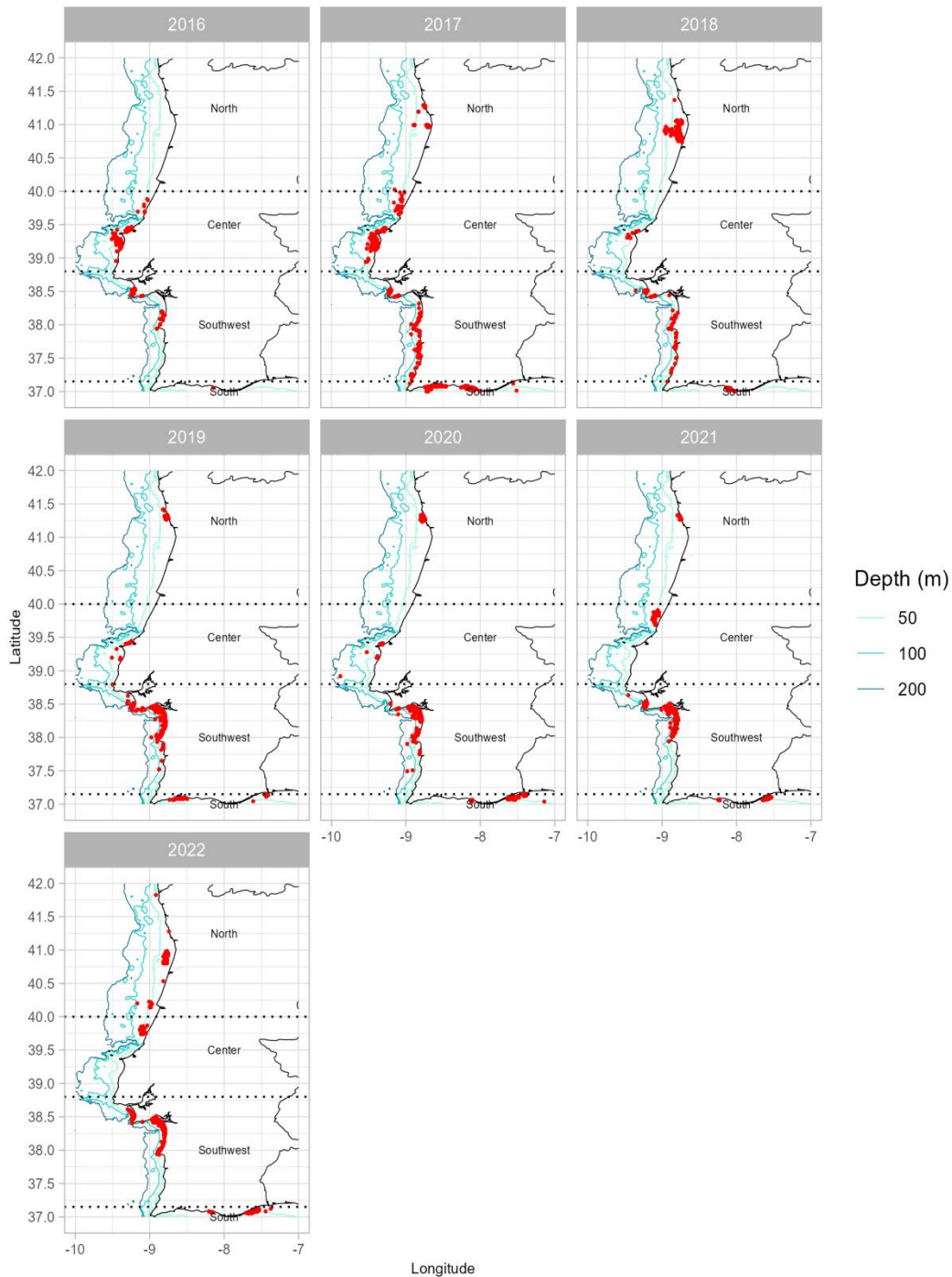


Figure 19.9.11.2. *Raja undulata* in ICES Division 27.9a. Spatial coverage of self-sampling data for the period 2016-2022.

### 19.9.12 Blonde ray (*Raja brachyura*) in Division 9.a (west of Galicia, Portugal, and Gulf of Cadiz) (rjh.27.9a)

For the period 2008-2022, *Raja brachyura* landings are mainly derived from Portugal (Table 19.9.12.1), in particular from the polyvalent fleet which represents between 71 and 94% of the total annual landed weight of the species (Maia *et al.*, 2022d). Spain landings only represent up to 4%.

Discards information on skates and rays from the Portuguese polyvalent and bottom otter trawl segments operating in the ICES Division 9.a has been collected by the Data Collection Framework (EU DCF). The routine estimator used to estimate total discards in the Portuguese crustacean and demersal fish bottom otter trawl does not apply to species with occurrence lower than 30% of the trips sampled under the DCF Portuguese on-board sampling program, which is the case of all skate and ray species (Serra-Pereira *et al.*, 2017). The low frequency of occurrence registered for the species in bottom otter trawl fisheries indicates that discards can be considered negligible (Fernandes, 2021). Regarding the polyvalent fleet, discards are known to take place but are not fully quantified and information available is insufficient to estimate discards of the species. *Raja brachyura* has commercial interest and large individuals are not discarded. Discard survival studies suggest that *R. brachyura* has relatively high survivorship after capture (for details see Section 19.3.3.).

**Table 19.9.12.1. *Raja brachyura* in ICES Division 27.9a. ICES estimates of landings by country (in tonnes). In 2005–2008 species-specific landings data are only presented for Portugal, as Spanish species-specific landings are not available in this period.**

Year	Spain	Portugal	Total
2005		495	495
2006		586	586
2007		459	459
2008		193	193
2009	1	163	164
2010	2	221	223
2011	1	161	162
2012	1	165	165
2013	3	179	182
2014	0	174	174
2015	1	236	236
2016	1	221	222
2017	1	235	236
2018	3.7	191	195
2019	8.3	255	263
2020	12	335	347
2021	11	267	278
2022	13	297	311

A proposal for assessing the status of the stock using the ICES rfb rule (ICES, 2021a) was presented at WGEF 2022. Following the ICES guidance on the parameter determination for the rfb rule (ICES, 2021a; ICES, 2022a), the input values for applying rfb rule are presented in Table 19.9.12.2. Following rfb rule, the advised landings in 2023 and 2024 should not exceed 231 t. Since the advice for 2023 and 2024 corresponds to a decrease of 9% in relation to the previous advice (Ay of 254 t), the stability clause was not applied.

**Table 19.9.12.2. *Raja brachyura* in ICES Division 27.9a. Estimates used in the rfb rule, with details and comments.**

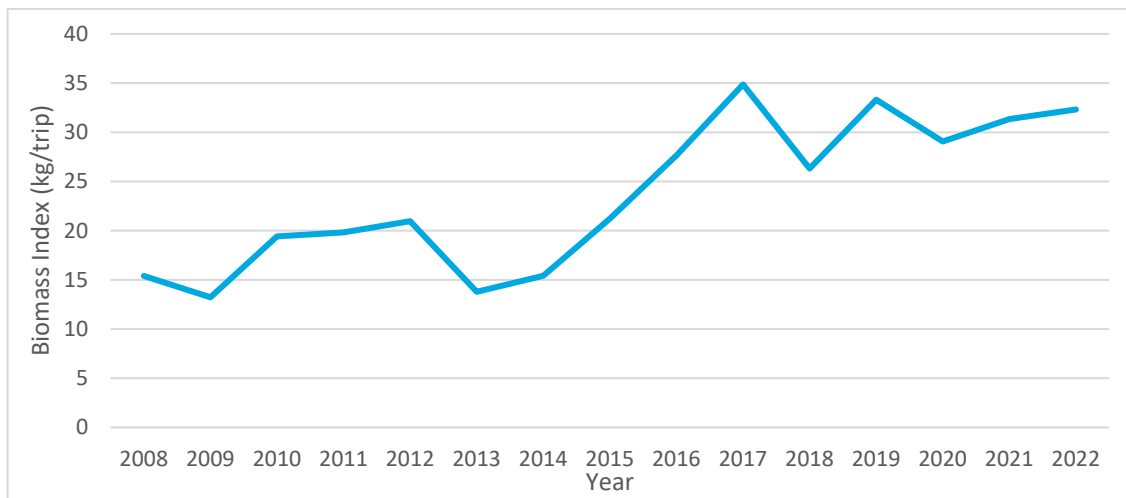
Variable	Estimate	Input data	Comment
r: Stock biomass trend	0.96	Stock-size indicator: standardized commercial LPUE from Portuguese polyvalent fleet.	Index A (2020, 2021) = 29.92 kg.trip <sup>-1</sup> Index B (2017, 2018, 2019) = 31.28 kg.trip <sup>-1</sup>
b: Biomass safeguard = $\min(1, Iy-1/Itrigger)$ $Itrigger = Iloss \omega$ Considering $\omega=1.4$	1	Stock indicator; Iloss, minimum estimate (2009) = Itrigger = 18.53 ( $Iy-1/Itrigger=1.67$ )	The series shows an increasing trend since its beginning.
m linked to von Bertalanffy k	0.95	k=0.13 year <sup>-1</sup> ; estimated from the Von Bertalanffy growth model (Pina-Rodrigues, 2012)	k estimated for females (Pina-Rodrigues, 2012).
f: Fishing proxy	1.00	Length data collected under the sampling program raised to the overall landings. Length data were from 2019 to 2021.  Lmean=74.54 cm  L <sub>F=M</sub> = 74.63	To overcome deficiencies in sampling in 2020 due to covid disruption, data from 2019-2021 was combined. See more information below.
Ay × r × f × b × m	231 t		Decrease of 9% in relation to the previous advice (Ay of 254 t). The stability clause was thus not applied.

Data used included a standardized LPUE time-series as stock indicator and the MSY related indicator ( $L_{mean}/L_{F=M}$ ) as F proxy (see details above).

This is a coastal species with a patchy distribution that is caught infrequently by both Spanish and in Portuguese surveys in Division 9.a (usually lower than 0.1 kg haul<sup>-1</sup> in any year of the series). Consequently, abundance indices derived from these surveys are not considered indicative of stock status. In this case, the biomass index used for assessment is based on a standardized commercial LPUE time-series

Details on the LPUE standardization methodology are described in the stock annex. In 2022, the model was updated with new data. The selected best model included the variables years, quarter, vessel size, fishing seasonality on skates and rays and fishing gear (trammel nets or gillnets). In previous analysis a standardized LPUE was given for to a reference situation: quarter = 1, SIZES = M (medium), SAZ = c (constant) and fishing gear = nets. However, in 2022 WGEF considered the high value estimated for 2019 unreliable and exploratory analyses were performed. More details can be found in Maia *et al.*, 2022d WD. As there were no evident reason for 2019 estimate, a new CPUE series was constructed based on the model's estimated values for the input data set (Figure 19.9.12.1). In 2023, the model was updated (explained variance = 0.75, AIC = 232296). Mean annual biomass index (stock indicator) for 2021-2022 (31.83) was 6% higher than observed in the preceding three years (2018–2020; 29.57).



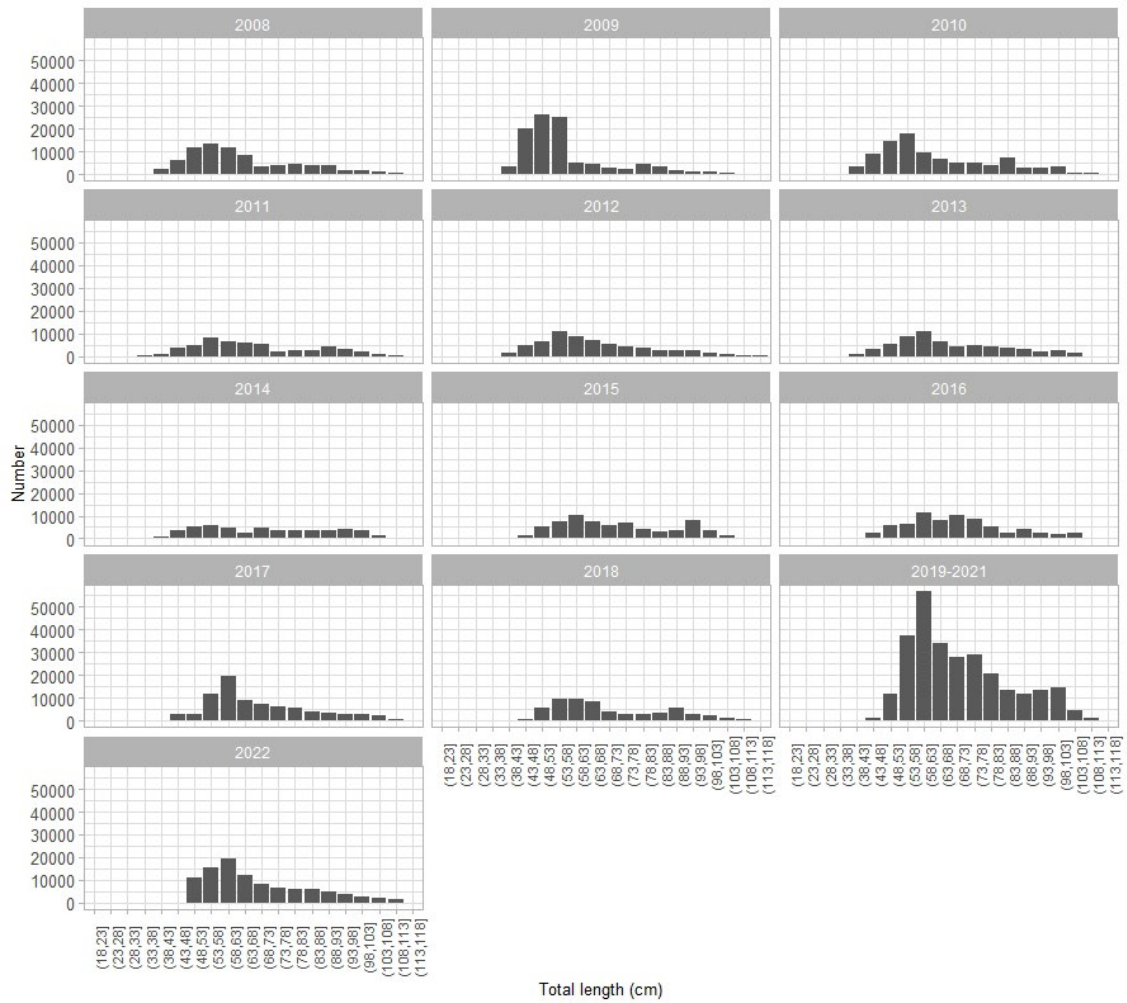


**Figure 19.9.12.1. *Raja brachyura* in ICES Division 27.9a. Polyvalent fleet annual standardized CPUE estimates (kg trip<sup>-1</sup>) in the Division 9.a for the period 2008–2022.**

Annual length frequency distributions for the Portuguese combined trawl and polyvalent catches are presented in Figure 19.9.12.2. Due to Covid related data collection constraints, data for the period 2019-2021 was combined, according to WGEF decision. Discard data are only available from the Spanish trawl fleet but length information is deficient. In the early years of the time series the sampling effort was reduced and the corresponding length frequency distributions for the exploited population reflect that and should be analyzed with caution.

To determine F proxy based on length-based indicators, estimates of  $L_{inf}$  (126.0 cm; Pina-Rodrigues, 2012),  $L_{50}$  (95.2 cm; Maia *et al.*, 2022a) and parameters from the weight-length relationship  $a=0.00000198$ ; and  $b=3.2$  (Serra-Pereira *et al.*, 2010) were used. Length classes of 5 cm were adopted as creates a smooth and unimodal distribution. In 2023, the LBI analysis was updated. LBI analysis resulted in a  $L_c= 52.5$  cm,  $L_{mean}=71.09$  cm and  $L_{F=M}= 70.86$  cm for 2022. The  $L_c$  estimated value of the exploited length frequency population is constrained by the Portuguese technical measures adopted, in particular the minimum landing size (MLS). Therefore, the  $L_c$  estimate is high and is likely to be biased against the  $L_c$  of the fishing gears capturing the species. The adoption of a MLS leads to the increase of smaller specimens discarding which, however, are thought to have a high survivorship after capture, as proven by studies on *R. brachyura* in the area (ICES, 2021b; Castelo, 2021).

The ratio of mean length in the catch to the  $F_{MSY}$  proxy ( $L_{mean}/L_{F=M}$ ) suggests that the stock is exploited at sustainable levels ( $L_{mean}/L_{F=M}=1.00$  in 2022), with values above or very close to 1 along the time-series (Table 19.9.12.3) (for details on procedures see Maia *et al.*, 2022d).



**Figure 19.9.12.2b.** *Raja brachyura* in ICES Division 27.9a. Length–frequency distribution (5 cm length classes) for the period for 2008-2021 with polyvalent and trawl fleets combined. Data for the period 2019-2021 is combined. Numbers of individuals correspond to raised numbers.

**Table 19.9.12.3.** *Raja brachyura* in ICES Division 27.9a. Indicator table for LBI analysis for the period 2008-2022.

Year	Conservation				Optimizing Yield	MSY
	$L_c/L_{mat}$	$L_{25}/L_{mat}$	$L_{max}/L_{inf}$	$P_{mega}$	$L_{mean}/L_{opt}$	$L_{mean}/L_{FeM}$
	>1	>1	>0.8	>30%	~1	≥1
2008	0.50	0.55	0.82	0.08	0.80	0.99
2009	0.50	0.51	0.75	0.03	0.71	0.89
2010	0.50	0.54	0.81	0.08	0.79	0.99
2011	0.50	0.57	0.83	0.14	0.84	1.06
2012	0.55	0.57	0.82	0.09	0.84	0.99
2013	0.55	0.58	0.82	0.11	0.85	1.01
2014	0.50	0.58	0.83	0.19	0.88	1.10
2015	0.55	0.63	0.83	0.20	0.90	1.06
2016	0.50	0.64	0.83	0.13	0.85	1.06
2017	0.60	0.63	0.83	0.11	0.88	0.99
2018	0.55	0.60	0.83	0.13	0.86	1.02

2019-2021	0.60	0.63	0.82	0.14	0.89	1.00
2022	0.55	0.60	0.84	0.11	0.85	1.00

### 19.9.13 Common skate *Dipturus batis*-complex (blue skate *Dipturus batis* and flapper skate *Dipturus intermedius*) in Subarea 8 and Division 9.a (Bay of Biscay and Atlantic Iberian waters) (rjb.27.89a)

*Dipturus batis*-complex has been confirmed to comprise two species, the nomenclature has been stabilized in Last *et al.* (2016) the smaller species (the form described as *D. cf. flossada* by Iglésias *et al.*, 2010) is named common blue skate, *Dipturus batis* and the larger species flapper skate, *D. intermedius*.

These species are only caught occasionally in Subarea 8 and might not occur to any degree in Division 9.a.

There are no stock size indicators for either species. Reported landings are low due to restrictive management measures and do not provide information on stock dynamics. Despite the *Dipturus batis*-complex being prohibited in EU regulations, some individuals were landed occasionally in French and Spanish fish markets in Subarea 8. In France, sampled specimens in fish markets included an adult female *Dipturus intermedius* (200 cm LT) - a southerly record of the species in recent years; and small individuals of *Dipturus batis* caught at the Glénan archipelago (southern Brittany). As these species are now extirpated from inner shelf areas of their former range, fishermen are not always able to identify them accurately. Available information does not change the perception of the stock status of these species that occur at low levels in this ecoregion.

Differing to other areas, *D. oxyrinchus* was included since 2016 and in the advice for the raj.27.89a and not for rjb.27.89a. It is important to highlight that all landings of the genus *Dipturus* from Portugal in Division 9.a refer to *D. oxyrinchus*, for Spain and France official landings of *D. oxyrinchus* were considered to be correctly identified and all the remaining official landings of the genus *Dipturus* from this ecoregion were allocated to *Dipturus* spp., as species identification problems persist among species of the genus *Dipturus*.

In 2021, information about *Dipturus* species were compiled for this ecoregion and discussed under the Tor “Evaluate available data at species-specific level within the common skate-complex (*Dipturus* spp.) stock units in order to further increase our understanding of each individual species and their current status”. See section 26 of this report for further details.

### 19.9.14 Other skates in Subarea 8 and Division 9.a (Bay of Biscay and Atlantic Iberian waters) (raj.27.89a)

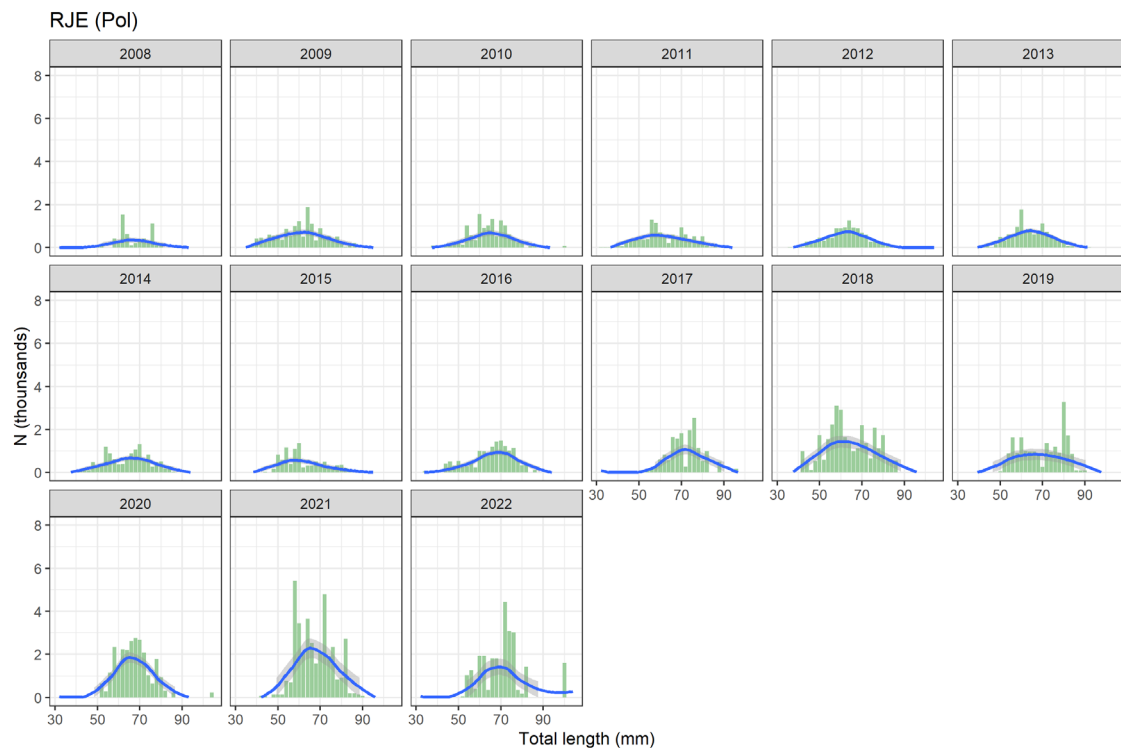
Sandy ray *Leucoraja circularis* occurs on the deeper shelf and along the slope of the Bay of Biscay and in minor abundance in Portuguese landings. Minor occurrences of the shagreen ray *Leucoraja fullonica* are also observed to the North of Division 8.a, but this species is largely absent from Division 9.a. Owing to the higher abundance of these two species in the Celtic Seas, the Bay of Biscay may comprise the southern limits of the Celtic Sea stocks.

In divisions 8.a-b, occasional catches of *Raja brachyura* and *Raja microocellata* are found at the coast by artisanal fisheries. These two species are scarce in the historical time-series of the Spanish IEO Q4-IBTS survey in divisions 8.c and 9.a.

All four of these species are caught in too small numbers in the EVHOE survey to calculate reliable population indices.

In Division 9.a, *Raja microocellata*, *R. miraletus* and *Dipturus oxyrinchus* appear occasionally in landings (Table 19.2a at the end of this chapter). *R. microocellata* length–frequency distribution is only presented for the Portuguese commercial polyvalent fleet, due to the low occurrence of this species in landings from the trawl fleet, for the period 2008–2022 (Figure 19.9.14). *R. miraletus* and *D. oxyrinchus* are caught in low numbers in Portuguese surveys.

As mentioned in the previous section, landings allocated to *D. oxyrinchus* were included in this stock.



**Figure 19.9.14.** *Raja microocellata* in ICES Division 27.9a. Length–frequency distribution from the Portuguese commercial polyvalent fleet for the period from 2008–2022. Total number of sampled trips was  $n = 825$ . Length–frequency distributions were extrapolated to the total estimated landed weight of each species.

### 19.9.15 Summary of the status of skate stocks in the Bay of Biscay and Atlantic Iberian waters

The following table provides a summary of stock status for the main species evaluated in 2022 and using ICES MSY and DLS approaches.

Species	ICES stock code	ICES DLS Category	Perceived status
Thornback ray <i>Raja clavata</i>	rjc.27.8ab,d	2	The current stock biomass (2022) is considered just below $B_{MSY}$ ( $0.96 * B_{MSY}$ )
	rjc.27.8c	3	Declining in the stock size indicator since a peak level in 2013
	rjc.27.9a	3	The stock size indicator increased from 2008 to 2017 and levelled off thereafter
Cuckoo ray <i>Leucoraja naevus</i>	rjn.27.9a	3	The stock size indicator increased from 1998 to 2018 and declining strongly in 2020
	rjn.27.8c	3	The stock size indicator shows a long-term increasing trend since 1988, with strong fluctuations
Spotted ray <i>Raja montagui</i>	rjm.27.8	3	The stock size indicator is highly uncertain and shows no trend during the past two decades.
	rjm.27.9a	3	The stock size indicator fluctuated without trend since 2008.
Undulate ray <i>Raja undulata</i>	rju.27.8ab	6	No assessment, ancillary information suggest increase in the stock biomass
	rju.27.8c	6	No assessment, fisheries data may not be informative of trends in stock biomass.
	rju.27.9a	6	No assessment, the current levels of exploitation are not thought to have a negative impact on stock status
Blonde ray <i>Raja brachyura</i>	rjh.27.9a	3	The stock size indicator increased from 2008 to 2017 and levelled off thereafter.
Common skate <i>Dipturus batis</i> complex	rjb.27.89a	6	No assessment, available data do not inform on stock dynamics, species composition, catch, or landings. There are currently no robust stock size indicators.
Other skates	raj.27.89a	6	No assessment. The decline in landings is due primarily to the increase in the proportion of landings of rajidae that are reported by species.

### 19.10 Quality of assessments

LPUE data for *L. naevus* and *R. clavata* are available for divisions 8.abd since 2001. Since 2008 LPUE were made available for *R. clavata*, *R. microocellata*, *R. montagui*, *R. undulata* and *R. brachyura* in Division 9.a. The inclusion of the standardized LPUE series in the assessment of *R. clavata*, *R. montagui* and *L. naevus* in Division 9.a were reviewed by WSKATE and peer-reviewed by an external review group (ICES; 2021b).

As in other ecoregions, surveys in Subarea 8 and Division 9.a were not specifically designed for elasmobranchs, producing a high frequency of zero-catch data. The fishing gear used and the survey design are not the most appropriate to sample elasmobranchs, especially for species with patchy distributions. Surveys do not cover coastal and estuarine areas, and therefore do not provide indicators for stocks distributed in shallow waters, e.g. those of undulate ray. Nevertheless, for some stocks, surveys provide reliable biomass indices.

Efforts have been made to overcome data limitations in order to standardize the fishery-independent abundance indexes, using as an example the estimates for *R. clavata* data from the

autumn survey (PtGFS-WIBTS-Q4) in Division 9.a (Figueiredo and Serra-Pereira, 2013 WD). To deal with the large amount of zero-catches a generalized linear mixed model (GLMM) was fitted to the data, assuming a Tweedie distribution for the observations. One of the main purposes of applying a GLMM was to incorporate in the model variables that could account for differences between years, namely the difference between stations, depths, survey methodology, etc. Some decisions/assumptions had to be taken in order to proceed with the analysis of the data, including the determination of a subset of the available data, which better represent the geographical distribution of the species.

Tagging studies of *R. undulata* have shown that the distribution of this species is discontinuous, confirming the 2013 tagging results and the need to assess the state of the stocks of this species for areas that fit with the limited movements that this species may make. This behaviour may be a benefit for obtaining mark–recapture stock estimate as the one provided for the central part of the Bay of Biscay. Results allow an exploratory analysis including a lot of assumptions. Consequently, it must be regarded as only indicative of the biomass trend.

## 19.11 Management considerations

A TAC for skates in this region was only introduced in 2009, along with requirements to provide species-specific data for the main commercial species (initially *L. naevus* and *R. clavata* and, since 2013, *R. brachyura*). Consequently, there is only a relatively short time-series of species-specific landings. In the case of Portugal, estimates of species-specific landings based on DCF sampling data are available since 2008.

Landings of *Raja undulata* were not allowed from 2009 to 2014, with a bycatch allowance only established for Subarea 8 since 2015, which was then extended to Division 9.a. in 2016. Consequently, landings data for *Raja undulata* are not indicative of stock status. However, landings and discards data could be indicative of stock status for this species along with several monitoring years according to self-sampling programs (French and Portuguese) in these areas.

Currently, fishery-independent trawl survey data provide the longest time-series of species-specific information. These surveys do not sample all skate species effectively, with more coastal species (e.g. *R. brachyura*, *R. microocellata* and *R. undulata*) not sampled representatively.

The status of more offshore species, such as *L. circularis* and *L. fullonica*, are poorly understood, but these two species may be more common in the adjacent Celtic Seas ecoregion (see Section 18).

Some of the larger-bodied species in this ecoregion are from the genus *Dipturus*, but data are limited for all these species, with some potentially more common further north.

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## **19.13 Tables and Figures**

**Table 19.1a. Skates in the Bay of Biscay and Iberian Waters. ICES estimates of landings (tonnes) of Rajidae in divisions 8.a-b (the figures in the table are rounded to the nearest tonne. Calculations were done with unrounded inputs, and computed values may not match exactly when calculated using the rounded figures in the table).**

Country	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Belgium	12	15	9	9	12	4	9	4	6	8	5	4	3
France	2405	1960	1884	1799	1693	1461	1294	1202	1179	1349	1541	1220	1322
Ireland											35	28	
Netherlands					0								
Norway		15	4										
Spain	423	334	408	428	295	190	247	235	242	243	212	262	210
UK	10	40	7	4	0	0	1	2	0		19	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>2850</b>	<b>2364</b>	<b>2312</b>	<b>2239</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>1656</b>	<b>1551</b>	<b>1443</b>	<b>1427</b>	<b>1601</b>	<b>1811</b>	<b>1514</b>	<b>1534</b>

**Table 19.1b. Skates in the Bay of Biscay and Iberian Waters. ICES estimates of landings (tonnes) of Rajidae in Division 8.d.**

Country	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
France	110	63	71	94	72	68	71	76	57	66	61	44	32
Ireland				0				0			0		
Spain	16	12	17	9	0	1	4	2	8	6	6		0
UK	0	3	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0			
<b>Total</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>32</b>

**Table 19.1c. Skates in the Bay of Biscay and Iberian Waters. ICES estimates of landings (tonnes) of Rajidae in Division 8.c.**

Country	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
France	2	0	1	0	0	0	2	1	0	3	1	0	0
Spain	177	194	420	434	533	551	662	654	608	528	364	407	377
<b>Total</b>	<b>179</b>	<b>194</b>	<b>421</b>	<b>434</b>	<b>534</b>	<b>552</b>	<b>664</b>	<b>656</b>	<b>609</b>	<b>530</b>	<b>364</b>	<b>408</b>	<b>377</b>

**Table 19.1d. Skates in the Bay of Biscay and Iberian Waters. ICES estimates of landings (tonnes) of Rajidae in Division 9.a.**

Country	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
France					1						0		0
Ireland					0								
Portugal	1303	1544	1444	1439	1444	1454	1425	1122	1104	1026	1012	1026	1138
Spain	301	283	139	134	276	409	429	468	481	455	253	304	348
<b>Total</b>	<b>1604</b>	<b>1827</b>	<b>1583</b>	<b>1573</b>	<b>1722</b>	<b>1863</b>	<b>1853</b>	<b>1590</b>	<b>1585</b>	<b>1481</b>	<b>1266</b>	<b>1330</b>	<b>1487</b>

**Table 19.1e. Skates in the Bay of Biscay and Iberian Waters. Combined Landings (tonnes) of Rajidae in Biscay and Iberian Waters.**

Country	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Belgium	12	15	9	9	12	4	9	4	6	8	5	4	3
France	2517	2023	1955	1893	1766	1529	1367	1279	1236	1418	1602	1264	1354
Ireland				0	0			0			35	28	
Netherlands					0								
Norway		15	4										
Portugal	1303	1544	1444	1439	1444	1454	1425	1122	1104	1026	1012	1026	1138
Spain	918	823	985	1005	1104	1152	1342	1359	1340	1233	835	973	935
UK	10	43	8	4	1	0	1	2	0	0	19	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>4760</b>	<b>4462</b>	<b>4405</b>	<b>4350</b>	<b>4327</b>	<b>4140</b>	<b>4144</b>	<b>3766</b>	<b>3686</b>	<b>3685</b>	<b>3508</b>	<b>3296</b>	<b>3430</b>

**Table 19.1f. Skates in the Bay of Biscay and Iberian Waters. Landings (tonnes) by ICES stock unit and country since 2005. Totals by stock are presented in bold (the figures in the table are rounded to the nearest tonne. Calculations were done with unrounded inputs, and computed values may not match exactly when calculated using the rounded figures in the table). The stock rjn.27.678abd includes landings in 6 and 7 Divisions.**

Stock	Country	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
raj.27.89a	Belgium	12	15	9	1	2	1	2	0	1	0	1	0
	France	783	662	610	613	391	244	175	151	179	238	202	181
	Ireland				0	0						4	5

Stock	Country	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
	Netherlands					0							
	Portugal	104	123	38	307	308	293	276	240	144	132	113	99
	Spain	918	823	985	1000	707	627	840	762	616	461	299	367
	UK	10	43	8	2	0	0		0	0		1	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>1827</b>	<b>1665</b>	<b>1651</b>	<b>1924</b>	<b>1408</b>	<b>1166</b>	<b>1293</b>	<b>1153</b>	<b>940</b>	<b>831</b>	<b>620</b>	<b>653</b>

Stock	Country	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
rja.27.nea	France	1		2	1	59	11	29	12	15	11	7	4	4	7	
	Ireland										0	0	0		0	
	Portugal	5	6													
	UK				1	0	0		0	0	0			0		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>7</b>	

Stock	Country	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
rjb.27.89a	France	11	5	3	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Ireland											13	15			
	Portugal	0		0	1											
	UK										0					
	<b>Total</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	

Stock	Country	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	
rjc.27.8abd	Belgium					2	2	1	2	2	3	3	1	2
	France	276	300	215	187	195	217	177	179	194	202	211	166	
	Ireland								0			4	7	
	Spain				0	42	28	37	45	47	36	33	37	
	UK							1	2			17	0	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>276</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>215</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>239</b>	<b>246</b>	<b>217</b>	<b>227</b>	<b>244</b>	<b>241</b>	<b>266</b>	<b>211</b>	

Stock	Country	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
rjc.27.8c	France	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
	Spain		0	0	4	94	186	206	223	238	248	150	161
	<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>186</b>	<b>207</b>	<b>224</b>	<b>238</b>	<b>248</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>161</b>

Stock	Country	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
rjc.27.9a	France												
	Portugal	480	569	472	745	739	611	811	570	643	585	578	559

Stock	Country	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
	Spain					29	115	139	194	166	215	120	123
	<b>Total</b>	<b>480</b>	<b>569</b>	<b>472</b>	<b>745</b>	<b>768</b>	<b>725</b>	<b>950</b>	<b>764</b>	<b>809</b>	<b>800</b>	<b>697</b>	<b>682</b>

Stock	Country	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
rjh.27.9a	Belgium												
	France												
	Portugal	495	586	459	193	163	221	161	165	179	174	236	221
	Spain					1	2	1	0	3	0	0	1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>495</b>	<b>586</b>	<b>459</b>	<b>193</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>223</b>	<b>162</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>182</b>	<b>174</b>	<b>236</b>	<b>222</b>

Stock	Country	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
rjm.27.8	Belgium				0	0	0	0	0				
	France	155	130	124	106	64	86	91	86	109	121	149	132
	Ireland											12	1
	Spain					11	26	22	19	28	40	28	26
	UK				1	1	0	0				1	0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>137</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>159</b>

Stock	Country	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
rjm.27.9a	France													
	Portugal	76	90	119	144	184	275	121	108	111	101	67	68	9
	Spain			0		7	10	3	2	4	2	1	5	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>191</b>	<b>284</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>9</b>

Stock	Country	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
rjn.27.678abd	Belgium			0	86	81	70	112	93	97	48	51	27	26	28	25	18	
	France	3164	2565	2575	2507	3217	3069	2909	2571	2195	2515	2621	2233	2144	2288	2398	1984	
	Ireland				12	55	106	108	93	83	79	69	69	115	103	73		
	Netherlands					0			0	0			0					
	Spain				1	778	480	387	311	373	300	343	372	305	335	295	192	
	UK				225	321	421	402	306	269	262	266	254	260	272	289	186	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>3164</b>	<b>2565</b>	<b>2575</b>	<b>2819</b>	<b>4408</b>	<b>4096</b>	<b>3916</b>	<b>3388</b>	<b>3028</b>	<b>3209</b>	<b>3360</b>	<b>2955</b>	<b>2804</b>	<b>3037</b>	<b>3111</b>	<b>2453</b>	<b>2</b>

Stock	Country	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
rjn.27.8c	France	0	0		0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0
	Spain					18	34	24	26	33	27	15	13
	<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>13</b>

Stock	Country	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
rjn.27.9a	France											0	
	Portugal	43	51	79	50	50	55	56	39	27	34	20	57
	Spain					3	4	12	13	2	0	0	1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>59</b>

Stock	Country	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
rju.27.8ab	France	1	0		0	3	2	2	3	0	7	11	14
	Spain												
	<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>14</b>

Stock	Country	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
rju.27.8c	France												
	Spain											5	7
	<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>7</b>

Stock	Country	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
rju.27.9a	France												
	Portugal	100	119	277									23
	Spain												8
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>277</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>31</b>

\*includes landings in 6 and 7 Divisions

**Table 19.2a. Skates in the Bay of Biscay and Iberian Waters. Species-specific landings (tonnes) in divisions 8.abde since 2005 (the figures in the table are rounded to the nearest tonne. Calculations were done with unrounded inputs, and computed values may not match exactly when calculated using the rounded figures in the table).**

Species	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
<i>Dipturus batis</i>														
<i>Dipturus oxyrinchus</i>	12	10	2	3	1	6	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	
<i>Dipturus spp</i>	11	5	3	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	13	15	0	



Species	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
<i>Leucoraja circularis</i>	84	53	58	69	20	28	16	20	20	25	24	22	0	
<i>Leucoraja fullonica</i>	14	8	7	7	45	37	36	30	30	38	47	40	27	
<i>Leucoraja naevus</i>	1290	927	1002	987	1310	1102	982	935	959	1057	1214	996	915	104
<i>Raja brachyura</i>				0	11	11	18	7	27	67	65	76	144	
<i>Raja clavata</i>	276	300	215	190	239	246	217	227	244	241	266	211	232	27
<i>Raja microocellata</i>	0	0	0	1	3	2	4	13	20	38	21	30	54	
<i>Raja montagui</i>	155	130	124	107	65	86	92	86	109	121	162	133	153	17
<i>Raja undulata</i>	1	0		0	3	2	2	3	0	7	11	14	22	1
<i>Rajella fyllae</i>									0					
<i>Rajiformes</i>	1133	993	990	974	373	206	252	199	83	79	52	19	18	26
<i>Rostroraja alba</i>	1		0	0	3	0	1	1	0	1	3	1	0	
<b>Total</b>	<b>2977</b>	<b>2441</b>	<b>2401</b>	<b>2343</b>	<b>2072</b>	<b>1725</b>	<b>1626</b>	<b>1520</b>	<b>1493</b>	<b>1673</b>	<b>1878</b>	<b>1558</b>	<b>1566</b>	<b>1768</b>

**Table 19.2b. Skates in the Bay of Biscay and Iberian Waters. Species-specific landings of Rajidae (tonnes) in divisions 8.c since 2005.**

Species	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
<i>Dipturus oxyrinchus</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Dipturus spp</i>	0	0	0	1										0				
<i>Leucoraja circularis</i>	0	0		4	1	2	1	1	1	0	0	0				0	0	0
<i>Leucoraja fullonica</i>		0		0	0					0				0		0	0	
<i>Leucoraja naevus</i>	0	0		0	18	34	24	27	33	29	16	13	15	23	13	9	7	16
<i>Raja brachyura</i>				0	5	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0		2	2	5	9
<i>Raja clavata</i>	0	0	0	4	94	18	20	22	23	24	15	16	13	25	247	257	233	448
<i>Raja microcellata</i>													0		1	0		
<i>Raja montagui</i>				0	11	25	22	19	28	40	28	26	27	44	45	42	36	63
<i>Raja undulata</i>											5	7	8	9	8	7	8	10
<i>Rajiformes</i>	179	19	42	42	40	29	40	38	30	21	16	19	19	21	209	132	119	80
<b>Total</b>	<b>179</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>209</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>80</b>
	<b>7</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>
	<b>9</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>6</b>

**Table 19.2c. Skates in the Bay of Biscay and Iberian Waters. Species-specific landings (tonnes) of rajidae in divisions 9.a since 2005.**

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
2	75	20	68	24	64	33	74	26	41	56	36	16	35	12
									0					
1	2	11	1	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	5	5	0	1
				0			0				0	0		
0	53	59	68	53	29	34	20	59	41	25	38	23	23	39
3	164	223	162	165	182	174	236	222	236	195	263	347	278	311
5	768	725	950	764	809	800	697	682	744	806	802	848	942	1090
9	45	43	29	36	41	45	32	63	68	82	77	91	124	93
4	2	6	5	5	1	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
4	191	284	124	110	115	103	68	73	99	62	90	69	113	87
								31	46	52	38	45	35	53
5	421	491	447	432	345	289	139	171	210	207	218	212	156	93
	<b>1722</b>	<b>1863</b>	<b>1853</b>	<b>1590</b>	<b>1585</b>	<b>1481</b>	<b>1266</b>	<b>1330</b>	<b>1487</b>	<b>1485</b>	<b>1569</b>	<b>1535</b>	<b>1706</b>	<b>1780</b>

**Table 19.2d. Skates in the Bay of Biscay and Iberian Waters. Species-specific landings (tonnes) of Myliobatiformes, Pristi-  
formes, Rhinopristiformes and Torpediniformes in subareas 8 and 9 since 2005.**

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
3														
0	0	0	0	0	0	0		0	0	0	0	2	0	
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		0	0		
5	3	3	2	2	3	5	6	4						
											0	0	0	0
7	7	7	10	8	12	7	9	10	12	6	4		1	0
										43	6	7		
2	1	1	2	1	1	2	2	2	23	15	11	7	4	4
	0			1										
												0		
0	0		0	0	0	0	0	0		0	0	0		0
6	39	50	54	39	43	46	43	49	63	50	46	34	34	
8	25	22	20	20	23	14	18	16				22	22	29
														35
7	76	84	90	72	83	75	78	81	98	114	67	72	61	69

**Table 19.3a. Skates in the Bay of Biscay and Iberian. Discards reported to ICES[^1] (tonnes) by ICES stock unit and country. The stock rjn.27.678abd includes discards in 6 and 7 Divisions.**

Stock	Country	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
raj.27.89a	France												713	882			
	Portugal					0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Spain															1	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>713</b>	<b>882</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>

Stock	Country	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
rja.27.nea	Portugal															0	0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

Stock	Country	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
rjb.27.89a	France														19		
	Portugal					0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Spain											3				0	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>0</b>

Stock	Country	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
rjc.27.8abd	Belgium														1		2
	France												27	24	22	10	50
	Spain											4	30	14	5	5	9
	<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>15</b>

Stock	Country	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
rjc.27.8c	Spain								73	79	12	28	31	61	33	30	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>30</b>

Stock	Country	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
rjc.27.9a	Portugal					0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Spain											31	43	7	13	21	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>21</b>

Stock	Country	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
rjh.27.9a	Portugal					0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
	Spain											0	2	0	0	3	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>

Stock	Country	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
rjm.27.8	France												71	85	0	63	0
	Spain											1	34	2	5	12	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>0</b>

Stock	Country	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
rjm.27.9a	Portugal				0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		
	Spain								1	41	12	2	3		2	3	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>

Stock	Country	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020		
rjn.27.678abd	Belgium								67	42	48	169	859	349	131	116	14		
	France											820	1030	667	855	428	257	71	
	Ireland				857	1886	746	866	469	719	673	562	597	732	975	322	849	85	
	Spain										315	315	125	138	249	105	144	133	
	UK					597	177	527	522	108	198	506	191	107	201	419	359	655	272
	<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>916</b>	<b>2063</b>	<b>798</b>	<b>918</b>	<b>638</b>	<b>959</b>	<b>1086</b>	<b>2063</b>	<b>2715</b>	<b>1778</b>	<b>2244</b>	<b>1329</b>	<b>1687</b>	<b>1207</b>

Stock	Country	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
rjn.27.8c	Spain									11	11	3	5	8		2	6
	<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>

Stock	Country	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
rjn.27.9a	Portugal					0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		
	Spain									4	41	22	16	7			3
	<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

Stock	Country	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	
rju.27.8ab	France											416	230	271	122		368	45

Stock	Country	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	
	Spain																		1	
	Total	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	41	23	27	12	0	36	45	

Stock	Country	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	
rju.2 7.8c	Spain											1		0	0	0				
	Total	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Stock	Country	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	
rju.2 7.9a	Portugal					0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0					
	Spain											0	7	14	0	1		4	0	
	Total	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	14	0	1	0	4	0	

[^1] This table includes estimated discards from fleets (e.g. a DCF levels 6 fleet for one country), for which there was enough (quality controlled) samples for the raising at national level. Unsampled fleets not include

# 20 Skates and Rays in the Azores and Mid-Atlantic Ridge

## 20.1 Ecoregion and stock boundaries

The Mid-Atlantic Ridge (MAR; ICES subareas 10.a, b, 12.a1, c, and 14. b1) is an extensive and diverse area, which includes several types of ecosystems, including abyssal plains, seamounts, active underwater volcanoes, chemosynthetic ecosystems, and islands coastal areas.

The main species of elasmobranch observed in this ecoregion are deep-water sharks (e.g., *Centrophorus* spp., *Centroscymnus* spp., *Deania* spp., *Etmopterus* spp., *Hexanchus griseus*, *Galeus murinus*, *Somniosus microcephalus*, *Pseudotriakis microdon*, *Scymnodon obscurus*, *Centroscyllium fabricii*; *Dalatias licha*, see sections 3-5 for more information). These species are mostly distributed deeper than 600 m. As a consequence of their low commercial value and EU restrictive management measures, many of these species are discarded (ICES, 2005; WD Pinho and Canha, 2011). Blue shark *Prionace glauca*, thornback ray *Raja clavata* and tope *Galeorhinus galeus* are the most important commercial elasmobranchs species in the Azores area (see sections 8 and 10 for blue shark and tope respectively).

The present section focuses on the skates taken in Azorean waters. Of these, the most abundant in Subarea 10 is thornback ray *Raja clavata*. Other species observed include the 'common skate complex' (species to be confirmed), *Dipturus intermedius*, *Leucoraja fullonica*, *Rajella bathyphila*, *Raja brachyura* and *Rostroraja alba* (WD Pinho, 2005, 2014b). Other species of batoids, such as Bigelow's ray *Rajella bigelowi* are also observed in this ecoregion (Santos *et al.*, 2020a). All these species are generally discarded if caught in the Azorean commercial fisheries (WD Pinho and Canha, 2011). Some of the scarcer skates observed on the MAR include *Bathyraja pallida* and *Bathyraja richardsoni* (ICES, 2005).

Stock boundaries are not known for most of the skate species in this area, neither are the potential movements of species that also occur on the continental shelf of mainland Europe. Genetic studies support the existence of a self-contained *R. clavata* population in the Azores, i.e., a stock unit (Chevolot *et al.*, 2006; Ball *et al.*, 2016), indicating that mixing is limited. Further investigations are necessary to determine potential migrations or interactions of skate populations within this ecoregion and neighbouring areas.

## 20.2 The fishery

### 20.2.1 History the fishery

Two broad types of fisheries occur in the Azores and MAR areas. Oceanic fisheries (large mid-water and bottom trawlers and longliners) operate in the central region and northern parts of the MAR. Longline and handline fisheries operate inside the Azorean EEZ, where trawling is prohibited. The latter fishery also targets stocks that may extend south of the ICES area, with the southern limit being 36°N.

Fisheries from these areas were described in earlier WGEF reports (ICES, 2005). Landings from the Azorean fleets have been reported to ICES. Landings from the MAR are small and variable, or even absent, and few vessels find the MAR fisheries profitable at present.



Skates are caught in the Azores EEZ by a multispecies demersal fishery, using handlines and bottom longlines, and by the black scabbardfish fishery using drifting bottom longlines (Santos *et al.*, 2020a). The most commercially important skate caught and landed from these fisheries is *R. clavata* (Santos *et al.*, 2020a).

### 20.2.2 The fishery in 2022

There are no target fisheries for skates in the Azores, landings are from bycatch. An expansion of the Azorean bottom longline fishery to more offshore seamounts has been observed in the last decade as a result of intensive fishing of important commercial demersal and deep-water stocks and also as a result of the introduction of spatial management measures (Santos *et al.*, 2019).

Skate landings, particularly of *R. clavata*, increased in the Azores since 2009 until 2016. The highest landings were reported in 2014 and 2015, the long-term average is 86 t, and the lowest landing values from the full time series was recorded in 2019 (42 t). Landings varied between 2020 and 2022 but remained lower than in 2011–2016 (tables 20.1–20.2; Figure 20.1). Prices in 2020–2022 were similar to previous years. The price of the thornback ray on local market does not seem to vary with quantity landed, suggesting that the domestic consumption can absorb all landings, at levels observed in recent years, with limited export. Although the fishery for this resource has these characteristics, the species is considered one of the twenty-two priority stocks in Azores (Santos *et al.*, 2020b).

Out of Azorean waters, there are no fisheries targeting skates on the MAR (ICES subareas 10, 12 and 14) with sporadic landings in recent years (Table 20.1 and 20.2).

### 20.2.3 ICES advice applicable

For the Rajidae stock in subareas 10 and 12, ICES provides biennial advice. *ICES advises that when the precautionary approach is applied, landings should be no more than 90 tonnes in each of the years 2022 and 2023. ICES cannot quantify the corresponding catches.*

### 20.2.4 Management applicable

There is no EU TAC for skates and rays in the Azores and Mid-Atlantic Ridge. The only EU management measure susceptible to impact fisheries is the list of prohibited species. Amongst prohibited rays and skates only *Dipturus intermedius* may occur in the ecoregion, but is not confirmed, so that the EU management might be considered as having no effect on fisheries.

#### 20.2.4.1 Mid-Atlantic Ridge

NEAFC has adopted management measures for the MAR areas under its regulatory area ([https://www.neafc.org/managing\\_fisheries/measures/current](https://www.neafc.org/managing_fisheries/measures/current)). These include effort limitations, area and gear restrictions.

#### 20.2.4.2 Azores EEZ

In 1998, the Azorean government implemented local management actions in order to reduce effort on shallow areas around the islands, including a licence threshold based on the requirement of the minimum value of sales and the creation of a box of three miles around the islands, with fishing restrictions by gear (only handlines are permitted) and vessel type. During 2009, additional measures were implemented, including area restrictions (temporary closure of the Condor Bank) and gear restrictions by vessel type (licence and gear configuration) (Santos *et al.*, 2020a). These technical measures have been updated thereafter (<http://www.azores.gov.pt/gra/srmct-pescas/menus/principal/Legislação/>).

In 2014, Portugal introduced a new regulation banning the use of bottom trawling and bottom gillnetting on the high seas in the area covered by Portugal's extended continental shelf under the UN Law of the Sea (Portaria n.º 114/2014, 28<sup>th</sup> May). The new regulation expands the EU regulation adopted in 2005 to ban bottom trawling in the Azores and Madeira waters and has the key objective of protecting deep-sea ecosystems (such as cold-water corals and seamounts) from the impact of bottom trawling and gillnetting.

Under the EU Common Fisheries Policy, a box of 100 miles was created around the Azorean EEZ where only the Azorean fleets are allowed to line fish for deep-sea species (Regulation EC 1954/2003).

### 20.3 Catch data

#### 20.3.1 Landings

Landings reported by each country and subarea are given in Tables 20.1–20.2. Historical total landings of skates reported for subareas 10, 12 and 14 are presented in Figure 20.1. Landings data from this ecoregion are also collated by NEAFC, and further studies to ensure that these data are consistent with ICES estimates are required.

#### 20.3.2 Discards

Discards of skates collected as part of the European Commission Data Collection Framework (DCF; EU, 2008) have no new information available.

Nevertheless, information on discards from observers in the Azorean longline fishery was reported to the WGDEEP, from 2004 to 2010, (WD Pinho and Canha, 2011). The results showed that *Raja clavata* and 'common skate complex' were among the frequently caught and discarded elasmobranch species. However, it would be important that the discard data collected by DCF in the Azores is available to update this information thirteen years after the last report.

In the past 20 years, management has induced changes in fleet behaviour, expanding the fishing areas to more offshore seamounts and deeper strata, which may have impacted the levels of skates' bycatch in Azorean fisheries. Fisheries occurring outside the ICES area to the south of the Azores EEZ may exploit the same stocks considered here.

#### 20.3.3 Quality of catch data

Species-specific landings data are not currently available for skates landed in this ecoregion, however, more than 90% of the Azorean landings are estimated to be *R. clavata*.

### **20.3.4 Discard survival**

Information on the discard survival of skates in these fisheries is not currently available.

### **20.3.5 Species composition**

In the Azores, there is no systematic fishery/landing sampling programme for these species because they have low priority on the port sampling programme. Landings of skates and rays from Azorean fisheries are reported under generic categories. Accurate data on the composition of skates landed are not currently available.

## **20.4 Commercial catch composition**

### **20.4.1 Length composition of landings**

Length samples of *R. clavata* have been collected since 1990, however few individuals were sampled until 2004 (Figure 20.5; WD Pinho and Pereira, 2017). Fishery length composition from the landings collected as part of the European Commission Data Collection Framework (DCF; EU, 2008) is available for the most recent period 2019-2022, however due to issues in the sampling program, the year of 2019 was removed (Figure 20.6). Length composition from the fishery showed a stable pattern, however, a small increase of the larger individuals (>60 cm) was observed in the last two years (Figure 20.6). This increase could be a result of the several changes in minimum landing size implemented since 2015 as a management measure in the Azores (Figure 20.2).

### **20.4.2 Length composition of discards**

There are no data available collected as part of the European Commission Data Collection Framework (DCF; EU, 2008).

### **20.4.3 Sex ratio of landings**

There are no data available collected as part of the European Commission Data Collection Framework (DCF; EU, 2008).

### **20.4.4 Quality of data**

Only limited data are available. Improved data collation and quality checks (including for species identification) are required.

## **20.5 Commercial catch and effort data**

No new information for commercial catches collected as part of the European Commission Data Collection Framework (DCF; EU, 2008) for 2020, 2021, and 2022.

Relative indices of abundance for the thornback ray species were recently estimated for the period 1990–2017 (CPUE) and 1985-2017 (LPUE) using a Generalized Linear Modelling and several

errors distributions were examined (Santos *et al.*, 2021a). Detailed information about all the standardization protocols is available in Santos *et al.* (2021a).

## 20.6 Fishery-independent surveys

An overview of the elasmobranch species occurring in Azorean waters and ICES Subarea 10, their fisheries and available information on species distributions by depth were described by Pinho (2005; 2014a, b WD), Pinho and Silva (2017 WD) and Santos *et al.* (2020a).

The Department of Oceanography and Fisheries (DOP) carries out an annual spring demersal bottom longline survey (ARQDAÇO-L6563) around the Azores since 1995. In 1998, 2006, 2009, 2014, 2015 and 2020 no survey was conducted (Pinho *et al.*, 2020). The survey follows a stratified random sampling design in which each sampling area is divided into depth strata with 50 m intervals down to 1200 m depth. Each bottom longline set is deployed perpendicular to the isobaths. Catches per unit of effort are weighted by the corresponding area size to estimate the relative biomass indices (kilogram  $10^{-3}$ hooks; Pinho *et al.*, 2020; Table 20.3). Due to the COVID-19 disruption, the bottom longline survey was not conducted in 2020. In 2021 the survey only covered 50% of the survey area. Detailed information about the statistical procedures to estimate abundance indices from areas coverage in 2021 are provided in Medeiros-Leal *et al.*, 2022 (WD). The annual values were computed using sampling statistical areas I-II because the areas III and IV were not sampled in 2021, however the abundance trend derived from Areas I–II are similar to the trends from Areas I–IV (Figure 20.3). The mean length estimated from Areas I–II and I–IV is presented in Figure 20.4.

*Raja clavata* is the only skate species commonly caught in this survey (Pinho *et al.*, 2020). Only *Dipturus intermedius* and *Leucoraja fullonica* were caught in more than three longline sets during 1996–2018 and their abundance was 20 to 100 times less than that of *R. clavata*. The survey provides an abundance index (Figure 20.3), mean length (Figure 20.4) and length–frequency distribution (Figure 20.5) for thornback ray.

The absence of records of the smallest individuals in this survey can be attributed to the gear selectivity (Figure 20.5). Catches of other skates are insufficient to be informative of stocks trends.

Information on elasmobranchs recorded on the MAR is available from the literature (Hareide and Garnes, 2001) and was summarized in ICES (2005).

## 20.7 Life-history information

Recently the main life-history parameters of *R. clavata* in the Azores have been estimated by Santos *et al.* (2021b) and showed in Table 20.4. However, the biological knowledge about this species in this ecoregion is poor and the available information presents some uncertainties.

## 20.8 Exploratory assessment methods

The stock is classified under ICES category 3 and WGEF implemented the methods recommended by WKLIFE X (“rfb” rule) to replace the former 2 over 5 advice. For this reason, the assessment was performed based on the “rfb” rule with the survey abundance index trends and fishery length composition.

Due to the interruption of COVID-19 and a strike of the crew members of the research vessel, the annual Azorean spring bottom longline survey was not carried out in 2020 and 2022. Considering this, it was decided to present the following scenario for the “rfb” rule on advice opportunities:

- Scenario: Previous catch of the last three years  $C_y$  (average 2020-2022). The index A was calculated using only 2021 and B based on the last three years with abundance index available (2017, 2018, 2019) These indices were calculated to estimate the r - stock biomass trend (index ratio A/B). The fishing pressure proxy (f) (from length-based indicators, LBI) was calculated using the length-composition from the fishery for the period 2020-2022 (Figure 20.6).

Following the guidance on the parameter determination for the “rfb” rule, possible estimates of the input values and some comments are presented in the table below.

Variable	Estimate	Input data	Comment
r: Stock biomass trend	1.29	The Azorean bottom longline survey was used as the index of stock development.	Index A (2021) = 14.1 Index B (2017, 2018, 2019) = 11.0 During 2022, the survey did not operate due to a strike of crew members of research vessels. The last index available was 2021.
f: Fishing proxy	0.94	Fishery length composition from the landings, collected by DCF (2020-2022). $L_{mean} = 68$ cm $L_{F=M} = 73$ cm	F proxy was estimated from length-based indicators. To overcome deficiencies in sampling in 2019, this year was removed. Data from 2020-2022 was combined. See more information below. $L_{inf} = L_{max} (105cm)/0.95$ , due to uncertainties in the local studies estimates.
b: Biomass safeguard $= \min(1, I_{y-1}/I_{trigger})$ $I_{trigger} = I_{loss} \omega$ , considering $\omega = 1.4$	1	Stock indicator; $I_{loss}$ minimum estimate (2013) = 3.93 $I_{trigger} = 5.5$	The CPUE and LPUE indexes presents the opposite of the survey index.
m linked to von Bertalanffy k	0.95	$K=0.117$ year <sup>-1</sup> , estimated from the Von Bertalanffy model, valid for both exercises	k estimates for <i>Raja clavata</i> in the Azores presents some uncertainties, was decided to use the estimates from Serra-Pereira <i>et al.</i> (2008) that seems more realistic.

Length-base indicators reported from WKLIFE-V were explored and for this exercise Azorean commercial fishery length compositions for pooled sexes from 2020–2022 were used (discards are not available). Main life-history parameters used are shown in Table 20.4. Computations were performed using R software and the codes were available in the GitHub library of ICES.

Results from the analysis are shown in Figure 20.7 and Table 20.5. Results show that for immature conservation a substantial harvesting occurs before maturity ( $L_c$  and  $L_{25\%} < L_{mat}$ ). This was expected since the current relative exploitation pattern corresponds to a  $L_{50\%} \leq L_{mat}$ .

For the mature fraction of the population, the results suggest that the large individuals are decreasing ( $L_{max} \leq L_{inf}$ ). The  $L_{mat}$  (77.59 cm) is higher than  $L_{opt}$  (73 cm) and the results of  $P_{mega}$  indicator clearly suggest that the mega spawners in the Azorean commercial fishery are lower than 30% throughout the analysed period. The MSY proxy results show that exploitation is above or close to the MSY level ( $L_{mean} < L_{opt}$  and  $L_{mean} < LF=M$ ; Table 20.5 and Figure 20.7).

## 20.9 Quality of assessments

Analyses of survey trends may be informative for *R. clavata* but do not allow the status of other skates to be evaluated.

### 20.10 Reference points

No reference points have been proposed for any of these species.

### 20.11 Conservation consideration

No new information.

### 20.12 Management considerations

The ecoregion is considered to be a sensitive area. The exploratory analysis demonstrated a sustainable exploitation for these species, but the fishing gear selectivity should be adjusted (increase the size of the hooks).

### 20.13 References

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## 20.14 Tables and Figures

**Table 20.1. Skates and Rays in the Azores and Mid-Atlantic Ridge. Reported landings (t) from ICES subareas 10 and 12 for the period 1988–2004.**

Year	Subarea 10			Total	Subarea 12	Subarea 14
	Portugal (Azores)	France	Spain		UK	UK
1988	48			48		
1989	29			29		
1990	35			35		
1991	52			52		
1992	43			43		
1993	32			32		
1994	55	1		56		
1995	62			62		
1996	71			71		
1997	99			99		
1998	117			117		
1999	103			109		
2000	83		24	107		
2001	68	2	29	99	1	+
2002	70			70	1	+
2003	89			89	6	
2004	72			72	1	



**Table 20.2. Skates and Rays in the Azores and Mid-Atlantic Ridge. Reported landings of skates and rays (t) from ICES subareas 10, 12 and 14 for the period 2005–2022.**

Year	Subarea 10			Subarea 12		Subarea 14			Total
	Portugal (Azores)	Spain	France	Spain	France	France	Norway	Germany	
2005	47		0.06	0	0.632			0	48
2006	62		0	0	0.029		6.6	0.2	69
2007	71		0	0	0.0135			0.1	71
2008	72		0.063	0	0.0031		0.7	0	73
2009	60		0.16	1.513	0.757		2.5	0	65
2010	68		0.066	5.106	0.275			0	74
2011	91		0.156	1.764	0.358			0	93
2012	103		0.002	0.671	0.26			0	104
2013	115		0.081	0.485	0			0	116
2014	187		0.03	2.481	0.189			0	190
2015	171		0	0	0.055	0.02	0	0	171
2016	127		0	0	0				127
2017	64		0	0	0			0	64
2018	62		0	0	0	0	0	0	61
2019	42		0	0	0	0	3	0	45
2020	60	0	0	0	0.18	0	1.73	0	62
2021	89	0	0	0	0.078	0	0.21	0	89
2022	77			0.005			0.34		77

**Table 20.3. Skates and Rays in the Azores and Mid-Atlantic Ridge. Assessment summary. Relative biomass index (kilograms per thousand hooks) of thornback ray (*Raja clavata*) from the Azores (ICES Subarea 10.a2) from the Azorean bottom longline survey (ARQDAÇO).**

Year	Abundance index	Lower	Upper
1995	11.64	9.67	8.87
1996	10.20	5.90	5.89
1997	13.43	5.82	6.03
1998	NA	NA	NA
1999	11.41	4.73	4.30
2000	5.70	4.01	4.75
2001	6.64	3.85	4.08
2002	13.60	7.03	6.88
2003	6.89	3.25	3.52
2004	12.39	5.33	5.83
2005	30.42	22.03	14.15
2006	NA	NA	NA
2007	16.43	11.30	13.29
2008	18.56	9.36	9.62
2009	NA	NA	NA
2010	10.37	3.73	3.73
2011	6.73	3.69	4.14
2012	10.42	4.80	5.12
2013	3.93	1.77	1.84
2014	NA	NA	NA
2015	NA	NA	NA
2016	7.45	3.29	3.38
2017	14.68	8.96	10.24
2018	4.05	1.76	1.98
2019	14.26	6.94	6.02
2020	NA	NA	NA
2021	14.14	6.54	5.46

NA = not available.

**Table 20.4. Life-history parameters estimated for *Raja clavata* in the Azores (ICES Area 10.a.2).**

Parameters	Value	Definition	Obs
$L_{\infty}$ (cm)	110.5	Asymptotic average maximum length	$L_{inf}=L_{max}/0.95$
k (year <sup>-1</sup> )	0.117	Growth coefficient of the von Bertalanffy growth model	Serra-Pereira <i>et al.</i> (2008)
Lmat (LT, cm)	77.9	Length at first maturity	Santos <i>et al.</i> (2021b)
M	0.16	Natural mortality	Santos <i>et al.</i> (2021b)
M/k	1.55	Ratio of natural mortality and the von Bertalanffy growth coefficient	Santos <i>et al.</i> (2021b)

Table 20.5. Skates and Rays in the Azores and Mid-Atlantic Ridge. Traffic light indicators for thornback ray *Raja clavata* from the Azorean commercial landings.

Year	Conservation				Optimizing Yield	MSY
	$L_c / L_{mat}$	$L_{25\%} / L_{mat}$	$L_{max\ 5} / L_{inf}$	$P_{mega}$	$L_{mean} / L_{opt}$	$L_{mean} / L_F = M$
2020	0.76	0.79	0.70	0.00	0.90	0.92
2021	0.76	0.79	0.71	0.01	0.92	0.93
2022	0.79	0.81	0.75	0.03	0.93	0.93

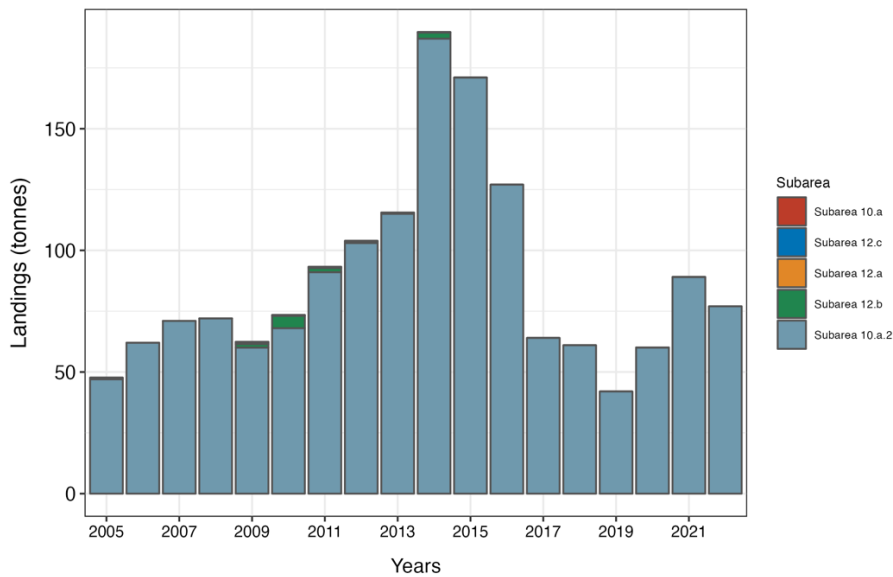
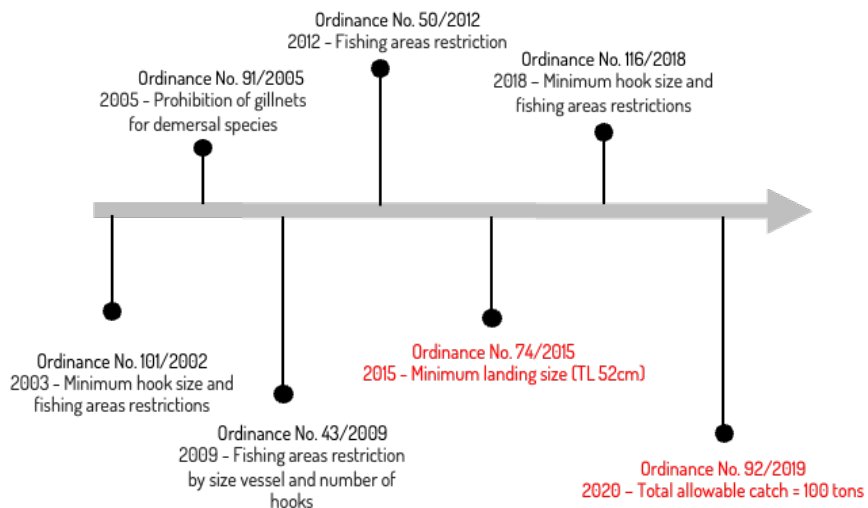
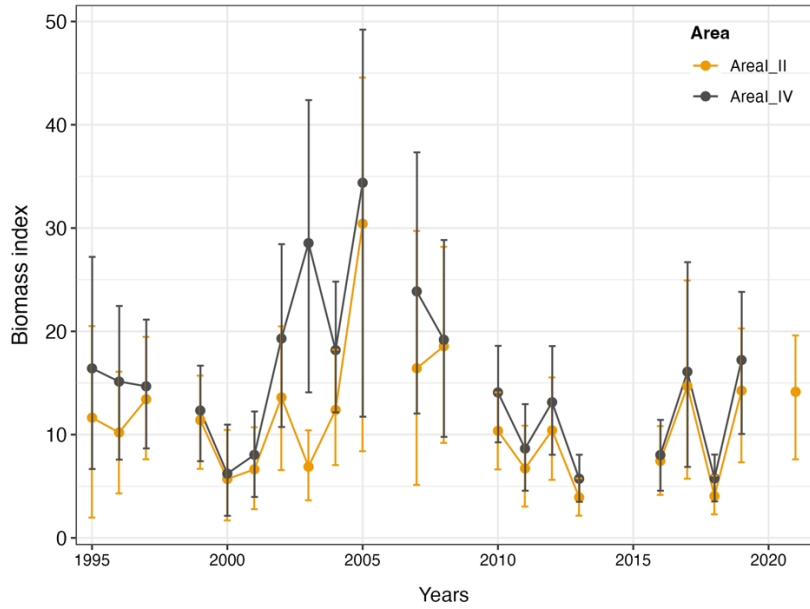


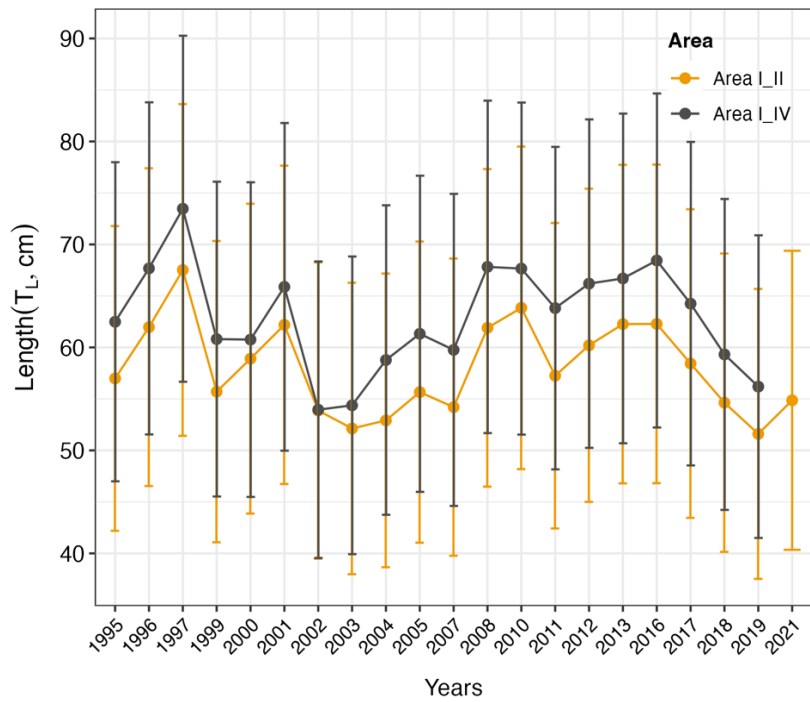
Figure 20.1. Skates and Rays in the Azores and Mid-Atlantic Ridge. Historical landings of skates and rays from Azores (ICES Division 10.a2) and MAR (ICES subareas 10, 12 and 14).



**Figure 20.2.** Timeline with the mains management measures adopted in the Azores to regulate the demersal fishery. In red colour, the measures adopted to specifically to Thornback ray *Raja clavata*.



**Figure 20.3.** Annual abundance in number (Relative Population Number) by statistical areas of Thornback ray *Raja clavata* from surveys for the period 1995–2021, by sampling statistical areas – Areas I-II and Areas I-IV (ICES Area 10.a.2).



**Figure 20.4.** Skates and Rays in the Azores and Mid-Atlantic Ridge. Mean length of thornback ray *Raja clavata* caught in the Azorean demersal spring bottom longline survey for the period 1995–2021, by statistical areas.

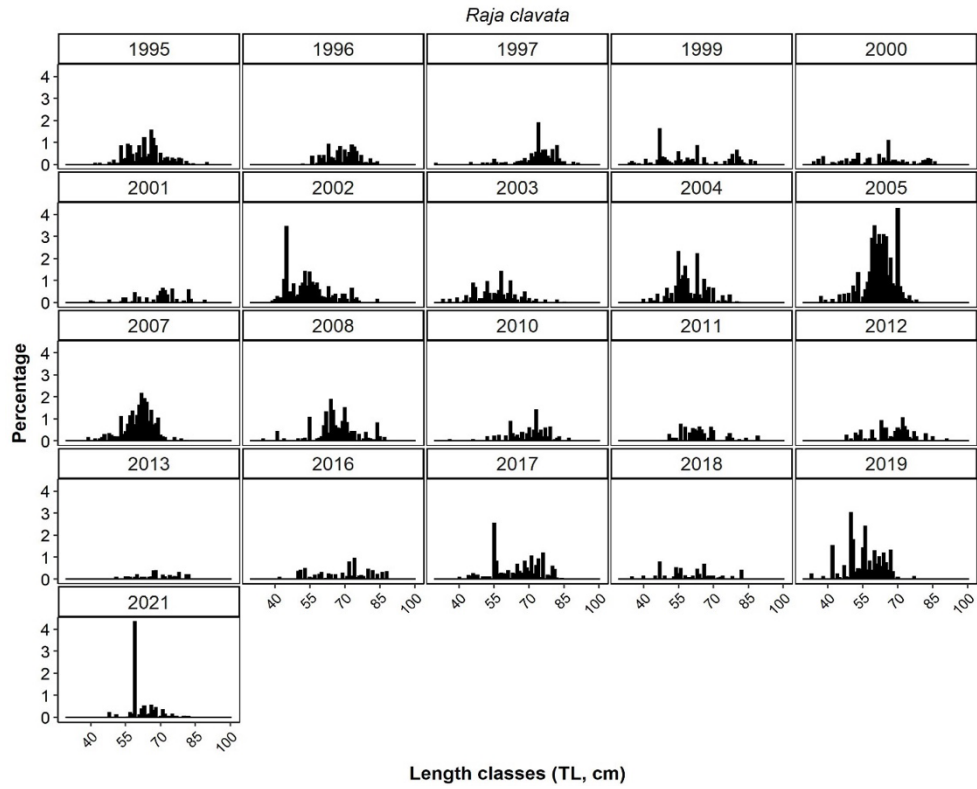


Figure 20.5. Skates and Rays in the Azores and Mid-Atlantic Ridge. Length-frequency of thornback ray *Raja clavata* caught in the Azorean demersal spring bottom longline survey for the period 1995–2021.

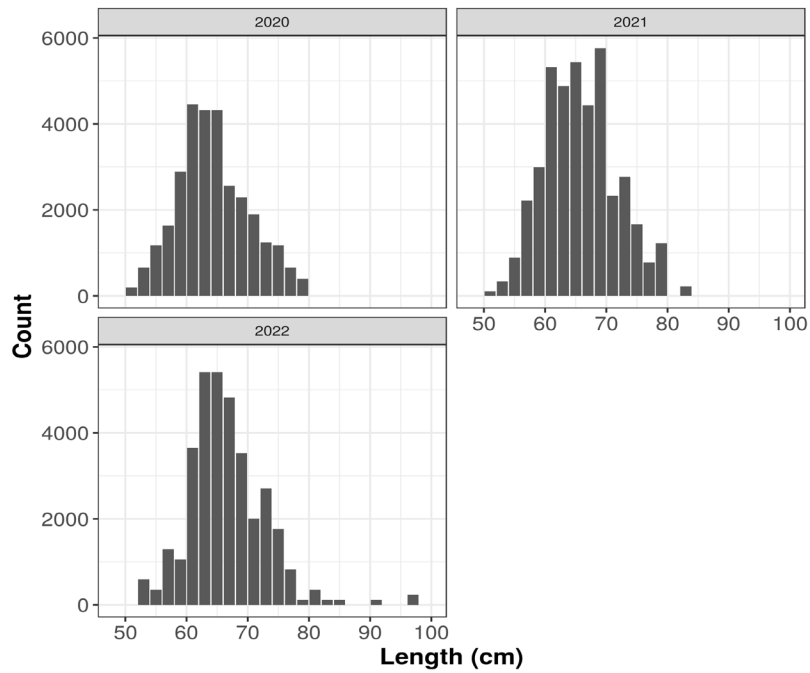


Figure 20.6. Skates and Rays in the Azores and Mid-Atlantic Ridge. Annual fishery length composition of thornback ray *Raja clavata* for the period 2020–2022.

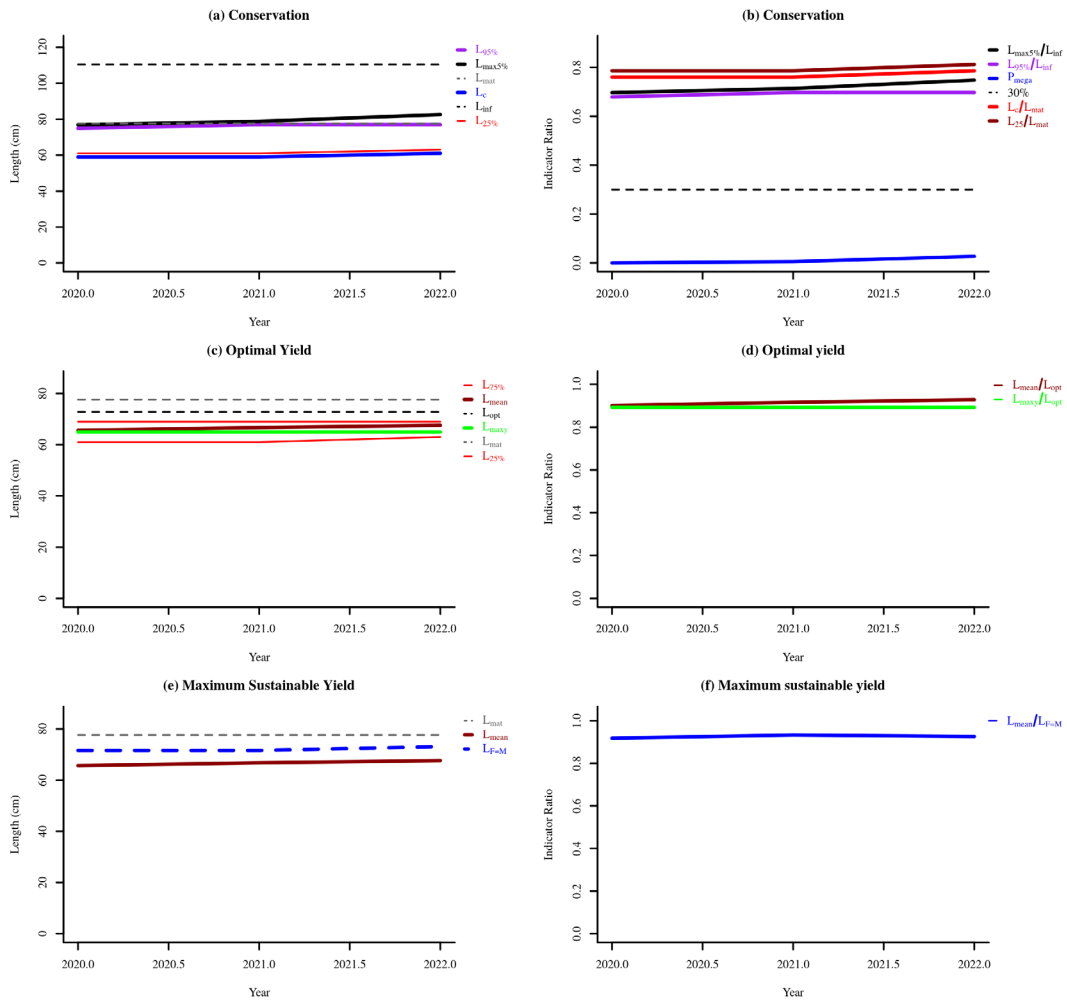


Figure 20.7. Indicator ratios and reference points for Thornback ray *Raja clavata* from the Azorean commercial landings (2020-2022).

## 21 Smooth-hounds in the Northeast Atlantic

### 21.1 Stock distribution

Three species of smooth-hound (*Triakidae*) occur in the ICES area.

#### Starry smooth-hound *Mustelus asterias*

This is the dominant smooth-hound in northern European waters. The development of molecular genetic identification techniques has allowed the reliable identification and discrimination of NE Atlantic *Mustelus* species (Farrell *et al.*, 2009). Subsequent studies involving the collection of 231 *Mustelus* from the Irish Sea, Bristol Channel, Celtic Sea and west of Ireland, identified all to be *M. asterias* (Farrell *et al.*, 2010a, b). Studies of *Mustelus* samples (n = 504) from the North Sea and English Channel (McCully Phillips and Ellis, 2015) also identified all specimens as *M. asterias*.

There are several on-going tag-and-release programmes for *M. asterias* (e.g., Burt *et al.*, 2013 WD). Sportvisserij Nederland, in conjunction with Wageningen Marine Research, have a tagging programme with anglers in the Dutch Delta (Brevé *et al.*, 2016, 2020). As of 2020, 3699 *M. asterias* have been tagged, and 220 recaptures have been reported (Brevé *et al.*, 2020). Recapture positions provide evidence of circannual migration, with fish spending the summer in the southern North Sea and overwintering in the English Channel and Bay of Biscay. The findings also suggest a degree of philopatry with individuals returning to their release locations on an annual basis (Brevé *et al.*, 2016, 2020). These behaviours are supported by electronic tagging studies conducted by Cefas (Griffiths *et al.*, 2020). Sex-based dispersal has also been described in these tagging studies, with females re-distributing over a wider spatial range than their male counterparts (Brevé *et al.*, 2020; Griffiths *et al.*, 2020). Cooperative large-scale analyses of all available tagging data are required to further understand population stock structure of *M. asterias* in the Northeast Atlantic. Tagging studies from the more southern parts of the distribution range could usefully be undertaken.

In the absence of more detailed studies on stock identity, WGEF considers there to be a single biological stock unit of *Mustelus asterias* in the continental shelf waters of ICES Subareas 4, 6–8. The southern limits of the stock are uncertain.

#### Common smooth-hound *Mustelus mustelus*

This species occurs along the west coast of Africa, Mediterranean Sea, and western Europe. It is believed to be the more common species in the southern parts of the ICES area; the northern limits of the stock are uncertain. In recent years, there have been no confirmed specimens in the northern parts of the ICES area and historical records, especially those north of the Bay of Biscay, are considered questionable. Separating *M. mustelus* from *M. asterias* based on the presence or absence of spots is considered unreliable (Compagno *et al.*, 2005; Farrell *et al.*, 2009), and information and data from northern Europe referring to *M. mustelus* likely refers to *M. asterias*.

#### Black-spotted smooth-hound *Mustelus punctulatus*

This species occurs in the Mediterranean Sea and off Northwest Africa (Quignard, 1972). Its northern limit is believed to be the southernmost part of ICES Division 9.a.

#### Generic issues

The species composition of smooth-hounds in Subareas 8–9 is unclear, and species/stocks in these areas likely extend into the northern part of the CECAF area and Mediterranean Sea. Given

species identification issues and that some species and/or stocks may extend beyond the ICES area, the identification of management unit(s) will need appropriate consideration.

Given the problems in separating *M. asterias* and *M. mustelus*, and that data for these two species are likely confounded, data in this chapter are generally combined at the genus level. Whilst assessments conducted by WGEF are based on *Mustelus asterias*, management advice should be applied at the genus level, therefore avoiding potential identification problems and their impacts on management and enforcement.

## 21.2 The fishery

### 21.2.1 History of the fishery

Smooth-hounds are a seasonal bycatch in trawl, gillnet, and longline fisheries. Though they are discarded in some fisheries, others land them as bycatch, depending on market demands. Some smooth-hounds may also be landed to supply bait for pot fisheries.

Smooth-hounds are also a relatively important species for recreational sea anglers and charter boat fishing in several areas, with anglers and angling clubs often having catch-and-release protocols, particularly in the Celtic and North Sea ecoregions.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on fishing activity has not been quantified, however, it is assumed based on national and/or local restrictions to have resulted in reduced fishing effort in 2020 and 2021.

### 21.2.2 The fishery in 2022

No changes to the fishery were observed in 2022.

Anecdotal information from the UK fishing industry suggests that increased landings of smooth-hounds in recent years are partly to supply market demand for 'dogfish', given the current restrictions on spurdog, *Squalus acanthias*. *M. asterias* is also of increasing importance to some inshore fisheries due to restricted quotas for traditional quota stocks. Anecdotal information from these inshore fisheries suggests that the local market value of *M. asterias* has increased beyond that of skates and rays.

### 21.2.3 ICES Advice applicable

ICES first provided advice for this stock in 2012 for 2013 and 2014 (which was reiterated for 2015), stating that "*Based on ICES approach to data-limited stocks, ICES advises that catches should be reduced by 4%. Because the data for catches of smooth-hounds are not fully documented and considered highly unreliable (due to the historical use of generic landings categories), ICES is not in a position to quantify the result*".

In 2015, ICES advised that "*when the precautionary approach is applied, landings should be no more than 3272 tonnes in each of the years 2016 and 2017*". This advice was based on a survey-based (Category 3) assessment, with a stock size indicator based on four survey indices.

In 2017, ICES advised that "*when the precautionary approach is applied, landings should be no more than 3855 tonnes in each of the years 2018 and 2019. ICES cannot quantify the corresponding catches*". This advice was based on a survey-based (Category 3) assessment, with a stock size indicator based on three survey indices.



In 2019, ICES advised that “when the precautionary approach is applied, landings should be no more than 4626 tonnes in each of the years 2020 and 2021. ICES cannot quantify the corresponding catches”. This advice was based on a survey-based (Category 3) assessment, with a stock size indicator based on three survey indices.

In 2021, ICES advised that “ICES advises that when the precautionary approach is applied, landings should be no more than 4441 tonnes in each of the years 2022 and 2023. ICES cannot quantify the corresponding catches”. This advice was based on a survey based (Category 3) assessment, with a stock size indicator based on five survey indices. Two additional surveys (FR-CGFS-Q4 and IE-IGFS-WIBTS-Q4) were added in 2021 to increase the area covered within the stock unit.

### 21.2.4 Management applicable

There are no specific management measures for *Mustelus* spp. in the ICES area.

EC Council Regulations 850/98 for the “conservation of fishery resources through technical measures for the protection of juveniles of marine organisms” details the minimum mesh sizes that can be used to target fish. Although other dogfish (*Squalus acanthias* and *Scyliorhinus* spp.) can be targeted in fixed nets of 120–219 mm and >220 mm mesh size (in regions 1 and 2), *Mustelus* spp. are classified under “all other marine organisms”, and can only be targeted in fixed nets of >220 mm.

## 21.3 Catch data

### 21.3.1 Landings

No accurate estimates of catch are available prior to 2014 (Table 21.1; Figure 21.1).

ICES estimates, following WKSHARK2 (ICES, 2016), indicate that landings have exceeded 3000 t since 2005 (Table 21.1). The main nations exploiting smooth-hounds are France and the UK. The English Channel and southern North Sea are important fishing grounds.

Although landings from Spain show a consistent decrease since 2015, this is mostly due to unavailable data from FAO areas 34 and 37, which represented on average ca. 11% and 30% of total landings reported to WGEF for this country during 2005–2014, respectively.

Landings data outside FAO area 27 that are currently reported to WGEF are negligible (ca. 0% to 2% between 2005–2022).

Landings from the Netherlands show an increase in 2019–2022. This increase may be partially linked to an increase in fishing effort by fly shoot (seine) fisheries.

Species-specific landings for the various species of *Mustelus* are not considered accurate, due to confounding identification issues between species thus, data have been collated at genus level. Furthermore, these values are likely underestimates, as some nations still report some landings of ‘dogfish and hounds *nei*’.

### 21.3.2 Discards

Although discards data are available from various nations, data are limited for some nations and fisheries (Table 21.2). Eight countries reported preliminary estimates of discards for 2009–2022, however data show high inter-annual variability by country and thus, further data analysis should be undertaken before the data are used in the assessment. Given the seasonality of catches in some areas, and that *M. asterias* is often taken by inshore vessels where observer data can be

more sporadic, further studies to evaluate the most appropriate methods of raising data from observer trips to fleet level are required if catches are to be estimated appropriately.

The collection of discards data in 2020 and 2021 was likely affected by COVID-19 national restrictions. Consequently, a decrease in the number of samples compared to previous years may be assumed, although the impact of has not been quantified. As such discard data for both years should be viewed with caution.

A study has indicated that juvenile *M. asterias* are often discarded (Figure 21.2), although the survival of these discards has not been evaluated (Silva and Ellis, 2019). *M. asterias* taken by UK beam trawl and *Nephrops* trawl were composed primarily of juveniles and sub-adults (<70 cm; total length:  $L_T$ ), and nearly all were discarded. Gillnet catches were comprised primarily of fish 70–110 cm  $L_T$ , with fish <60 cm  $L_T$  usually discarded. Otter trawl catches covered a broad length range, and *M. asterias* <60 cm  $L_T$  were usually discarded. The absence of full retention at length in these gears is likely linked to various factors (e.g., catch quality and local market value).

Silva and Ellis (2019) also noted that a greater proportion of *M. asterias* have been retained since landing opportunities for spurdog have become restrictive. In the years 2002–2009, the retention of *M. asterias*  $\geq 70$  cm  $L_T$  was 59% and 44% in gillnet and otter trawl fisheries, respectively. In the period 2010–2016, however, retention increased to 85% (gillnets) and 66% (otter trawl). In addition, length at retention for otter trawl dropped from 41 cm  $L_T$  (2002–2009) to 34 cm  $L_T$  (2010–2016). High rates of discarding (of smaller fish, <60 cm  $L_T$ ) have also been observed in otter trawls, where ca. 63% and 71% of the total catches were discarded in the North Sea and Celtic Seas, respectively.

WKSHARK3 undertook further exploratory analyses of discards data, noting similar discard-retention patterns to those described above. An analysis of discards data from Scottish fisheries was also presented (ICES, 2017).

### 21.3.3 Quality of catch data

Landings data have historically been of poor quality, as much of the landings data have been reported under generic landings categories. Most nations have made efforts to improve the recording of species in recent years.

Some northern European nations report more *M. mustelus* than *M. asterias* in official statistics, but WGEF combine these data, as *M. asterias* is the predominant and possibly the only species to occur around the British Isles.

*Mustelus* spp. are often taken in inshore fisheries, and landings data for vessels <10 m may not be complete.

*M. asterias* may be landed for bait in pot fisheries around the British Isles targeting whelk, and it is unclear whether such landings are reported consistently.

The availability of landings data from outside the ICES area (e.g., Mediterranean Sea) is limited, and the quality remains uncertain. In 2010, the European Commission collated landings data as an average across 2008–2010 and three species of *Mustelus* were represented in these data; *M. punctulatus* (269 t from Italy), *M. mustelus* (14 t combined from Italy, Spain, Malta, and Slovenia) and *M. asterias* (1 t from Malta) (ICES, 2012). WGEF has not yet considered potential catches/landings for waters off NW Africa.

Better estimates of discarding are required, as are robust estimates of discard survival.

### 21.3.4 Discard survival

Discard survival is variable across this family (Ellis *et al.*, 2014 WD). Whilst quantitative data are limited in European waters, Fennessy (1994) reported at-vessel mortality of 29% for Arabian smooth-hound *Mustelus mosis* taken in a prawn trawl fishery. Mortality ranged from 57–93% for three triakid sharks taken in an Australian gillnet fishery, despite the soak times being <24 hours (Braccini *et al.*, 2012). High survival of triakids has also been reported in longline fisheries (Frick *et al.*, 2010; Coelho *et al.*, 2012).

A UK research programme examining movements, behaviour, and discard survival through electronic tagging of *M. asterias* found that in terms of at-vessel mortality, the longline fleet had the greatest proportion of fish in a lively condition (91%; primarily large individuals due to the selectivity of the gear), whilst gillnets had the highest mortality (56%) of the gears studied (McCully Phillips *et al.*, 2019). Smaller individuals, which were caught mostly in beam trawls, were found to generally be in a poor condition (McCully Phillips *et al.*, 2019).

## 21.4 Commercial catch composition

Studies to better understand the composition of commercial catches by size and sex (and species where there is spatial overlap) are required. Given the potential for sex-based spatial segregation of *Mustelus*, as evidenced by sex-based dispersal of tagged fish (Brevé *et al.*, 2020; Griffiths *et al.*, 2020) as well as recent work on metazoan parasites (Gérard *et al.*, 2022), an appropriate level of monitoring would be required to fully understand commercial catch compositions over appropriate spatial and temporal scales.

### 21.4.1 Length composition of landings

In a UK study, 504 *M. asterias* samples (266 females; 238 males, Figure 21.3) were examined (McCully Phillips and Ellis, 2015), of which 286 (with a length range of 52–124 cm  $L_T$ ) were landed by commercial vessels.

Data on the length composition of landings were available for 2019–2022 for UK and France (Figure 21.4). Data from 2020 onwards for individuals within the range of 24–125 cm  $L_T$  were used in the calculation of the fishing proxy  $f$  (see section 21.9) when applying the rfb rule (ICES, 2022b).

### 21.4.2 Length composition of discards

Silva and Ellis (2019) analysed the discard and retention patterns of *M. asterias* taken as bycatch in UK fisheries. Beam trawlers caught proportionally more juveniles (most records were of specimens of *ca.* 35–70 cm  $L_T$ ), and discarding rates were high (95–99%). Gillnets were more selective for larger fish (most fish were 60–100 cm  $L_T$ ), and typically only larger fish (>70 cm  $L_T$ ) were retained.

Data on the length composition of discards were available for 2019–2022 from UK, France and the Netherlands (Figure 21.4, see section 21.9). Dutch data from a self-sampling programme were considered limited due to the low coverage of the main fleet catching this species, and the number of samples available insufficient to raise robustly the data. Thus, these were not considered in the assessment. Data from 2020 onwards for individuals within the range of 24–125 cm  $L_T$  were used in the calculation of the fishing proxy  $f$  (see section 21.9).

### 21.4.3 Sex ratio of landings

Of 286 commercially landed samples of *M. asterias* from the southern North Sea and eastern English Channel in May–November (2012 – 2014), 155 were female and 131 were male (McCully Phillips, unpublished). Due to *M. asterias* aggregating by sex and size, the sex ratio (and length–frequency) is expected to vary over the year and between areas.

### 21.4.4 Quality of data

The main countries reporting commercial length composition of landings and discards for *Mustelus* were the UK and France. Sporadic information is also available for the Netherlands, however, these data were not considered in the assessment of this stock. During the 2023 assessment, data from 2020–2022 for individuals 24–125 cm  $L_T$  were used. This size range was chosen to remove any potential input errors (e.g. records below the known minimum length of free-living neonates) and, to account for any confounding issues with *Galeorhinus* (e.g. records above  $L_{max}$  of the most recent literature for starry smooth-hound, McCully Phillips and Ellis, 2015). Although data may have been reported at genus level, it is assumed that these are mainly composed of starry smooth-hound. This is because all length data used in the assessment of the stock are provided by countries where starry smooth-hound is considered to be the main species.

## 21.5 Commercial -effort data

There are no data available.

## 21.6 Fishery-independent information

### 21.6.1 Availability of survey data

Several fishery-independent surveys operate in the stock area. Smooth-hounds are often caught in GOV trawl and other otter trawl surveys. For further details on trawl surveys in the stock area, see Section 15 (North Sea ecoregion), Section 18 (Celtic Seas) and Section 19 (Biscay-Iberia).

Larger individuals are not sampled effectively in beam-trawl surveys (because of low gear selectivity). For example, the UK western English Channel beam-trawl survey, which occurs in strata broadly equating to Division 7.e, only occasionally records *M. asterias* >100 cm  $L_T$  (Figure 21.5).

Analyses of survey data need to be undertaken with care; smooth-hounds are relatively large-bodied fish (the maximum size of *M. asterias* is at least 124 cm (McCully-Phillips and Ellis, 2015), with other sources suggesting they may attain 133 or 140 cm  $L_T$ ) and adults may be strong swimmers, and able to avoid capture. As the largest individuals may not be sampled effectively in some survey gears, survey data might not provide a representative sample of the population.

Given their aggregating nature, some surveys may have a large number of zero hauls and a few hauls with relatively large numbers, although this issue does not appear to be as pronounced as seen in spurdog.

Although two species of *Mustelus* are often reported in surveys, the discrimination of these species was usually based on the presence or absence of spots, which is not a reliable identification characteristic. WGEF consider that survey data for these two species should be combined in any analyses, and that *M. asterias* is likely to be the only, or main, species in the Celtic Seas and North Sea ecoregions.

More detailed investigations of data in DATRAS indicate that data for *Mustelus* spp. and *Galeorhinus galeus* (tope shark) may have been confounded. This is most evident for Danish survey data (see Section 21.6.3).

## 21.6.2 Survey trends

Updated survey data were examined by WGEF in 2023, as summarised below (see Section 21.9 for additional quantitative information).

### NS-IBTS-Q1 and NS-IBTS-Q3

The IBTS surveys of the North Sea, undertaken in Q1 and Q3 by seven and six countries respectively, have a common time period of 32 years (1991–2022). These surveys were included in the 2023 assessment of the stock; both surveys catch relatively low numbers of *M. asterias*. The long-term trend in biomass of smooth-hounds has increased in both the Q1 and Q3 time-series (Figure 21.6). However, in the Q3 there seems to have been a peak in biomass in 2017 (and high CIs), followed by a decline in 2019–2021, whereas in Q1 biomass seemed relatively stable for those same years, with a peak occurring in 2022 (Figure 21.6). The survey trends were updated in 2023 for the whole time series and were averaged and treated as one following recommendations from WSKATE (ICES, 2021a). Data presented for these surveys include all national data for Q1 and Q3 available on DATRAS, with the exception of Danish data for Q3 time-series described in Section 21.6.3. The NS-IBTS-Q3 estimates may differ from previous results used in the 2021 assessment. This change is due to changes in the DATRAS product, with these being mostly related to data previously allocated to Sweden now reallocated to Denmark.

### EVHOE-WIBTS-Q4

This survey of ICES divisions 7.g–k and 8.a.b.d has a 25-year time-series of data (1997–2016, 2018–2022) and was included in the assessment of the stock in 2023 (see Section 21.9). The survey covers the south-western part of the stock area. Catch rates, though showing marked inter-annual variability, indicate a broadly increasing trend (Figure 21.7). Survey trends were updated for the whole time series in 2023 and therefore values may differ from previous results used in the 2021 assessment. Estimates used data available on DATRAS following methodology presented at WSKATE (ICES, 2021a).

### FR-CGFS-Q4

This survey of ICES Division 7.d has a 24-year time-series of data (1997–2020) and has been included in the assessment of the stock since 2021 (see Section 21.9). The survey covers part of the stock area in the eastern English Channel. Catch rates indicate a broadly increasing trend despite intra-annual variability (Figure 21.7). The survey trends were updated for the whole time series in 2023 and therefore values may differ from previous results used in the 2021 assessment. Estimates used data available on DATRAS following methodology presented at WSKATE (ICES, 2021a).

This survey did not cover part of the survey grid in 2020 (ICES rectangles 29F1 and 30E9) and further analysis was conducted to better understand the potential impact on the assessment of this stock (see section 21.9 in ICES, 2022a).

### IE-IGFS-WIBTS-Q4

This survey of ICES divisions 6.a and 7.b.g.j has a 18-year time-series of data (2005–2022) and has been included in the assessment of the stock since 2021 (see Section 21.9). The survey covers the north-western part of the stock area. The increasing long-term trend in *M. asterias* is also evident

in the Irish Groundfish Survey, although catch rates are generally low and more variable in recent years (2017–2022, Figure 21.8).

#### UK(E&W)-BTS-Q3 (in 7.afg<sup>1</sup>)

This survey of ICES divisions 7.a and 7.f.g has a 29-year time-series of data (1993–2022), and catches reasonable numbers of *M. asterias*, albeit mostly immature specimens. This survey was not used in the 2023 assessment of the stock as the assessment explicitly considers exploitable biomass (i.e., individuals  $\geq 50$  cm  $L_T$ ). Since 2023, estimates use a subset of data available on DATRAS from 97 fixed stations, the selection was based on locations that have been consistently and successfully fished during the time-series (further details in Silva, 2022a WD).

The mean catch rate of this survey was derived from the catch rates from fixed stations (97 stations; Silva, 2023 WD). The temporal trend in CPUE (abundance and biomass for all individuals) indicates an increasing trend, although data indicate a decrease in 2021. Both abundance and estimated biomass showed similar trends (Figure 21.9). Data are not provided for 2020 as these are considered not to be representative since these relate only to part of the survey area where this species is most abundant (ICES Division 7.f), and data for other parts of the survey area (where lower catches and more ‘nil hauls’ would be expected) are lacking (Figure 21.9; Silva and Ellis, 2021 WD; Silva, 2023 WD). The reduction in survey coverage in 2020 to only locations within ICES Division 7.f was due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with a total of 65 fixed stations in ICES Division 7.a and 7.g being missed. While *M. asterias* is more commonly found in the Bristol Channel (7.f), there has been an increase in occurrence in the Irish Sea (7.a) in recent years (Silva and Ellis, 2021 WD). The 2022 survey had insufficient time to sample 12 locations in 7.a, with only 85 out of the 97 fixed stations successfully fished. Despite this, the area covered is considered spatially broad enough to be representative for most stocks including for starry smoothhound (Silva, 2023 WD). BTS-Eng-Q3 (in 7.d and 4.c)

This survey of ICES divisions 7.d and 4.c has a 29-year time-series of data (1993–2022) and catches mostly juvenile *M. asterias*. This survey was not used in the 2023 assessment of the stock as the assessment explicitly considers exploitable biomass (i.e., individuals  $\geq 50$  cm  $L_T$ ).

The mean catch rate of this survey was derived from the catch rates from fixed stations (78 stations, Silva and Ellis, 2020 WD). The temporal trend in CPUE (abundance and biomass for all individuals) indicates an increasing trend, although CPUE is lower and more variable than recorded in the beam trawl survey of the Irish Sea and Bristol Channel (Figure 21.9). Survey indices for the whole time series were updated following recommendations from WKSKATE, and since 2021, have used a subset of data available on DATRAS (ICES, 2021a). The survey did not occur in 2022 due to logistical and time constraints.

#### UK-Q1SWBeam<sup>2</sup>

The UK beam-trawl survey in the western Channel (7.e: 2006–2013), and more recently extended to cover the Celtic Sea (2014–2022) also encounters *M. asterias* (Figure 21.10 in Division 7.e). Previous analyses of these data (for the period 2006–2019) noted that 1098 specimens had been caught (713  $\geq 50$  cm  $L_T$  for exploitable biomass calculations) accounting for 5% of the elasmobranch catch by numbers; the observed length range was 26–117 cm  $L_T$  (Silva *et al.*, 2020 WD based on data held within national database; ICES, 2022a). In the western Channel (Division 7.e), the estimated total abundance and biomass showed similar trends, with peaks in 2009 and 2013–2014, and after a decrease in 2016, data indicate another increase in 2018–2019 (Figure 21.11). Data for both 2020 and 2022 are shown only for illustrative reasons in Figure 21.10 as these may

<sup>1</sup> Only two fixed (prime) station is within ICES Division 7.g (Prime 119 and 501). Also referred as BTS–UK(E&W)–Q3.

<sup>2</sup> This survey may also be referred to as ‘Q1SWECOS’, ‘Q1SWBEAM’, ‘BTS-UK-Q1’ in other ICES-related documents.

not be representative of the stock status for those years. This is because the survey did not occur in Q1 in 2020 and in 2022, the area covered within the strata in Division 7.e was reduced due to logistical and time constraints. The potential impacts of this are yet to be assessed for this stock. The time-series estimates of this survey should be viewed as 'qualitative assessments', with further evaluations needed to better understand the utility of these trends for providing quantitative assessment and advice (Silva *et al.*, 2020 WD).

### Other surveys

Other surveys also capture *M. asterias*. Previous analyses of the UK (Northern Ireland) western IBTS Q4 survey of the Irish Sea indicated increasing catch rates, but recent data have not been analysed.

Although smooth-hounds are not usually subject to additional biological sampling in trawl surveys, UK (England and Wales) and IGFS surveys tag and release *M. asterias*, and the individual weights and sex (all fish) and maturity (male fish only) are recorded prior to release (see Section 21.7.5).

### 21.6.3 Data quality

Exploratory analyses of DATRAS data (numbers at length data, 1992–2022) indicated that there might be some confounded data for *Mustelus* and *Galeorhinus*, which could be due to taxonomic or coding errors.

Exploratory data checks indicated the minimum and maximum recorded sizes of *Mustelus* spp. in NS-IBTS-Q1 were 23 cm  $L_T$  and 129 cm  $L_T$ , respectively (1992–2022). While the record of 129 cm  $L_T$  is questionable, it is also potentially valid, given the range in reported  $L_{max}$  for the species. All nations recorded a minimum size of free-living pups that was greater than the length of the smallest neonates recorded by McCully Phillips and Ellis (2015), and are therefore within the accepted range.

Exploratory data checks indicated the minimum and maximum recorded sizes of *Mustelus* spp. in NS-IBTS-Q3 were 22 cm  $L_T$  and 151 cm  $L_T$ , respectively (1992–2022). The minimum lengths observed by each nation (22–54 cm  $L_T$ ) were within acceptable limits. During 1992–2022, most nations caught *Mustelus* spp. to a maximum length of 107–135 cm  $L_T$ , with one nation (Denmark) reporting larger individuals with a maximum length of 151 cm  $L_T$  (Figure 21.11). These data indicate that there seems to be inter-annual variation in the species of triakid sharks caught (Figure 21.12), and suggest that DATRAS data for *Mustelus* and *Galeorhinus* are confounded for this nation. The single record of 135 cm  $L_T$  from Sweden may be questionable, though also potentially valid, and was therefore retained in further analyses (Figure 21.11). Additional work on these data are required in order to determine whether it is a coding error or misidentification, and also to determine the extent of this issue. Similarly, some large catches linked to a single vessel would benefit from additional investigation.

For stock assessment purposes in 2023, NS-IBTS-Q1 and NS-IBTS-Q3 indices were both based on data held on DATRAS, with NS-IBTS-Q1 including data from all countries, NS-IBTS-Q3 excluded Danish data.

Since 2022, BTS-UK(E&W)-Q3 (in 7.afg) indices were calculated using DATRAS exchange data following recommendations from WSKATE (ICES, 2021a). Indices provided to the WGEF in 2023 used a selection of fixed (prime) stations within DATRAS exchange data. The stations chosen for the calculations were the same as when using data held within national database (Silva and Ellis, 2021 WD; Silva, 2022a and 2023 WD).

Since 2021, BTS-ENG-Q3 (in 7.d and 4.c) indices were calculated using DATRAS exchange data following recommendations from WSKATE (ICES, 2021a). Indices provided to the WGEF since 2021 used a selection of fixed (prime) stations within DATRAS exchange data. The stations chosen for the calculations were the same as when using data held within national database (Silva and Ellis, 2020 WD; ICES, 2021a).

Since 2022, UK-Q1SWBeam (in 7.e) estimates were calculated using DATRAS exchange data following recommendations from WSKATE (ICES, 2021a), with similar methodology as for *Rajidae* described in Silva (2022b WD).

## 21.7 Life-history information

Biological data are not collected under EU-MAP, although some *ad hoc* data are collected on fishery-independent surveys and there are several published studies resulting from biological investigations of *Mustelus* spp. in European seas, including from the NE Atlantic (e.g., Farrell *et al.*, 2010a; McCully Phillips and Ellis, 2015) and Mediterranean Sea (e.g., Capapé, 1983; Saidi *et al.*, 2008).

### 21.7.1 Habitat

The spatial distribution of *Mustelus asterias* around the British Isles has been described by several authors (e.g., Brevé *et al.*, 2016; Griffiths *et al.*, 2020), with more detailed studies being undertaken on habitat utilization in the eastern English Channel (see Martin *et al.*, 2010; 2012).

### 21.7.2 Spawning, parturition and nursery grounds

*Mustelus asterias* pups are taken in trawl surveys (including beam trawl surveys), and such data may assist in the preliminary identification of pupping and primary nursery grounds. Most of the records for *M. asterias* pups recorded in UK beam-trawl surveys are from the southern North Sea, English Channel (including near the Solent) and Bristol Channel (Ellis *et al.*, 2005). Studies on other species of smooth-hound have shown high site fidelity of immature individuals to nursery grounds (Espinoza *et al.*, 2011).

Recent biological studies have indicated that full-term pups of *M. asterias* range in size from 205–329 mm  $L_T$  and that pup size is positively correlated with maternal length (McCully Phillips and Ellis, 2015; Figure 21.13). The smallest free-swimming neonate reported by this study was 24 cm  $L_T$ .

Parturition of *M. asterias* occurred in February in the western English Channel and June–July in the eastern English Channel and southern North Sea (Figure 21.14), indicating either protracted spawning or asynchronous parturition for the stock (McCully Phillips and Ellis, 2015).

### 21.7.3 Age and growth

#### *Mustelus asterias*

Farrell *et al.* (2010a) studied age and growth in the Celtic Seas ecoregion. Growth parameters for males ( $n = 106$ ) were  $L_\infty = 103.7$  cm  $L_T$ ,  $L_0 = 38.1$  cm and  $k = 0.195$  year<sup>-1</sup>. Growth parameters for females ( $n = 114$ ) were  $L_\infty = 123.5$  cm  $L_T$ ,  $L_0 = 34.9$  cm and  $k = 0.146$  year<sup>-1</sup>. Estimates of longevity were 13 years and 18.3 years for males and females, respectively. The lengths-at-age for *M. asterias* based on these growth parameters are given in Table 21.3.



An analysis of samples collected in waters around the British Isles between 2009–2019 provides preliminary estimates of  $L_{\infty} = 94.6$  cm for males ( $n = 159$ ,  $L_T = 24$ – $100$  cm ages 0–14) and  $L_{\infty} = 130.1$  cm for females ( $n = 163$ ,  $L_T = 28$ – $124$  cm ages 0–17) (Ellis *et al.*, 2019 WD), although it should be noted that this study had more fish at age 0. Further work is required to evaluate the estimated ages, and in terms of stock assessment modelling, the results of Farrell *et al.* (2010a) should still be used.

Further assumptions on  $L_{\infty}$  were considered when applying the rfb rule in 2023 to provide MSY advice (Method 2.1, ICES, 2022b) where an  $L_{\infty}$  of 130.5 cm  $L_T$  was used (see section 21.9 for further details).

### *Mustelus mustelus*

Age and growth have been reported for South African waters, with males and females estimated to mature at 6–9 and 12–15 years, respectively (Goosen and Smale, 1997). The maximum age reported in this study was 24 years.

## 21.7.4 Reproductive biology

### *Mustelus asterias*

Studies in the Celtic Seas ecoregion indicated that the total length (and age) at 50% maturity for male and females was 78 cm  $L_T$  (4–5 years) and 87 cm  $L_T$  (six years), respectively (Farrell *et al.*, 2010b). A subsequent study in the southern North Sea and English Channel, estimated 50% maturity for males at 70.4 cm  $L_T$  (smallest mature = 65 cm; largest immature = 74 cm) and females at 81.9 cm  $L_T$  (smallest mature = 69 cm; largest immature = 87 cm) (McCully Phillips and Ellis, 2015; Figure 21.15). An analysis of samples collected between 2009–2019 by fishery-independent trawl surveys conducted by Cefas in waters around the British Isles estimated 50% maturity for males at 73.5 cm  $L_T$  (smallest mature = 64 cm; largest immature = 99 cm), with 100% maturity attained at ca. 90 cm, and females at 85.4 cm  $L_T$  (smallest mature = 75 cm; largest immature = 91 cm), with 100% maturity attained at ca. 92 cm (Ellis *et al.*, 2019 WD).

The smallest mature female that Farrell *et al.* (2010b) reported was 83 cm; considerably larger than the smallest females (69 cm and 75 cm  $L_T$ ; summarised above) recorded by McCully Phillips and Ellis (2015) and Ellis *et al.* (2019 WD). This is interesting because the studies use slightly different maturity keys; Farrell *et al.* (2010b) assigning a female to be mature when oocytes were present, yellow, and countable at >3 mm in diameter, whereas the Cefas maturity keys (Table II of McCully Phillips and Ellis, 2015), which are comparable to those keys developed within ICES, assigned a female as mature when the oocytes are slightly larger (>5 mm).

Estimates of fecundity range from 8–27 (ovarian fecundity) and 6–18 (embryonic fecundity), with a gestation period of about twelve months (Farrell *et al.*, 2010b). There may also be a resting period of a year between pregnancies, giving a two-year reproductive period. Mature female specimens sampled by McCully Phillips and Ellis (2015) included seventeen late gravid females with term pups (uterine fecundity 4–20), which were found to have numerous yolk-filled follicles ( $n = 6$ – $22$ ; follicle diameters 6–10 mm). Further studies, including more samples of fish from winter and spring are required to better gauge the reproductive period.

The number of mature follicles ranged from 0–28 in the mature females (McCully Phillips and Ellis, 2015). These will not all necessarily develop into embryos, however, and estimates of ovarian fecundity are known to exceed estimates of uterine fecundity. The size-spectra of the mature follicles (within mature females) ranged from 4.1 mm (mid-term gravid female) to 20.7 mm (mature female).

The uterine fecundity increased with total length and ranged from 4–20 (McCully Phillips and Ellis, 2015), which exceeded the maximum uterine fecundity (18) found by Farrell *et al.* (2010b).

That said, Farrell *et al.* (2010b) did state that their values may be underestimated due to females aborting pups on capture. The female identified with a fecundity of 20 was found with full-term pups. Furthermore, there were also positive linear relationships identified between maternal length and average pup length and weight (Figure 21.13; McCully Phillips and Ellis, 2015).

A combined dataset on uterine fecundity, using data from Henderson *et al.* (2003), Farrell *et al.* (2010b), McCully Phillips and Ellis (2015) and additional samples collected during fishery-independent trawl surveys conducted by Cefas is given in Table 21.4 (Ellis *et al.*, 2019). Of the 74 early- to late-gravid females in this combined study, the uterine fecundity ranged from 2–20 (mean = 8.5) which is similar to the initial studies of subsets of this combined dataset (summarised above). Uterine fecundity (F) had a linear relationship with  $L_T$ , as described by the equation  $F = 0.28390.L_T - 19.18583$  ( $n = 74$ ;  $r^2 = 0.4295$ ; bottom panel Figure 21.16).

In the Mediterranean Sea, *Mustelus asterias* reach maturity at about 75 cm (males) and 96 cm (females), with estimates of fecundity ranging from 10–45 (ovarian fecundity) and 10–35 (uterine fecundity). Again, fecundity is found to increase with length (Capapé, 1983), although it is possible the higher fecundity in this study may relate to data being confounded with other species of smooth-hound.

### *Mustelus mustelus*

Studies in the Mediterranean Sea have found that females matured at 107.5–123 cm  $L_T$  (50% maturity at 117.2 cm) and that males matured at 88–112 cm  $L_T$  (50% maturity at 97.1 cm) (Saidi *et al.*, 2008). This study also found that embryonic fecundity ranged from 4–18 embryos, with fecundity increasing with length. Further south off Senegal, the lengths at first (and 100%) maturity for *M. mustelus* were found to be 82 cm (95 cm), for males, and 95 cm (104 cm) for females (Capapé *et al.*, 2006). This study reported litters of 4–21 pups.

## 21.7.5 Movements and migrations

### *Mustelus asterias*

Although the movements and migrations of *M. asterias* are not fully known, there have been relatively high numbers tagged and released during various elasmobranch research programmes (e.g., Burt *et al.*, 2013 WD, Ellis *et al.*, 2019 WD Figure 21.17). A tagging programme (2011–2014) undertaken by Sportvisserij Nederland, in conjunction with Wageningen Marine Research, involved anglers tagging *M. asterias* in the Dutch Delta. There were 2244 releases and 80 recaptures (Figure 21.18; Brevé *et al.*, 2016). Recapture positions indicated circannual migrations between summertime grounds in the southern North Sea and overwintering grounds in the English Channel and Bay of Biscay, suggesting a degree of philopatry (Brevé *et al.*, 2016). This is an on-going tagging programme, and more recently Brevé *et al.* (2020) reported that during 2011–2019 a total of 3699 *M. asterias* were released, of which 220 recaptures were reported (ca. 5.9% return rate). The recent results support previous work from Brevé *et al.* (2016).

Cefas have tagged-and-released specimens of *M. asterias* from fishery-independent trawl surveys since 2003 (Burt *et al.*, 2013). In 2019, a total of 1613 (744 females and 868 males, one unsexed) had been tagged and released, of which 40 (2.48%) have been recaptured and details returned (Ellis *et al.*, 2019 WD). Results suggest that the species is wide ranging in northern European seas and displays seasonal migrations, which are likely related to its reproductive cycle (Figure 21.17; Ellis *et al.*, 2019 WD). An electronic tagging programmes initiated by Cefas in 2017–2019 deployed 125 tags with a return rate of 14.4% to date. On a broad-scale, sex-biased dispersal, and potential metapopulation-like stock structuring either side of the UK continental shelf was seen along with clear diel variation in vertical activity and association with the seabed (Griffiths *et al.*, 2020).

### 21.7.6 Diet and role in ecosystem

*Mustelus asterias* is primarily carcinophagous (98.8% percentage of index of relative importance, %IRI), with the two main prey species being hermit crab *Pagurus bernhardus* (34% IRI) and flying crab *Liocarcinus holsatus* (15% IRI) in specimens from the Northeast Atlantic (McCully Phillips, *et al.*, 2020). Ontogenetic dietary preferences showed that smaller individuals [20–69 cm total length ( $L_T$ )] had a significantly lower diversity of prey than larger individuals (70–124 cm  $L_T$ ) and similarly, specimens from the North Sea ecoregion had a lower diversity of prey types for a given sample size than fish from the Celtic Seas ecoregion (McCully Phillips, *et al.*, 2020). This study did not find any fish remains in the examination of 640 stomachs, however Ford (1921) and Ellis *et al.*, (1996) found that teleosts were only eaten occasionally by larger individuals. Larger individuals could be important predators of commercial crustaceans, feeding on velvet swimming crab *Necora puber* and small edible crab *Cancer pagurus* (McCully Phillips, *et al.*, 2020).

Other studies on the feeding habits of *Mustelus* also indicate a high proportion of crustaceans in the diet (Morte *et al.*, 1997; Jardas *et al.*, 2007; Santic *et al.*, 2007; Saidi *et al.*, 2009; Lipej *et al.*, 2011; Poiesz *et al.*, 2021; Biton-Porsmoguer, 2022).

The trophic level of specimens from the Northeast Atlantic was calculated as 4.34 when species-level prey categories were used; a value higher than previously indicated by other studies (Cortés, (1999; 3.7), Cotter *et al.* (2008; 3.9), and Pinnegar *et al.* (2002; 4.0)). These differences are due to the high trophic levels of their preferred crustacean prey (McCully Phillips, *et al.*, 2020). These findings will have ramifications for food web and ecosystem modelling, with the role of this species (as a top predator) potentially underestimated to date.

### 21.7.7 Conversion factors

The relationship between total length and weight in smooth-hounds sampled by McCully Phillips and Ellis (2015) are summarised by sex and maturity stage in Table 21.5 (see also figures 21.19 and 21.20).

The relationship for males differed slightly to that of females, largely driven by the larger maximum length of females and the weight of females about to give birth. Of note is the 119 cm outlier, which was a post-partum female with a very low body mass. Samples of the smaller size classes were obtained from scientific trawl surveys, while the larger individuals were commercially landed specimens.

Recent data on overall length-weight relationships for male and female *M. asterias* caught between 2009–2019 by Cefas fishery-independent trawl surveys around the British Isles are illustrated in Figure 21.20.

## 21.8 Exploratory assessment models

### 21.8.1 Previous studies

No previous assessments of NE Atlantic smooth-hounds have been made. However, there have been assessment methods developed for the Australian species *Mustelus antarcticus* (e.g. Xiao and Walker, 2000; Pribac *et al.*, 2005) which could be applied to the European species when relevant data are available.

## 21.8.2 Data exploration and preliminary assessments

An analytical age-, sex-, and length-structured assessment model was explored for *M. asterias* following the approach of De Oliveira *et al.* (2013) for spurdog, however, further work is required.

## 21.9 Stock assessment

The rfb rule (Method 2.1, ICES 2022b) was applied for the first time during the WGEF 2023 to assess the status of smooth-hounds (*Mustelus* spp.) in the Northeast Atlantic (stock sdv.27.nea).

Following the ICES guidance on the parameter determination for the rfb rule (ICES, 2022b), the input values for applying rfb rule on sdv.27.nea are presented in Table 21.6. Calculations used the R package ‘cat3advice’ which was developed by Fischer (2023).

It should be noted that the assessment is based on trends of fisheries-independent trawl surveys for starry smooth-hound (*Mustelus asterias*), which occurs primarily in subareas 4 and 6–8, and commercial data for the smooth-hound genus from the overall Northeast Atlantic, where two other species may also occur.

### 21.9.1 Stock size indicator

Since 2015, the stock of *M. asterias* in northern Europe has been evaluated using trends from fishery-independent trawl surveys, as these are the longest time-series of standardised species-specific data available.

The biomass trends of the long-term time-series of five different surveys covering a large proportion of the species distribution range were used in the 2023 assessment (NS-IBTS-Q1, NS-IBTS-Q3, EVHOE-WIBTS-Q4, FR-CGFS-Q4 and IE-IGFS-WIBTS-Q4, Figure 21.22 and Figure 21.23).

#### NS-IBTS-Q1 and NS-IBTS-Q3

Data from the two North Sea IBTS were used (see Section 15 for further details). These surveys sample the more northerly parts of the stock area. The biomass index of specimens  $\geq 50$  cm  $L_T$  of *Mustelus* spp. was used, though the GOV samples mostly larger fish (Figure 21.6). Data from Denmark were excluded in analyses for the IBTS-Q3, due to the suspicion that data for *Mustelus* and *Galeorhinus* were confounded (see Section 21.6.3). The temporal trends in abundance, total biomass, and exploitable biomass (specimens  $\geq 50$  cm  $L_T$ ) all showed similar patterns (Figure 21.6). Normalized values for the average of NS-IBTS-Q1 Q3 are shown in Figure 21.22 and Table 21.7.

#### EVHOE-WIBTS-Q4

A biomass index of specimens  $\geq 50$  cm  $L_T$  of *Mustelus* spp. from the EVHOE-IBTS-Q4, was included in the 2023 assessment. This survey covers more south-western parts of the stock area (divisions 8.a.b.d; Figure 21.7). Data were available for 1997–2022 (excluding 2017) and indicate an overall increase in total and exploitable biomass, albeit a decline in 2022 is seen compared to 2021. The total biomass was calculated using the weight from on-board catch weight per species, as no individual weights were available for most years. Exploitable biomass (specimens  $\geq 50$  cm  $L_T$ ) was calculated using the length-weight relationship with  $W_T = 0.0016 \cdot L_T^{3.1753}$ . Normalized values for this survey are shown in Figure 21.22 and Table 21.7.

#### FR-CGFS-Q4

A biomass index of specimens  $\geq 50$  cm  $L_T$  of *Mustelus* spp. from the FR-CGFS-Q4, was included in the 2023 assessment. This survey covers the eastern English Channel part of the stock area (Division 7.d; Figure 21.7). Data were available for 1997–2022 and indicate an overall increase in total and exploitable biomass, albeit a decrease in 2022 is seen compared to 2021. Despite this, 2022 remains within the highest levels observed in the time-series.

Although, in 2020 the survey did not cover part of the survey grid (ICES rectangles 29F1 and 30E9), data have been included in the assessment (see Section 2.19 in ICES, 2022a). Normalized values for this survey are shown in Figure 21.22 and Table 21.7.

#### IE-IGFS-WIBTS-Q4

Although the inclusion of this survey reduces the common time frame from 1997–2022 to 2005–2022, it covers the north-western parts of the stock area (divisions 6.a and 7.b.g.j) and was therefore used in 2023 assessment. The biomass index of specimens  $\geq 50$  cm  $L_T$  of *Mustelus* spp. was used, though the GOV samples mostly larger fish (Figure 21.8). Data indicate increasing total and exploitable biomass, though the variation is greater in recent years (Figure 21.8). Normalized values for this survey are shown in Figure 21.22 and Table 21.7.

#### Summary

The stock size indicator is based on ‘exploitable biomass’ (individuals  $\geq 50$  cm total length). The inclusion of additional surveys such as the IE-IGFS-WIBTS-Q4 truncates the common time period from 1997–2022 to 2005–2022, however, it does extend the spatial range covered within the stock unit. NS-IBTS-Q1 and NS-IBTS-Q3 were averaged prior to standardising to the long-term mean, and are therefore treated as a single survey following recommendations from WSKATE (ICES, 2021a). The remaining three survey indices were also standardised in relation to their long-term mean. The average of the four surveys was used to derive an annual index of stock size (Figure 21.23; Table 21.7). In 2017, EHVOE-WIBTS-Q4 did not occur and the average for the annual index of stock size was based on the other surveys. All four surveys were given equal weighting.

Following the ICES guidelines for category 3, the stock biomass trend  $r$  is now based on the ratio of 2 over 3 years, instead of previous assessment where it was based on 2 over 5 years (ICES, 2022b). The mean index for the years 2021–2022 was 2.0, whilst the mean index for the preceding three years (2018–2020) was 1.25 (Figure 21.23; Table 21.6 and Table 21.7). Thus,  $r$  was set at 1.64 (Table 21.6). The  $I_{\text{loss}}$  equating to the lowest estimate observed in the time-series was 0.36 (2005; the first year used in the assessment) and  $I_{\text{trigger}}$  set as  $1.4 * I_{\text{loss}}$  was 0.51 (Table 21.6). The biomass safeguard  $b$  was set at 1 as  $I_{2022}$  (2.1) was above  $I_{\text{trigger}}$  (0.51) with ratio  $I_{2022}/I_{\text{trigger}}$  of 4.1 (Table 21.6).

#### Further considerations

The BTS-UK(E&W)-Q3 and BTS-Eng-Q3 surveys primarily sample juvenile *M. asterias*, and so in 2023 were excluded from the assessment. However, data may be informative for pup abundance, and thus it may be possible to develop an index of recruitment from such surveys in the future.

Further studies to better quantify differences between ‘total biomass’ and ‘exploitable biomass’ are still to be undertaken. Such work could usefully be appraised during a dedicated workshop for smooth-hounds *Mustelus* spp. and tope *Galeorhinus galeus* as recommended during WSKATE (ICES, 2021a). Furthermore, the suitability of statistical modelling to provide a single survey index and associated confidence intervals, similar to work developed for spurdog during the benchmark in 2021 (ICES, 2021b), could usefully be examined for *Mustelus*. This would allow

for the potential use of multiple surveys while accounting for potential differences (e.g., season, design, gear, depth, sex, length class).

### 21.9.2 Fishing proxy $f$

Although length composition data from commercial fisheries were available to WGEF since 2016, only data for 2020–2022 for both UK and France were used in the assessment of the stock (Figure 21.4).

The quality of the commercial length data may have also been hampered by the potential confusion between smooth-hound and tope, with records above the maximum observed length in recent literature for starry smooth-hound ( $L_{\max} = 124$  cm  $L_T$ , McCully Phillips and Ellis, 2015). There were also records below smallest free-swimming neonate reported by the same study (24 cm  $L_T$ ). Therefore, length data considered for the assessment were truncated to individuals between  $\geq 24$  and  $\leq 125$  cm  $L_T$  (Figure 21.24 and Figure 21.25).

$L_c$  (length at first capture) was calculated using pooled data from commercial catches from 2020–2022 (Table 21.8 and Figure 21.24), with  $L_{\text{mean}}$  calculated for each of the years 2020–2022 shown in Table 21.7 and Figure 21.25.

Farrel *et al.* (2010) observed a maximum length of 112 cm  $L_T$  in his study, thus the estimated  $L_{\text{inf}}$  (or  $L_{\infty}$ ) of 123.5 cm and  $k$  of 0.146 year<sup>-1</sup> for females may be considered an underestimate given the more recent literature in relation to  $L_{\max}$  observed. Consequently, the WGEF agreed that  $L_{\text{inf}}$  should be calculated using  $L_{\max}/0.95$  (Pauly, 1984), and despite noting historical accounts of a  $L_{\max}$  of 140 cm  $L_T$  (Branstetter *et al.*, 1984), preference was given to use a more recent account from McCully Phillips and Ellis (2015) with  $L_{\max}$  of 124 cm  $L_T$ . Therefore using [fishbase.se/popdyn](https://fishbase.se/popdyn) for starry smooth-hound and a new  $L_{\text{inf}}$  of 130.5 cm  $L_T$ ,  $k$  was set at 0.13 year<sup>-1</sup>, with  $m$  as 0.95.

The fishing proxy  $f$  values for 2020–2022 are listed in Table 21.7 and Figure 21.26. Results are presented considering both the  $L_{\text{inf}}$  derived from  $L_{\max}$  observed in McCully Phillips and Ellis (2015) and using  $L_{\text{inf}}$  from Farrel *et al.* (2010). The WGEF agreed on the fishing proxy  $f$  derived  $L_{\text{inf}}$  of 130.5 cm  $L_T$ .

### 21.9.3 Application of the rfb rule

The rfb catch rule is defined as  $A_{y+1} = A_y \times r \times f \times b \times m$  ( $\times$  stability clause), where  $A_{y+1}$  and  $A_y$  refer to advised landings in 2024 (and 2025) and 2023, respectively,  $r$  to stock biomass trend (set at 1.64),  $f$  to fishing pressure proxy (set at 1.06),  $b$  to biomass safeguard (set at 1) and  $m$  to a precautionary multiplier depending on life-history parameters (set at 0.95). The stability clause was considered in this case and was applied to limit the increase in landings advice to 20% (Table 21.6).

The advised landings for 2024 and 2025 are 20% higher than the previous advice because of the increase in the stock size indicator and the application of the stability clause. Therefore, landings should be no more than 5329 tonnes in each of the years 2024 and 2025 (Table 21.6).

## 21.10 Quality of the assessment

Commercial landings data are available for recent years but may be compromised by poor data quality. Whilst fishery-independent trawl surveys provide the best time-series information, such surveys may under-represent the largest size classes. It is unclear as to how recent increases in CPUE may relate to increased stock abundance and/or a possible northward shift in distribution.

The positions of survey hauls containing smooth-hounds in the EVHOE-WIBTS-Q4 survey were plotted over the 1997–2019 time-series (Figure 21.27). The number of stations catching smooth-hounds increased over the survey, but the distribution of the catches has remained constant, occurring north of 46°N. There was no evidence from this survey to support the theory of a northward shift in the distribution, which would support the suggestion that increasing catch rates reflect population growth.

## 21.11 Conservation considerations

The most recent IUCN Red List Assessment for European marine fishes (Nieto *et al.*, 2015) upgraded all three *Mustelus* spp. to either Near Threatened (*M. asterias*) or Vulnerable (*M. mustelus* and *M. punctulatus*), identifying them as of increasing conservation interest. These species were listed previously as either Data Deficient or Least Concern (Gibson *et al.*, 2008).

## 21.12 Management considerations

Smooth-hounds appear to be increasing in relative abundance in trawl surveys, and in commercial landings data. Given the potential expansion in fisheries for smooth-hounds (which may reflect an increased abundance and/or an increase in fishing opportunities due to restrictions on *S. acanthias*), further studies to understand the dynamics, distribution and geographic boundaries of this stock are required.

Smooth-hounds taken by beam trawl are primarily juveniles and subadults (<70 cm  $L_T$ ), and these are often discarded, as are smooth-hounds <50 cm  $L_T$  in otter trawl fisheries. Discard survival has not been quantified for many métiers, and survival is variable in this family (Ellis *et al.*, 2014 WD). Further studies on at-vessel mortality and post-release mortality, including of juveniles, are needed.

Survey data are available, and the quality of landings data is thought to be improving. Whilst there have been several recent biological investigations (Farrell *et al.*, 2010a, b; McCully Phillips and Ellis, 2015), there is still uncertainty in some key biological parameters, including the duration of the reproductive cycle.

Smooth-hounds are also an important target species in some areas for recreational fisheries; despite this there remains insufficient data to examine the relative economic importance of these fisheries, or the degree of mortality associated with recreational fisheries.

Other species of smooth-hound are targeted elsewhere in the world, including Australia/New Zealand and South America. Although smooth-hounds are generally quite productive stocks (relative to some other elasmobranchs), evidence from these fisheries suggests that various management controls can be considered appropriate.

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## 21.14 Tables and Figures

Table 21.1. Smooth-hounds in the Northeast Atlantic. ICES estimated landings (t) for the period 1973–2022. Data from 1973–2014 are considered underestimates as some smooth-hounds are landed under generic landings categories. Data from 2005 onwards were revised following the 2016 Data Call (see ICES, 2016); previous estimates are provided in brackets (2005–2014). Species-specific landings data are not available for the Mediterranean Sea and are limited for the north-west African waters. Blank = no data reported; 0 ≤ 0.5 tonnes.

	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986
<b>Belgium</b>														
<b>Germany</b>														
<b>Denmark</b>														
<b>Spain</b>														
<b>France</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	32	0	0	222	218	66	143	167
<b>UK*</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Ireland</b>														
<b>Netherlands</b>														
<b>Portugal</b>														
<b>Total</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	32	0	0	222	218	66	143	167
	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	
<b>Belgium</b>														
<b>Germany</b>														
<b>Denmark</b>														
<b>Spain</b>														
<b>France</b>	119	64	117	126	93	90	102	138	145	228	187	197	0	
<b>UK*</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
<b>Ireland</b>														
<b>Netherlands</b>														
<b>Portugal</b>														
<b>Total</b>	119	64	117	126	93	90	102	138	145	228	187	197	0	

\*Data from 1973–2014 were previously separated into UK –E, W & NI and UK – Scotland but have been merged into UK.

Table 21.1. Continued. Smooth-hounds in the Northeast Atlantic. ICES estimated landings (t) for the period 1973–2022. Data from 1973–2014 are considered underestimates as some smooth-hounds are landed under generic landings categories. Data from 2005 onwards were revised following the 2016 Data Call (see ICES, 2016); previous estimates are provided in brackets (2005–2014). Species-specific landings data are not available for the Mediterranean Sea and are limited for the north-west African waters. Blank = no data reported; 0 ≤ 0.5 tonnes.

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
<b>Belgium</b>													(8)	(10)	1 (1)
<b>Germany</b>															
<b>Denmark</b>															
<b>Spain**</b>						112	134	138	200	297	129 (34)	106 (48)	120 (9)	80 (83)	70 (14)
<b>France</b>	306	377	585	589	682	2685 (767)	2722 (714)	2958 (908)	3403 (522)	3082 (926)	3204 (969)	3241 (706)	2821 (2695)	2942 (2955)	2836 (2825)
<b>UK*</b>	14	0	0	0	0	171 (0)	130 (0)	155 (0)	171 (115)	199 (133)	275 (161)	315 (919)	339 (337)	325 (323)	331 (647)
<b>Ireland</b>								0	1	0	0	0			0
<b>Netherlands</b>										4	9 (8)	3 (3)	23 (11)	26 (20)	24 (15)
<b>Portugal</b>						44	57	57	41	45	38	43 (35)	42 (42)	41 (41)	17 (187)
<b>Total***</b>	320	377	585	589	682	3013 (767)	3043	3308 (908)	3816 (637)	3628 (1059)	3655 (1172)	3709 (1712)	3345 (3101)	3415 (3433)	3280 (3690)

\*Data from 1973–2014 were previously separated into UK –E, W & NI and UK – Scotland but have been merged into UK. \*\*Data not available for Area 34 and 37 in 2015–2021; \*\*\*Includes negligible landings reported to Fishing Area 34 and 37 (ca. 0.0-2.4% of the total annual estimated landings).

Table 21.1. Continued. Smooth-hounds in the Northeast Atlantic. ICES estimated landings (t) for the period 1973–2022. Data from 1973-2014 are considered underestimates as some smooth-hounds are landed under generic landings categories. Species-specific landings data are not available for the Mediterranean Sea and are limited for the north-west African waters. Blank = no data reported; 0 ≤ 0.5 tonnes.

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	
Belgium	1	3		2	1	1	3	4	5
Germany						1			
Denmark		0		0	1	0	0		
Spain**	42	40		43	38	30	41	28	29
France	2963	2855		2730	3136	2934	2665	3195	3141
UK*	303	469		376	390	474	405	470	483
Ireland	0							0	10
Netherlands	24	22		22	34	74	91	62	83
Portugal	15	18		55	51	53	64	54	47
Slovenia						1			
Total***	3349	3407		3228	3651	3567	3268	3813	3800

\*\*Data not available for Area 34 and 37 in 2015–2021; \*\*\*Includes negligible landings reported to Fishing Area 34 and 37 (ca. 0.0-2.4% of the total annual estimated landings).

Table 21.2. Smooth-hounds in the Northeast Atlantic. Preliminary discards estimates (t) by country for the period 2009–2022. Blank = no data reported; 0 ≤ 0.5 tonnes.

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Denmark	0	1	0		0	0	1	25	0	3	9	3	3	0
Spain											0			
France			441	204	308	508	320	510	874	284	464	357	319	244
UK	163	109	95	145	111	56	37	118	61	94	68	223	122	490
Ireland	26	38	33	56	31	29	15	119	43	27	6	36		51
Netherlands			17	64	12	5	32	7	41	40	37	25	42	45
Portugal										0	0	0		

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
<b>Slovenia</b>														0
<b>Total</b>	189	149	586	469	462	598	405	780	1020	449	585	643	486	831

**Table 21.3. Smooth-hounds in the Northeast Atlantic. Age-length key for *Mustelus asterias*, based on data given in Farrell *et al.* (2010a).**

Age	Total length (cm)	
	Male	Female
0	38.1	34.9
1	49.7	46.9
2	59.3	57.3
3	67.2	66.3
4	73.6	74.1
5	79.0	80.8
6	83.3	86.6
7	86.9	91.6
8	89.9	95.9
9	92.4	99.7
10	94.4	102.9
11	96.0	105.7
12	97.4	108.1
13	98.5	110.2
14	99.4	112.0
15	100.2	113.6
16	100.8	114.9
17	101.3	116.1
18	101.7	117.1



**Table 21.4 Smooth-hounds in the Northeast Atlantic. Fecundity at length data for *Mustelus asterias*, based on data given in Henderson *et al.* (2003), Farrell *et al.* (2010b), McCully Phillips and Ellis (2015) and Ellis *et al.* (2019 WD).**

Source	Total length (cm)	Uterine fecundity	Maturity stage <sup>3</sup>
Henderson <i>et al.</i> (2003)	87	10	D
	89	2	D
	109	10	D
Farrell <i>et al.</i> (2010)	83	6	
	90	8	
	91	7	
	92	4	
	94	7	
	97	6	
	97	9	
	100	9	
	103	14	
	104	7	
	106	7	
	106	11	
	108	10	
	111	18	
112	9		
McCully Phillips & Ellis (2015)	80	4	D
	83	7	D
	86	10	E
	88	9	D
	90	7	D
	91	6	F
	92	6	D
	93	4	F
	96	14	F
	97	9	F
	97	5	E
	97	11	D
	98	10	F
	98	10	D
	101	7	F
	101	11	E
101	10	F	
101	12	D	
102	11	F	

<sup>3</sup> Maturity stage as per described in McCully Phillips and Ellis, 2015.

Source	Total length (cm)	Uterine fecundity	Maturity stage <sup>3</sup>
	103	12	F
	104	13	F
	105	17	F
	105	8	F
	106	11	F
	110	17	F
	115	12	F
	116	20	F
	116	15	E
	124	13	F
Cefas unpublished <sup>4</sup> in Ellis <i>et al.</i> (2019 WD)	101	5	F
Cefas (Ciro 2/02) in Ellis <i>et al.</i> (2019 WD)	88	4	D
	92	2	D
	93	2	D
	101	9	F
	111	14	F
Cefas trawl surveys (CEnd 2/13) in Ellis <i>et al.</i> (2019 WD)	93	4	F
	97	10	E
Cefas trawl surveys (CEnd 4/18) in Ellis <i>et al.</i> (2019 WD)	81	3	F
	85	5	F
	87	4	F
	88	4	F
	89	5	F
	89	5	F
	90	4	F
	90	6	F
	91	7	E
	93	8	F
	97	10	F
	99	9	F
	100	12	F
	101	4	F
Cefas trawl surveys (CEnd 3/19) in Ellis <i>et al.</i> (2019)	82	6	F
	99	10	F
	100	12	F
	100	9	E
	108	2	D

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<sup>4</sup> April 2019, 101 cm, 3671 g total weight

**Table 21.5 Smooth-hounds in the Northeast Atlantic. Relationship between total length and weight in the smooth-hounds sampled by McCully Phillips and Ellis (2015)**

Relationship $Y = ax^b$	Sex/Stage	a	b	r <sup>2</sup>	n
Total weight to total length	All females	0.0014	3.2	0.992	248
	All males	0.0020	3.1	0.995	237
	Immature female (stage A/B)	0.0020	3.1245	0.994	170
	Immature male (stage A/B)	0.0014	3.2159	0.991	113
	Mature female (including early gravid) (stage C/D)	0.0021	3.1396	0.913	54
	Mature male (stage C/D)	0.0077	2.8084	0.938	123
	Mid-/late-term gravid females (stage E/F)	0.0002	3.7072	0.935	21
Gutted weight to total length	Sexes combined	0.0014	3.1580	0.995	484
	Female	0.0016	3.1	0.994	249
	Male	0.0014	3.2	0.996	235

**Table 21.6 Smooth-hounds in the Northeast Atlantic. Estimates used in the rfb rule, with details and comments. All values have been rounded; calculations were done using unrounded values. Calculations were done using ‘cat3advice’ R package from Fischer (2023).**

Variable	Estimate	Input data	Comments
r: Stock biomass trend	1.64	Stock size indicator is the mean normalized exploitable biomass index (individuals of $\geq 50$ cm total length, $L_T$ ) of starry smooth-hound from the average of the two NS-IBTS surveys (NS-IBTS-Q1 [G1022] and NS-IBTS-Q3 [G2829]), EVHOE-WIBTS-Q4 [G9527], FR-CGFS-Q4 [G3425], and IE-IGFS-WIBTS-Q4 [G7212].	Index A (2021, 2022) = 2.0 Index B (2018, 2019, 2020) = 1.25 The series shows an increasing trend since 2005.
b: Biomass safeguard	1	$\min\{I_{2022}/I_{trigger}, 1\}$	$I_{loss} = 0.36$ (2005) $I_{trigger} = I_{loss} \times 1.4 = 0.51$ $I_{2022} = 2.1$ $I_{2022}/I_{trigger} = 4.1$ The series shows an increasing trend since 2005.
f: Fishing proxy $L_{mean}/L_{F=M}$	1.06	Length data collected from commercial landings and discards from 2022. $L_C$ is calculated from pooled data from 2020–2022.	$L_C = 40$ cm $L_{inf} = L_{max}/0.95 = 130.5$ cm $L_{max} = 124$ cm $L_T$ from McCully Phillips and Ellis (2015) $L_{F=M} = 0.75 * L_C + 0.25 * L_{inf}$ $L_{F=M} = 63$ cm $L_{mean 2022} = 66$ cm Length data used for individuals $\geq 24$ and $\leq 125$ cm $L_T$ .

Variable	Estimate	Input data	Comments
m linked to von Bertalanffy k	0.95	Set at 0.95 when a species-specific k parameter is < 0.2.	k = 0.13 year <sup>-1</sup> calculated in <a href="https://fishbase.se/popdyn">fishbase.se/popdyn</a> when using $L_{inf} = L_{max}/0.95 = 130.5$ cm (Pauly, 1984)
$A_y$	4441 tonnes	ICES advice in 2022 (2023)	
$A_{y+1}$	7360 tonnes	$A_{y+1} = A_y \times r \times f \times b \times m$	Value rounded to the nearest tonne.
Stability clause	1.2	Applied as $b \geq 1$	$A_{y+1}$ would be more than 20% compared to $A_y$ , thus, stability clause applied
Landings advice for 2024 and 2025 ( $A_y \times$ stability clause)	5329	$\min(\max(0.7 \cdot A_y, A_{y+1}), 1.2 \cdot A_y)$	To limit the increase to 20%.

**Table 21.7 Smooth-hounds in the Northeast Atlantic. Biomass indices for exploitable biomass (individuals of  $\geq 50$  cm total length) of starry smooth-hound derived from five surveys (average of NS-IBTS-Q1 and NS-IBTS-Q3, EHVQE-WIBTS-Q4, FR-CGFS-Q4 and IE-IGFS-WIBTS-Q4). The stock size indicator is the annual mean of the normalized surveys indices (2005–2022). Note: rounded numbers as per ICES rounding rules. Values may differ from previous assessment for years prior to 2021 as NS-IBTS Q3, EHVQE-WIBTS-Q4 and FR-CGFS-Q4 time-series were updated in 2023.**

Year	NS-IBTS-Q1 Q3	EHVQE-WIBTS-Q4	FR-CGFS-Q4	IE-IGFS-WIBTS-Q4	Stock size indicator
2005	0.28	0.33	0.69	0.150	0.36
2006	0.49	0.166	0.95	0.190	0.45
2007	0.40	0.64	0.78	0.32	0.53
2008	0.41	1.04	0.97	0.27	0.67
2009	0.46	0.00	1.32	0.29	0.52
2010	0.71	0.00	0.78	0.54	0.51
2011	0.86	0.93	0.57	0.24	0.65
2012	0.92	1.17	0.71	0.44	0.81
2013	0.92	0.22	0.72	0.41	0.57
2014	1.54	0.96	0.54	0.74	0.95
2015	0.77	1.82	1.60	1.16	1.34
2016	0.82	1.69	1.04	1.60	1.29
2017	2.3	NA	0.92	1.84	1.69*
2018	1.04	1.55	0.64	1.03	1.06
2019	0.80	1.43	1.68	1.73	1.41
2020	1.55	1.56	1.28**	0.67	1.26
2021	0.99	2.5	1.68	2.8	1.99
2022	2.7	0.97	1.14	3.6	2.1

\* In 2017, the stock size indicator does not include EHVQE-WIBTS-Q4 (Data not available).

\*\* Only parts of the survey area covered during FR-CGFS-Q4 though impact considered to be negligible for starry smooth-hound (ICES, 2022a).

**Table 21.8 Smooth-hounds in the Northeast Atlantic. Commercial length data available from UK and France (2020–2022) used in the assessment to calculate  $L_c$ . Note: Numbers rounded to two decimal places, with calculations made with unrounded numbers.**

$L_T$ (cm)	Numbers	$L_T$ (cm)	Numbers	$L_T$ (cm)	Numbers
26	2.88	61	69.42	96	25.93
27	3.60	62	75.00	97	17.39
28	1.18	63	72.82	98	25.71
29	1.53	64	96.15	99	11.81
30	4.05	65	93.41	100	14.01
31	25.43	66	65.17	101	17.21
32	2.49	67	78.40	102	11.05
33	13.09	68	108.79	103	11.83
34	20.61	69	108.50	104	15.20
35	14.74	70	90.30	105	8.90
36	20.64	71	125.22	106	5.60
37	22.75	72	101.43	107	6.59
38	42.43	73	177.97	108	4.07
39	51.82	74	120.05	109	3.50
40	102.70	75	94.14	110	7.02
41	126.69	76	85.12	111	2.81
42	110.83	77	100.52	112	3.94
43	116.92	78	87.39	113	2.70
44	89.96	79	154.02	114	2.90
45	115.08	80	91.55	115	1.78
46	121.30	81	107.46	116	0.55
47	125.33	82	64.72	117	3.43
48	68.43	83	97.48	118	1.23
49	79.11	84	68.87	120	0.61
50	89.72	85	84.73	121	0.53
51	56.43	86	84.19	122	0.98
52	75.37	87	61.45	125	0.11
53	52.64	88	69.49		
54	62.90	89	81.94		
55	88.70	90	79.67		
56	57.22	91	60.01		
57	39.66	92	50.17		
58	54.70	93	28.77		
59	63.94	94	38.54		
60	46.72	95	28.38		

**Table 21.7 Smooth-hounds in the Northeast Atlantic.  $L_{mean}$ ,  $L_{F=M}$ ,  $f$ , and inverse  $f$  values for the years 2020–2022 using different  $L_{inf}$ .  $L_c$  calculated using pooled length data from commercial catches from UK and France (2020–2022). Note: In bold values used in the final assessment.**

Year	$L_c$	$L_{mean}$	Using $L_{inf}$ derived from $L_{max}$ observed in McCully Phillips and Ellis (2015)			Using $L_{inf}$ from Farrell <i>et al.</i> (2010)		
			$L_{F=M}$	$f$	inverse $f$	$L_{F=M}$	$f$	inverse $f$
2020	<b>40</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>1.12</b>	<b>0.89</b>	61	1.16	0.87
2021	<b>40</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>1.11</b>	<b>0.90</b>	61	1.14	0.88
2022	<b>40</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>1.06</b>	<b>0.94</b>	61	1.09	0.92

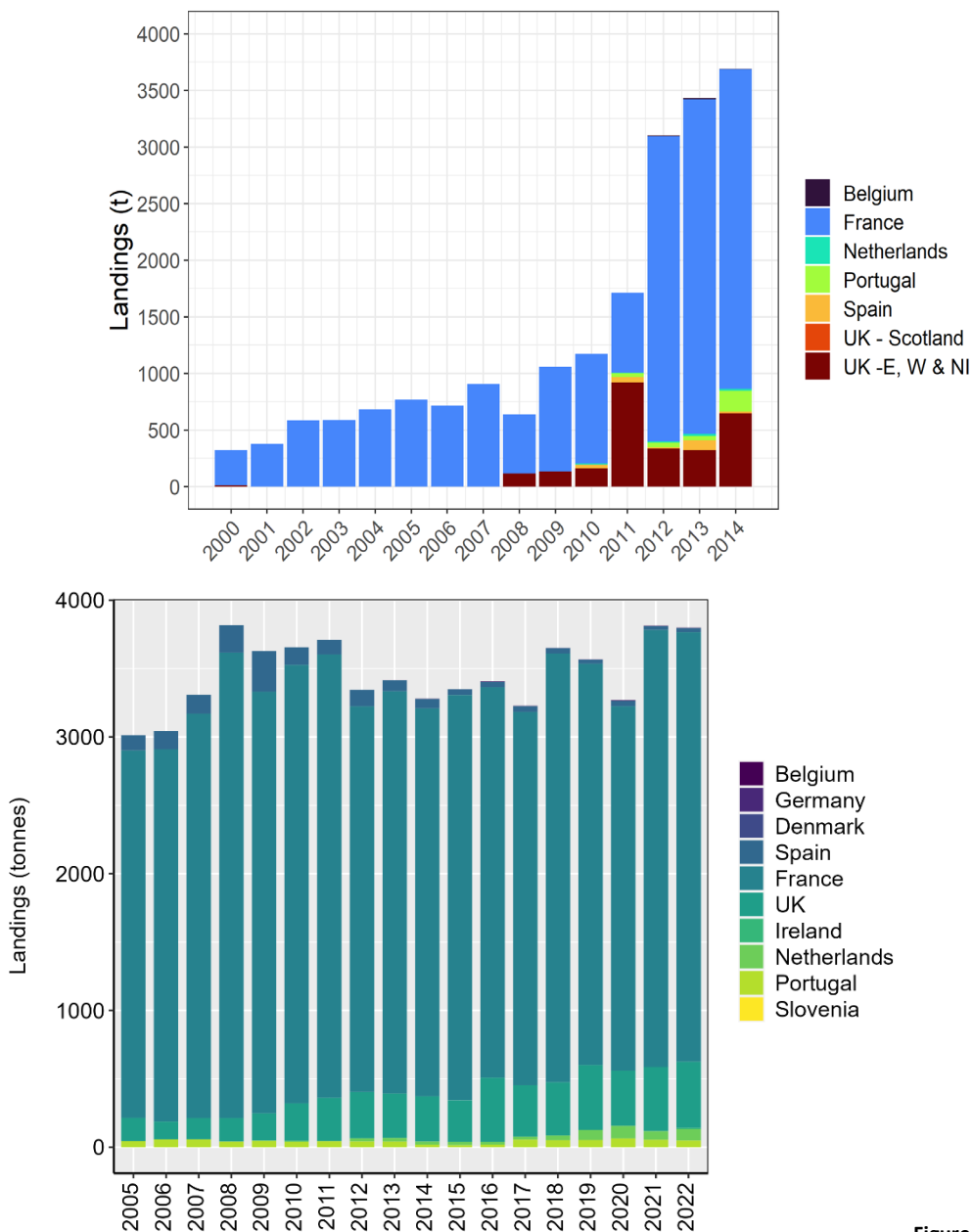
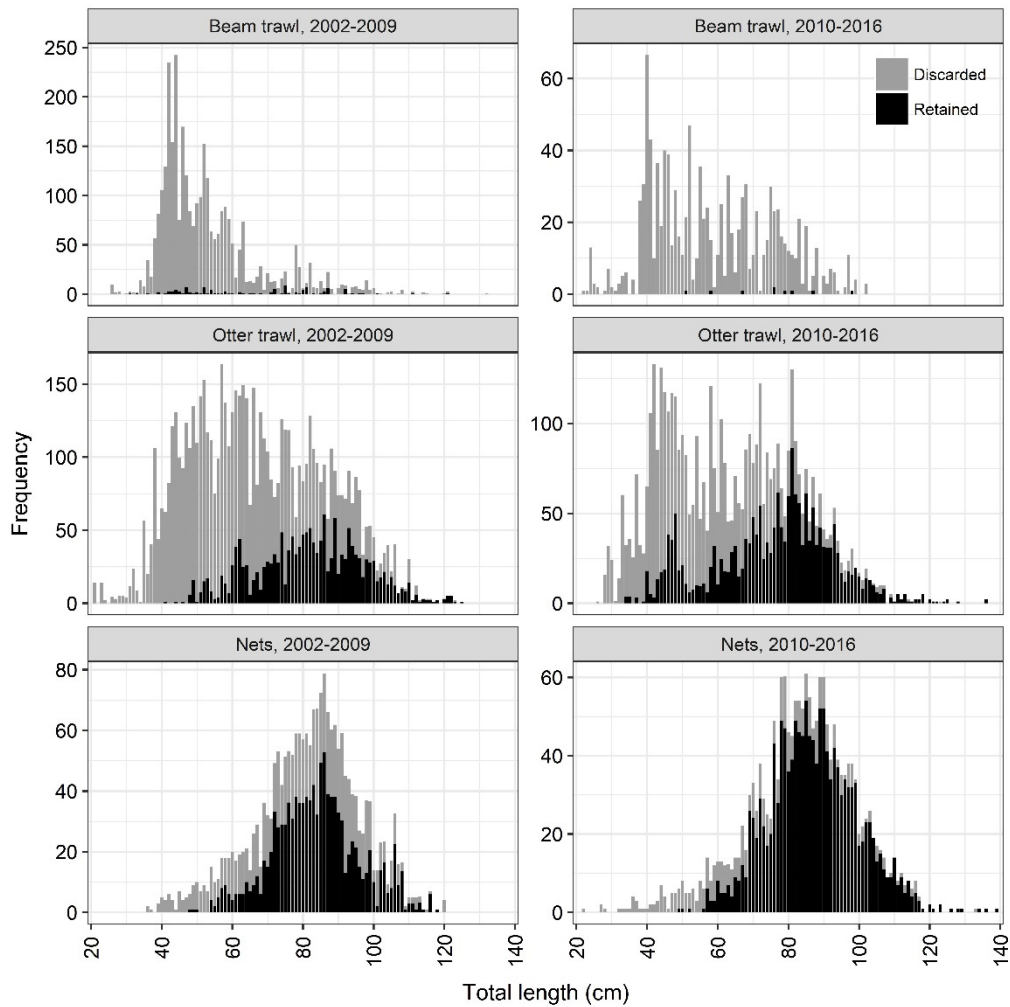


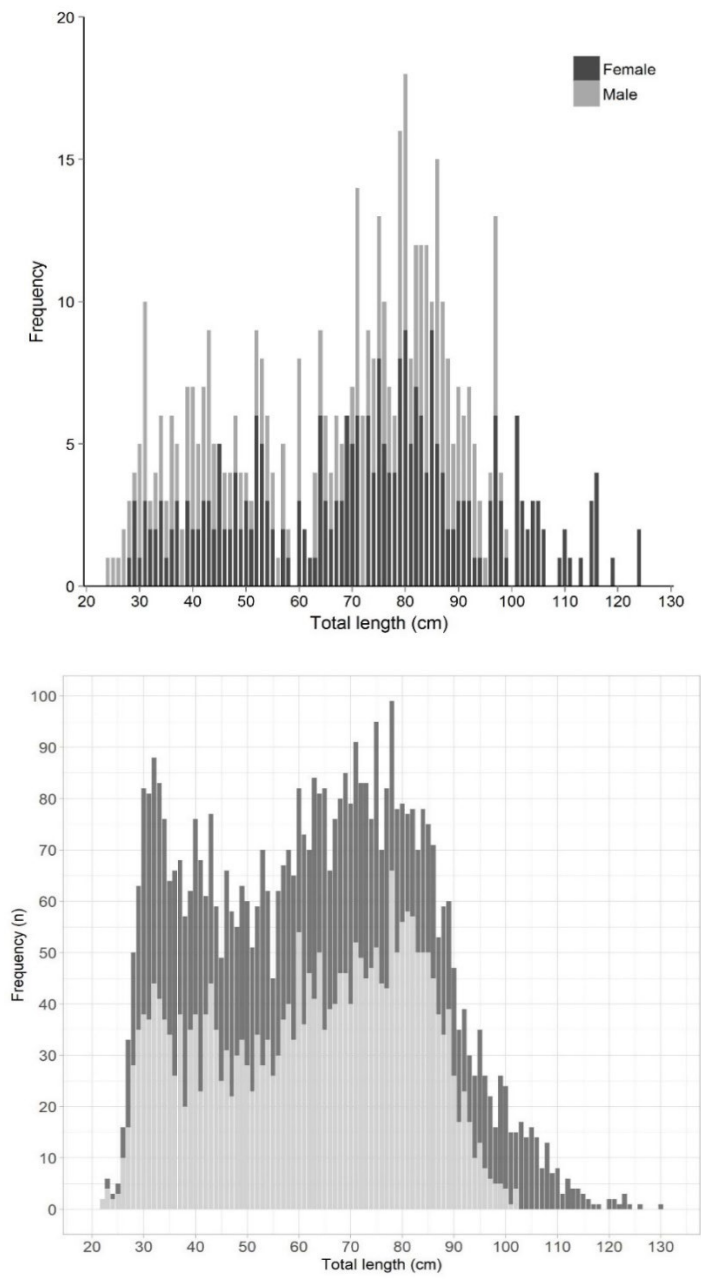
Figure 21.1.

Smooth-hounds in the Northeast Atlantic. Earlier ICES estimates of overall *Mustelus* spp. landings by country (2000–2014; top) and revised ICES estimates (2005–2022; bottom). Data are considered underestimates.

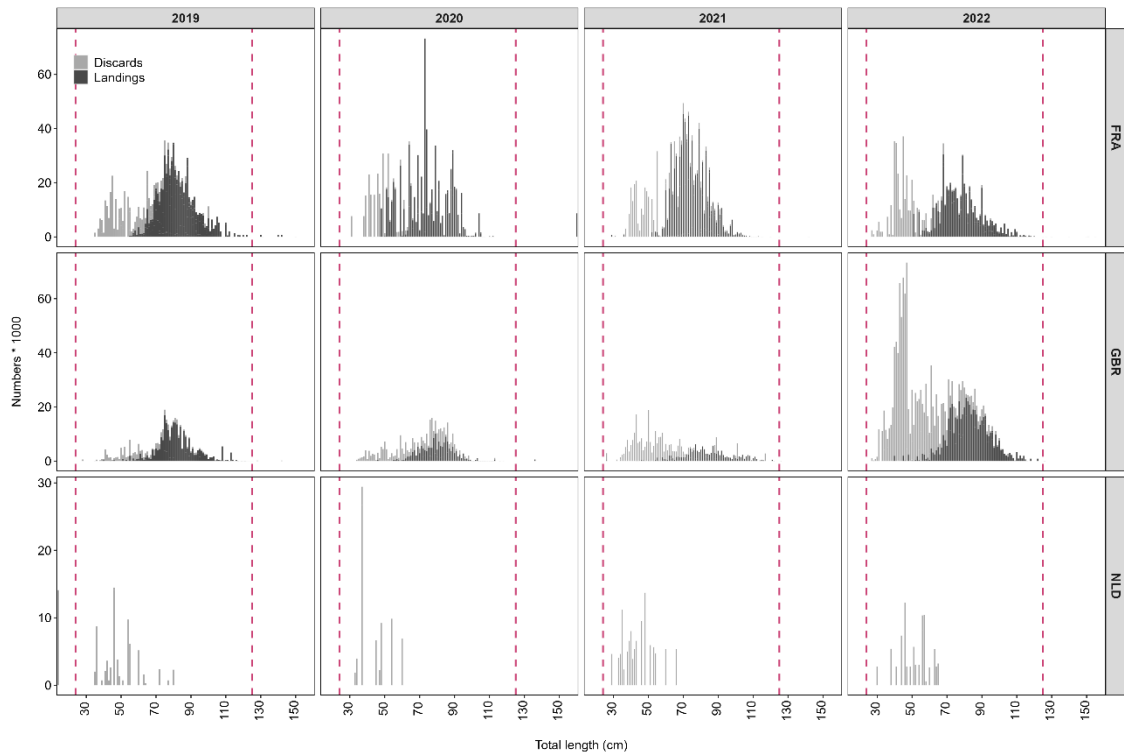


**Figure 21.2.** Smooth-hounds in the Northeast Atlantic. Length–frequency of discarded (pale grey) and retained (dark grey) starry smooth-hound *Mustelus asterias* caught by beam trawl, otter trawl and gillnets during the periods 2002–2009 and 2010–2016, as recorded in the Cefas observer programme. Data aggregated across North Sea and Celtic Seas ecoregions. (Source: Silva and Ellis, 2019).

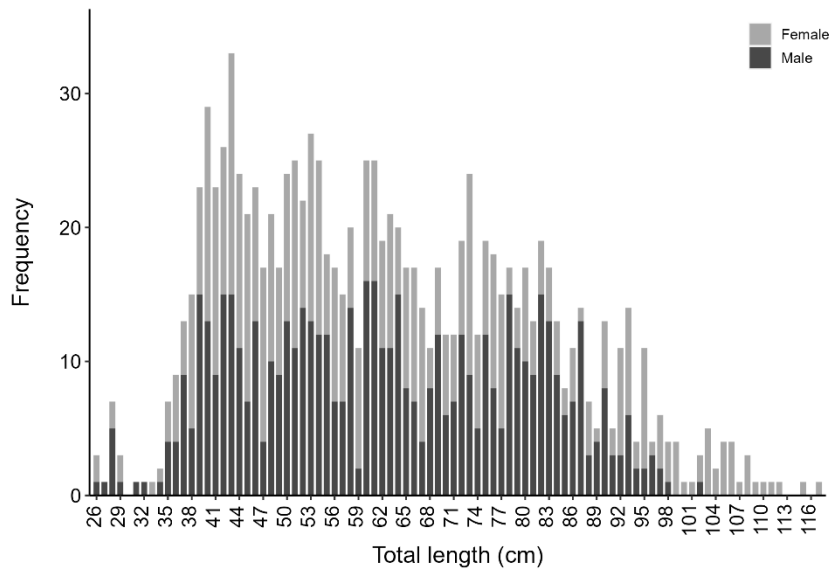




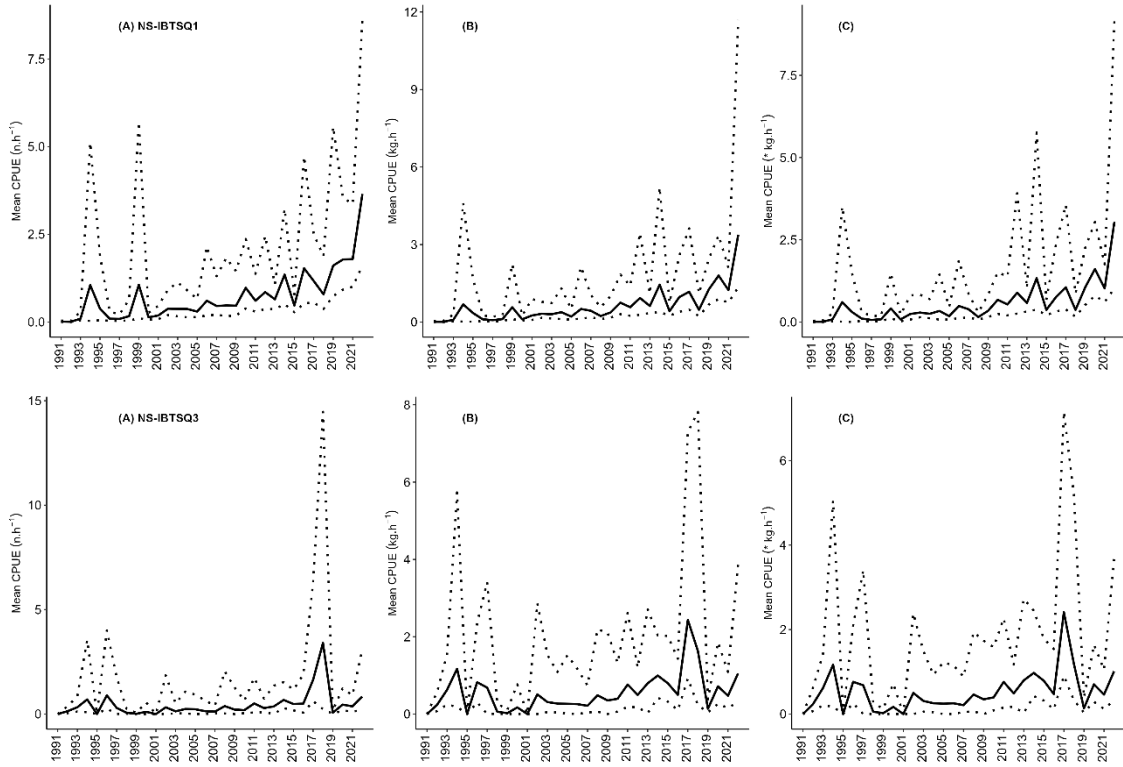
**Figure 21.3. Smooth-hounds in the Northeast Atlantic. Number of starry smooth-hounds biologically sampled by length and sex (top; n = 504) from McCully Phillips and Ellis (2015) and (bottom; n = 4951) from Ellis *et al.* (2019 WD).**



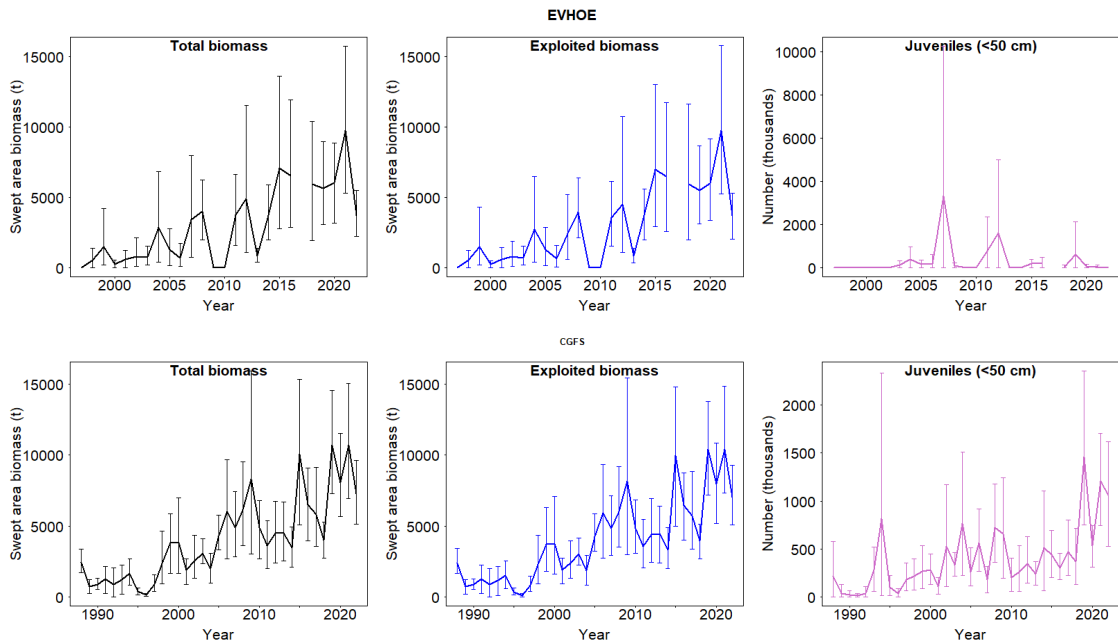
**Figure 21.4. Smooth-hounds in the Northeast Atlantic. Combined commercial length data available by country for 2019–2022. Note: data prior to 2019 not shown, only data from 2020 onwards were used in the assessment. Dashed pink line refer to the lengths cut off used at 24 cm  $L_T$  and 125 cm  $L_T$ .**



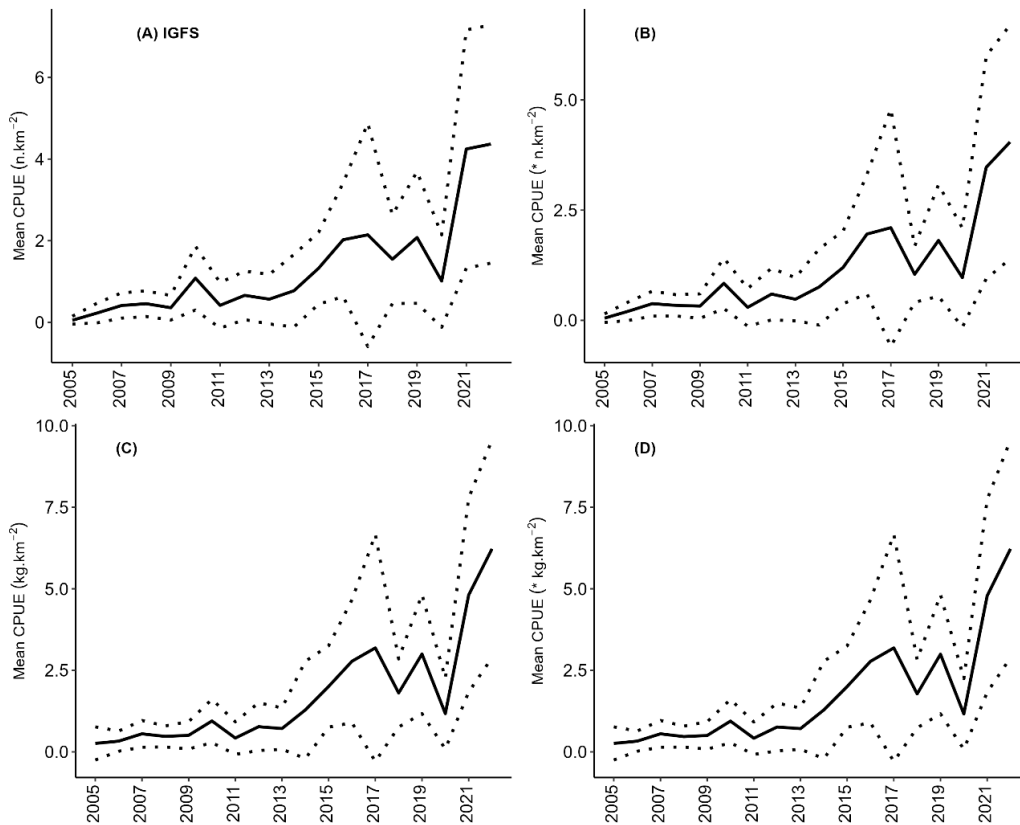
**Figure 21.5. Smooth-hounds in the Northeast Atlantic. Length–frequency by sex of smooth-hounds *Mustelus* spp. encountered during the UK western Channel Q1 Beam-trawl survey 2006–2022 in strata broadly equating to Division 7.e. Source: DATRAS.**



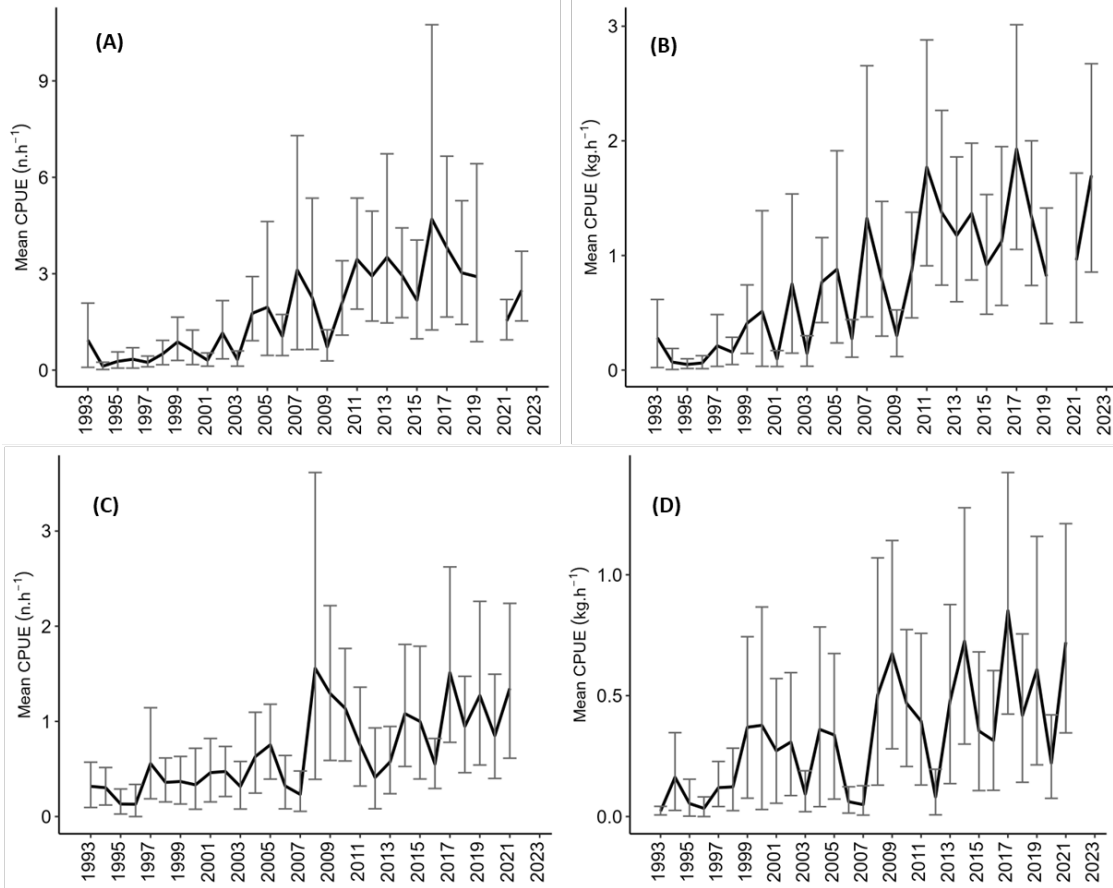
**Figure 21.6. Smooth-hounds in the Northeast Atlantic. Survey indices and associated confidence intervals (95% CI) (A – number per hour; B – estimated biomass per hour; and C – estimated exploitable biomass for individuals  $\geq 50$  cm total length) in NS-IBTS-Q1 (top) and NS-IBTS-Q3 (bottom) of the North Sea. Note: NS-IBTS-Q3 excludes Danish data. Updated survey estimates in 2023 for whole time-series. Source: DATRAS.**



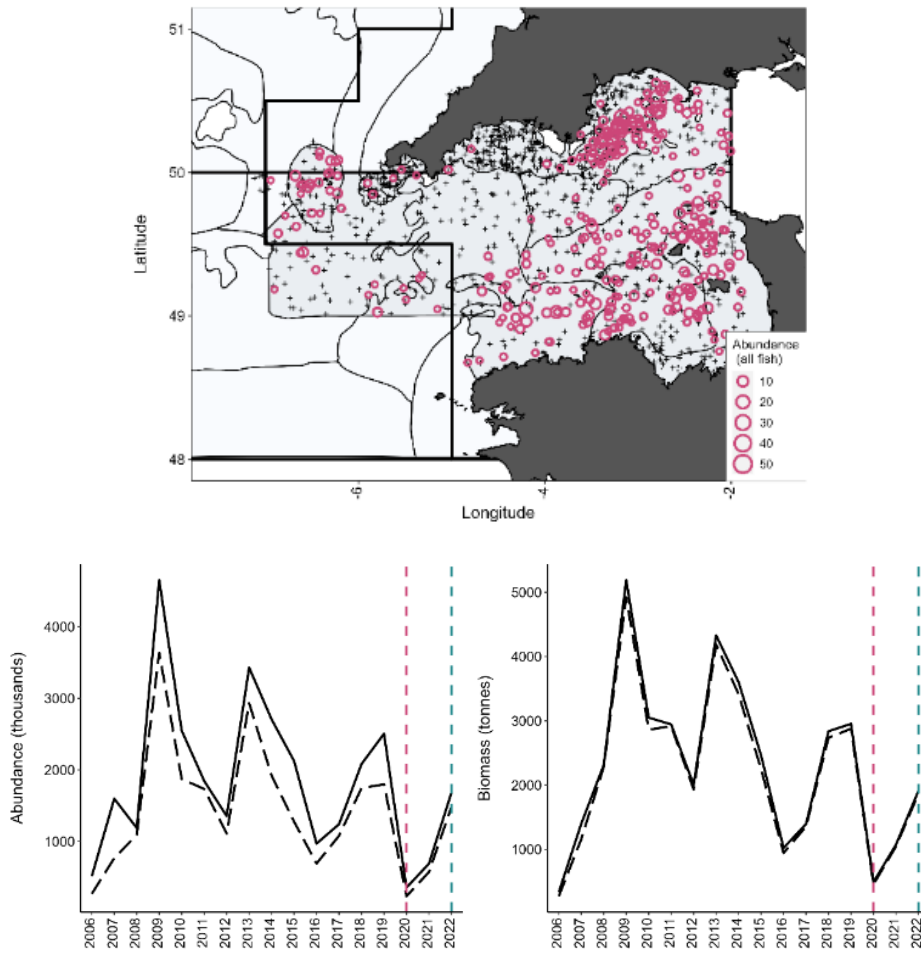
**Figure 21.7. Smooth-hounds in the Northeast Atlantic. Swept area exploitable biomass index and associated confidence intervals (95% CIs) from the EVHOE-WIBTS-Q4 survey in divisions 7.g-j, 8.a.b.d (top) and FR-CGFS-Q4 in Division 7.d (bottom). Note: both surveys indices updated in 2023 for the whole time-series, EVHOE-WIBTS-Q4 survey did not occur in 2017. Source: DATRAS.**



**Figure 21.8. Smooth-hounds in the Northeast Atlantic. Survey indices and associated confidence intervals (95%CI) by (A) total abundance ( $n.km^{-2}$ ), (B) total biomass ( $kg.km^{-2}$ ), (C) abundance for individuals  $\geq 50$  cm total length ( $*n.km^{-2}$ ) and (D) biomass for individuals  $\geq 50$  cm total length ( $*kg.km^{-2}$ ) from the IE-IGFS-WIBTS-Q4.**



**Figure 21.9. Smooth-hounds in the Northeast Atlantic. Survey indices and associated confidence intervals (number per hour for all individuals, estimated total biomass per hour and 95%CI) from UK(E&W)-BTS-Q3 in the Bristol Channel and Irish Sea (top, panel A and B) and BTS-Eng-Q3 in the eastern English Channel and southern North Sea (bottom, panel C and D). Note: 2020 value (top, panel A and B) not shown as survey did not cover Division 7.a (see Section 21.6.2). No data available for 2022 (bottom, panel C and D). Survey indices were updated in 2023.**



**Figure 21.10. Smooth-hounds in the Northeast Atlantic. Spatial distribution and relative abundance of *Mustelus* spp. in the UK-Q1SWBeam (2006–2022) in 7.e (top), and the total abundance (numbers in thousands) and total biomass (tonnes) in 7.e for *Mustelus* spp (bottom). Continuous line relates to all specimens, dashed line relates to individuals  $\geq 50$  cm total length. Source: DATRAS. Note: Pink and teal dashed line shown only for illustrative purposes. In 2020 (pink), survey occurred in a different season and, in 2022 (teal) survey coverage was reduced within 7.e strata thus, potentially impacting survey estimates. These data should be viewed with caution.**

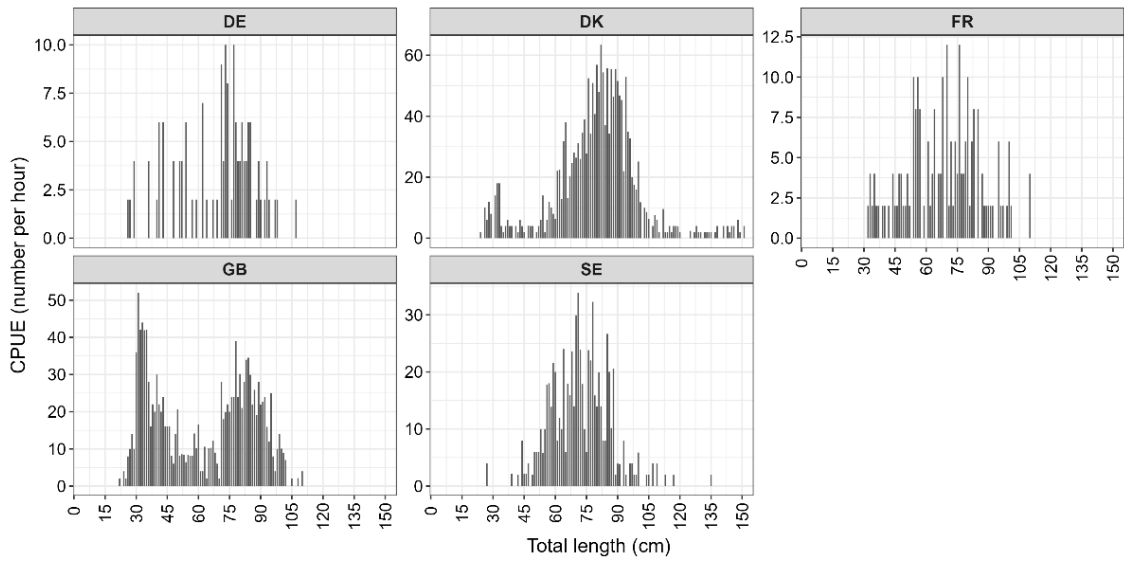


Figure 21.11. Smooth-hounds in the Northeast Atlantic. Length distributions of *Mustelus* spp. in the NS-IBTS-Q3 by nation during 1992–2022. Most nations record *Mustelus* spp. up to 110 cm, while Danish data (to 151 cm) suggests there may be misidentification with *Galeorhinus galeus* or coding errors. Note: DE - Germany, DK - Denmark, FR – France, GB – England, SE – Sweden. Note: Scottish records not shown as data are limited.



Figure 21.12. Smooth-hounds in the Northeast Atlantic. Length distributions of triakid sharks as reported on DATRAS during NS-IBTS-Q3 for Danish data (1992–2022). Large specimens of triakid sharks (i.e. SDV – *Mustelus* spp. or GAG - *Galeorhinus galeus*) are not usually captured in the same year, which suggests potential identification issues or coding errors. Note: Dashed black line refers to 50 cm  $L_T$ , with fish equal or above considered as the exploitable biomass. Grey dashed line refers to the 125 cm  $L_T$  used as a cut off length when using commercial length data in the assessment, and here shown for illustrative purposes only.

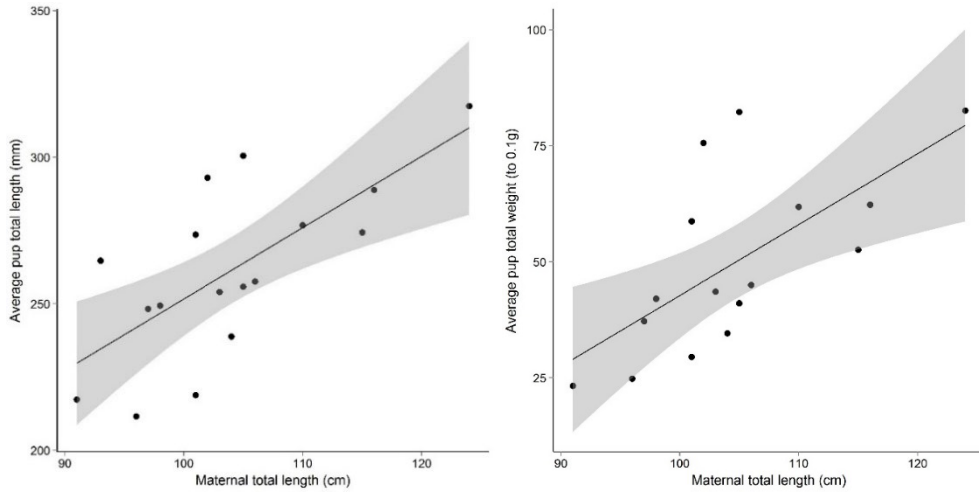


Figure 21.13. Smooth-hounds in the Northeast Atlantic. Relationship between maternal total length and average length and weight of term pups. Source: McCully Phillips and Ellis (2015).

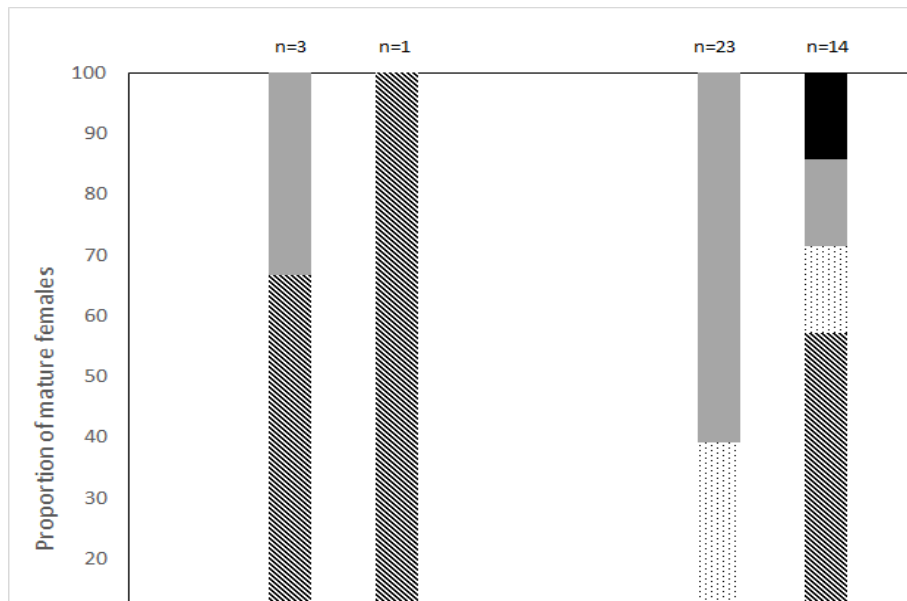
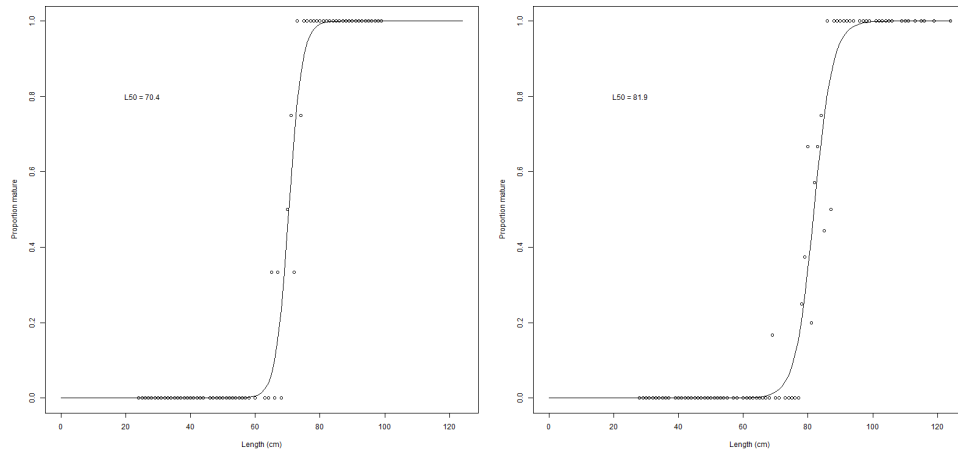
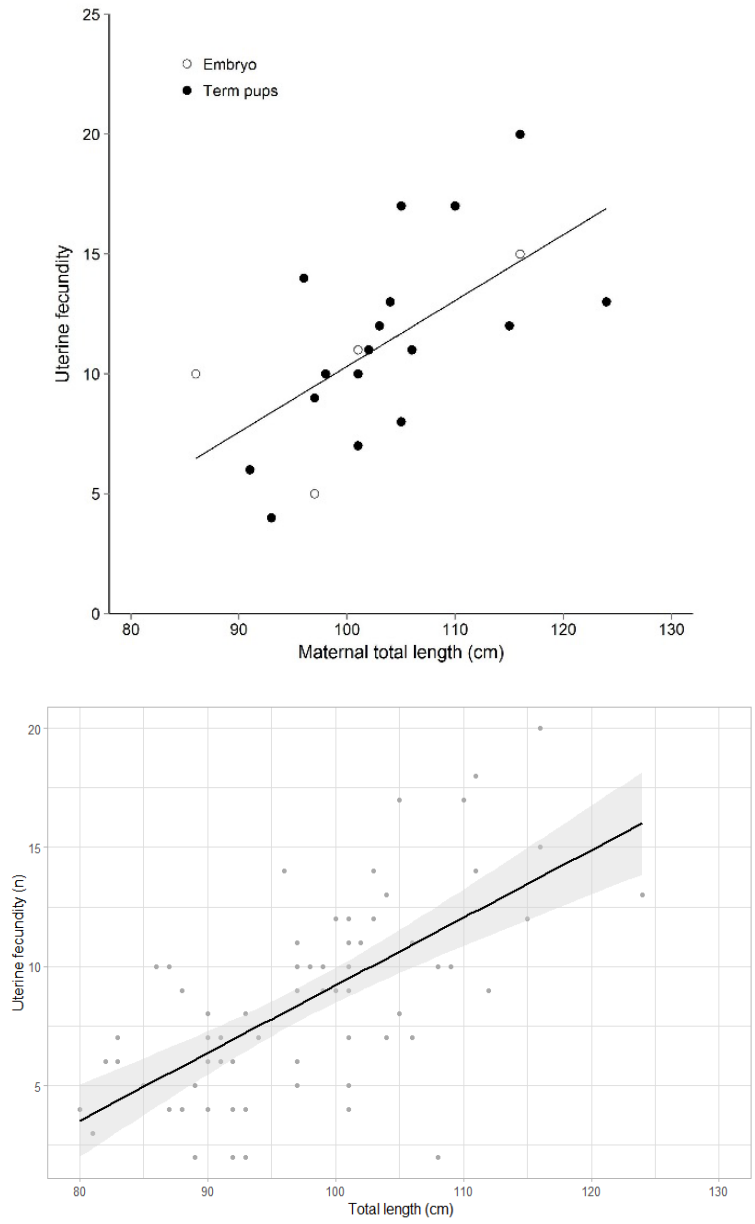


Figure 21.14. Smooth-hounds in the Northeast Atlantic. Percentage of mature females at each developmental stage (D: early gravid; E: mid-gravid; F: late gravid; G: post-partum) by month. Source: McCully Phillips and Ellis (2015).





**Figure 21.15. Smooth-hounds in the Northeast Atlantic. Maturity ogive for male (n = 237;  $L_{50} = 70.4$  = cm  $L_T$ ) and female (n = 248;  $L_{50} = 81.9$  cm  $L_T$ ) *M. asterias*. Source: McCully Phillips and Ellis (2015).**



**Figure 21.16. Smooth-hounds in the Northeast Atlantic. Relationship between maternal total length and uterine fecundity (top) from McCully Phillips and Ellis (2015) and (bottom) from Ellis *et al.* (2019 WD).**

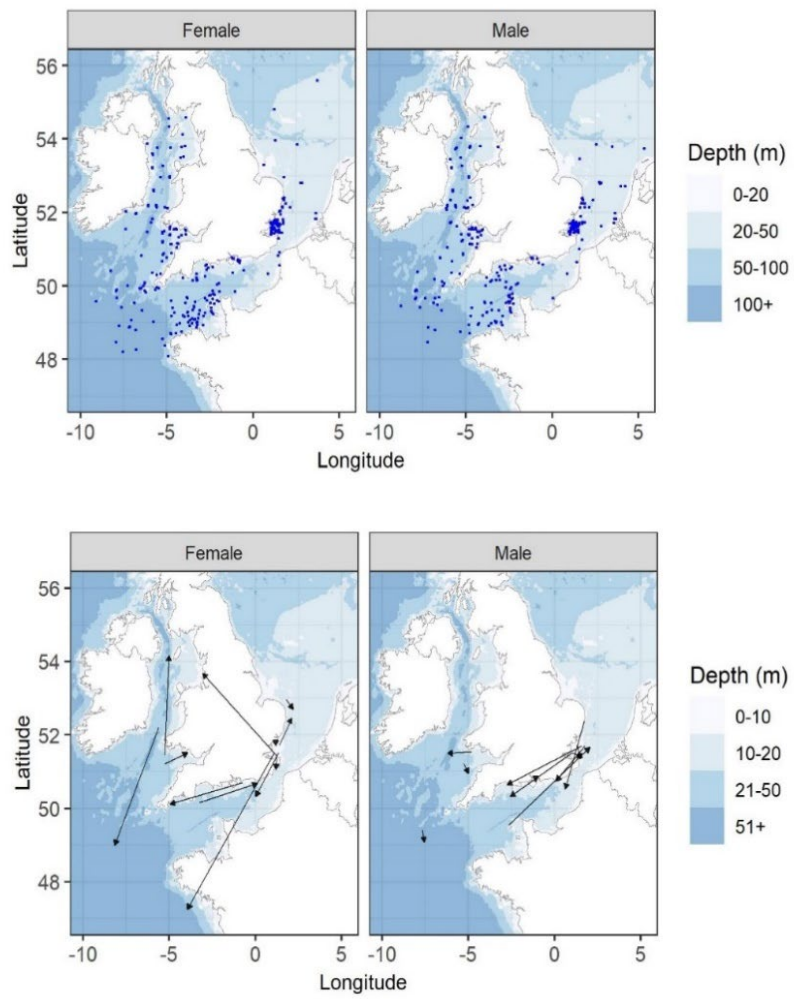


Figure 21.17. Smooth-hounds in the Northeast Atlantic. Tagging locations (top) and displacement vectors (bottom) for male and female *M. asterias*. Source: Ellis *et al.* (2019 WD).

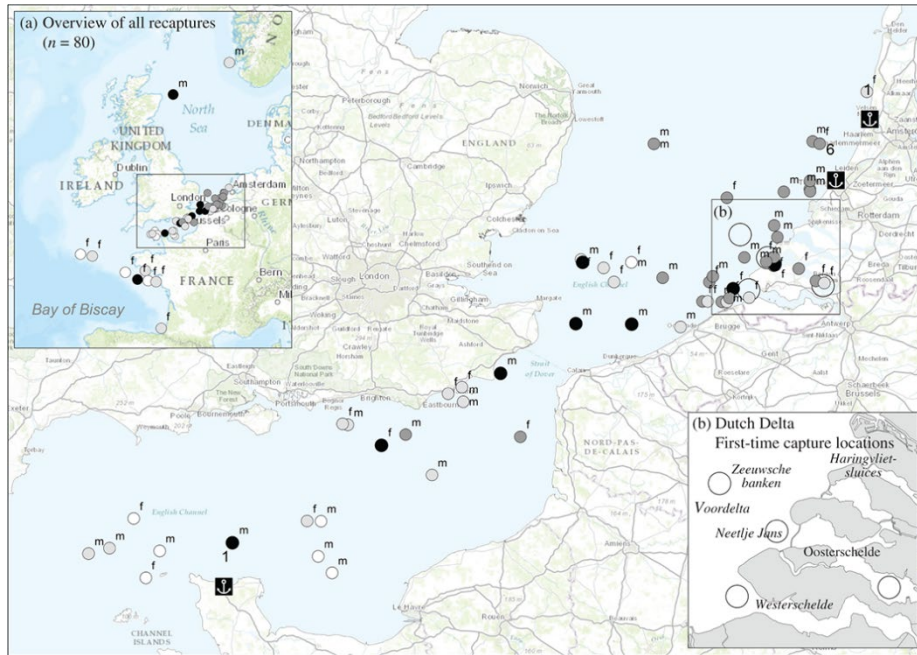


Figure 21.18. Smooth-hounds in the Northeast Atlantic. The main map shows the more detailed distribution of recaptures in the English Channel and southern North Sea. From three fish markets (indicated with anchors), eight tagged *M. asterias* were reported (numbers next to the anchors represent the number of sharks from each fish market) with unknown recapture location. Inset (a) shows the locations of recaptured *Mustelus asterias* ( $n = 80$ ) reported by quarter for the years 2011–2014. Their distribution pattern indicates a circannual migration between the Dutch Delta (summer), the English Channel and Bay of Biscay (winter). Inset (b) shows the tag and release location with the main places fished indicated with open circles. Symbols: f = female; m = male; recaptures per quarter are shown for January to March (□), April to June (◻), July to September (◼) and October to December (●). Source: Brevé *et al.* (2016).

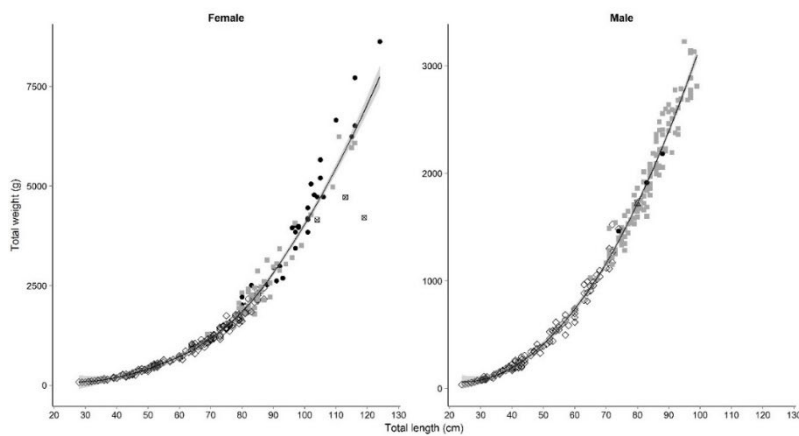


Figure 21.19. Smooth-hounds in the Northeast Atlantic. Length–weight relationship for female ( $n = 248$ ) and male ( $n = 237$ ) *M. asterias* by maturity stage (shaded region showing 95% confidence intervals). Source: McCully Phillips and Ellis (2015).

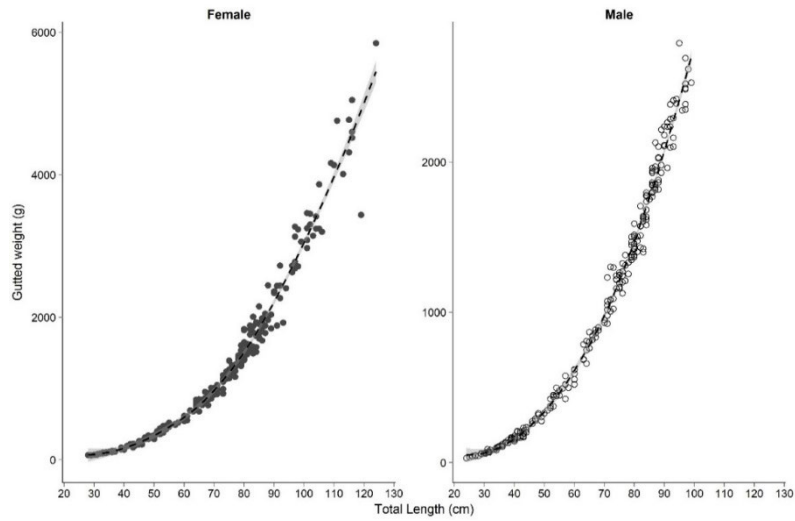


Figure 21.20. Smooth-hounds in the Northeast Atlantic. Total length to gutted weight relationship for female (n = 249) and male (n = 235) *M. asterias* (shaded region showing 95% confidence intervals). Source: McCully Phillips and Ellis (2015).

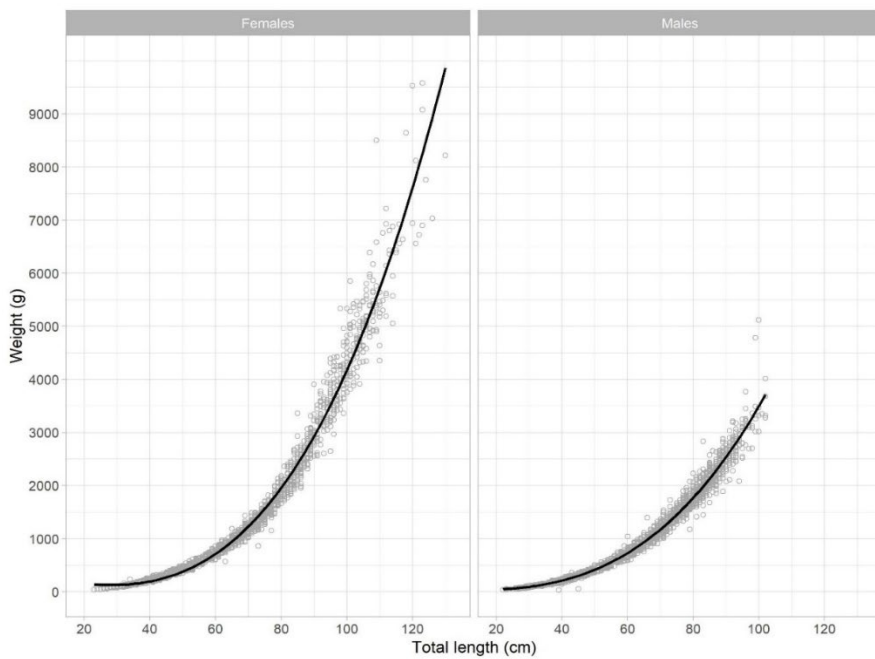
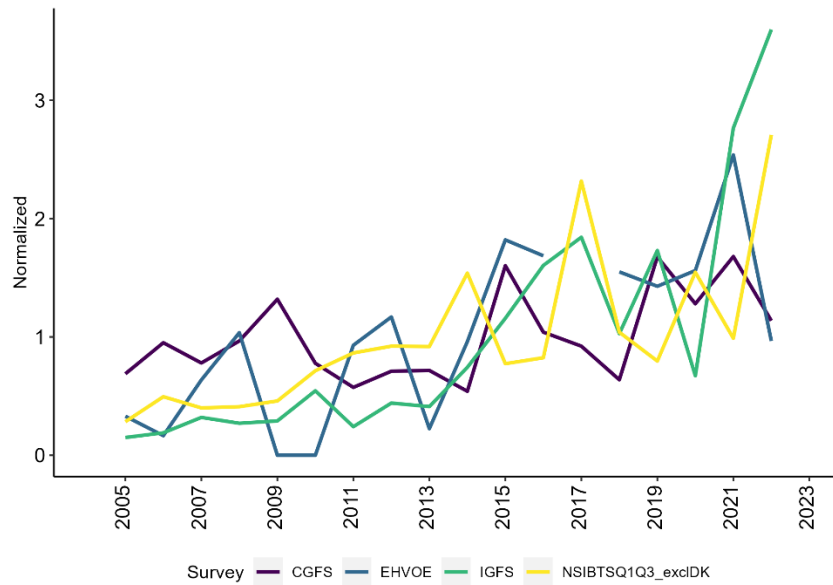
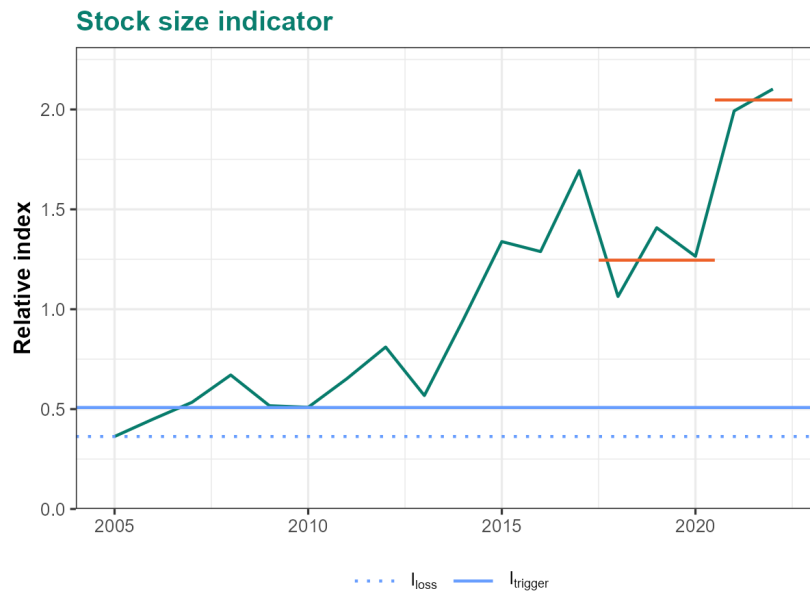


Figure 21.21. Smooth-hounds in the Northeast Atlantic. Length–weight relationships for female and male *M. asterias* caught in fishery-independent trawl surveys conducted by Cefas between 2009–2019. Relationships are described by the equations: females,  $M_T = 0.002 T_L^{3.1}$  ( $r^2 = 0.992$ ,  $n = 2323$ ); males,  $M_T = 0.003 T_L^{3.0}$  ( $r^2 = 0.991$ ,  $n = 2471$ ).  $M_T$  = Total weight (g),  $L_T$  = Total length (cm). Source: Ellis *et al.* (2019 WD).



**Figure 21.22. Smooth-hounds in the Northeast Atlantic. Normalized exploitable biomass index (individuals of  $\geq 50$  cm  $L_T$ ) of starry smooth-hound of the average of the two NS-IBTS surveys (NS-IBTS-Q1 and NS-IBTS-Q3), EHVQE-WIBTS-Q4, FR-CGFS-Q4 and IE-IGFS-WIBTS-Q4. Note: Danish data excluded from NS-IBTS-Q3.**



**Figure 21.23. Smooth-hounds in the Northeast Atlantic. Stock size indicator is the mean normalized exploitable biomass index (individuals of  $\geq 50$  cm  $L_T$ ) of starry smooth-hound from the average of the two NS-IBTS surveys (NS-IBTS-Q1 and NS-IBTS-Q3), EHVQE-WIBTS-Q4, FR-CGFS-Q4 and IE-IGFS-WIBTS-Q4. The horizontal orange lines show the mean stock indicators for 2021–2022 and 2018–2020.**

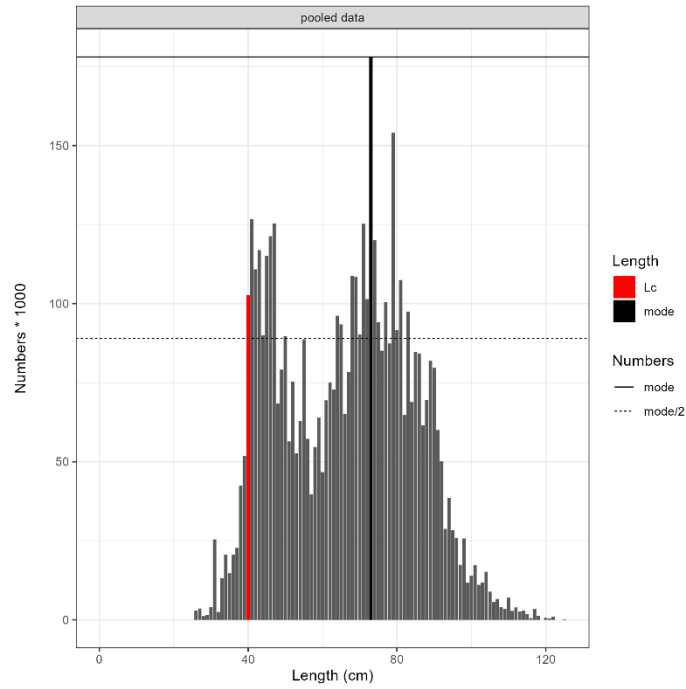


Figure 21.24. Smooth-hounds in the Northeast Atlantic. Combined commercial length data from UK and France (2020–2022) used in the application of the rfb. Note:  $L_c$  estimated from pooled data at 40 cm  $L_T$ .

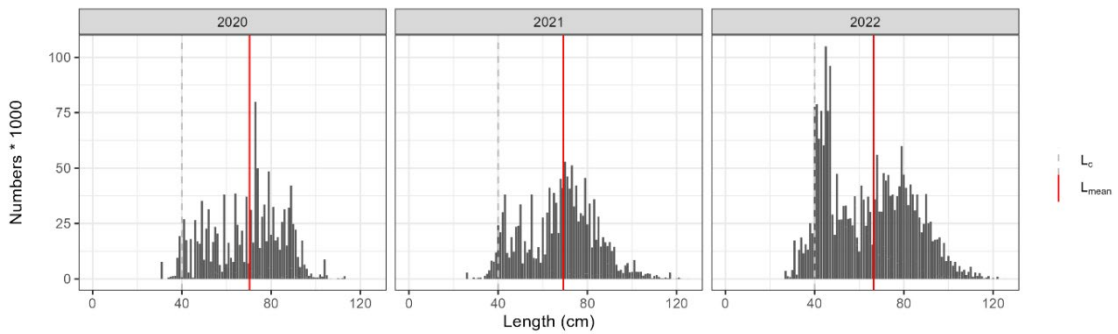


Figure 21.25. Smooth-hounds in the Northeast Atlantic. Combined commercial length data from UK and France (2020–2022) used in the application of the rfb. Note:  $L_c = 40$  cm  $L_T$ ;  $L_{mean}$  2020 = 70 cm  $L_T$ ;  $L_{mean}$  2021 = 69 cm  $L_T$ ;  $L_{mean}$  2022 = 66 cm  $L_T$ .

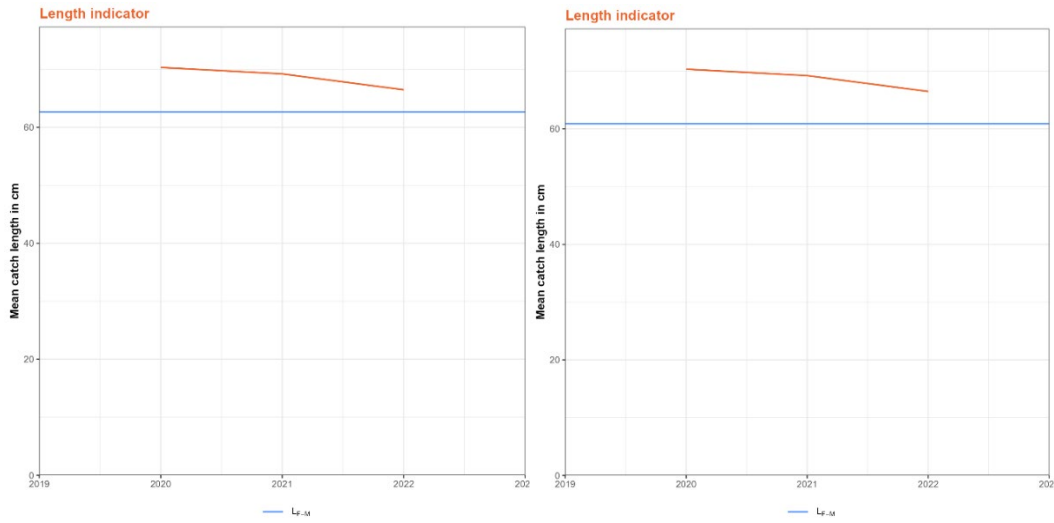


Figure 21.26. Smooth-hounds in the Northeast Atlantic. Fishing pressure proxy ( $f$ ,  $L_{mean}/L_{F=M}$ ) from the length-based indicator (LBI) method is used for the evaluation of the exploitation status. (Left, used in assessment) using  $L_{inf}$  derived from observed  $L_{max}$  of 124 cm  $L_T$  (McCully Phillips and Ellis, 2015) and (right) using  $L_{inf}$  123.5 cm  $L_T$  (Farrell *et al.*, 2010).

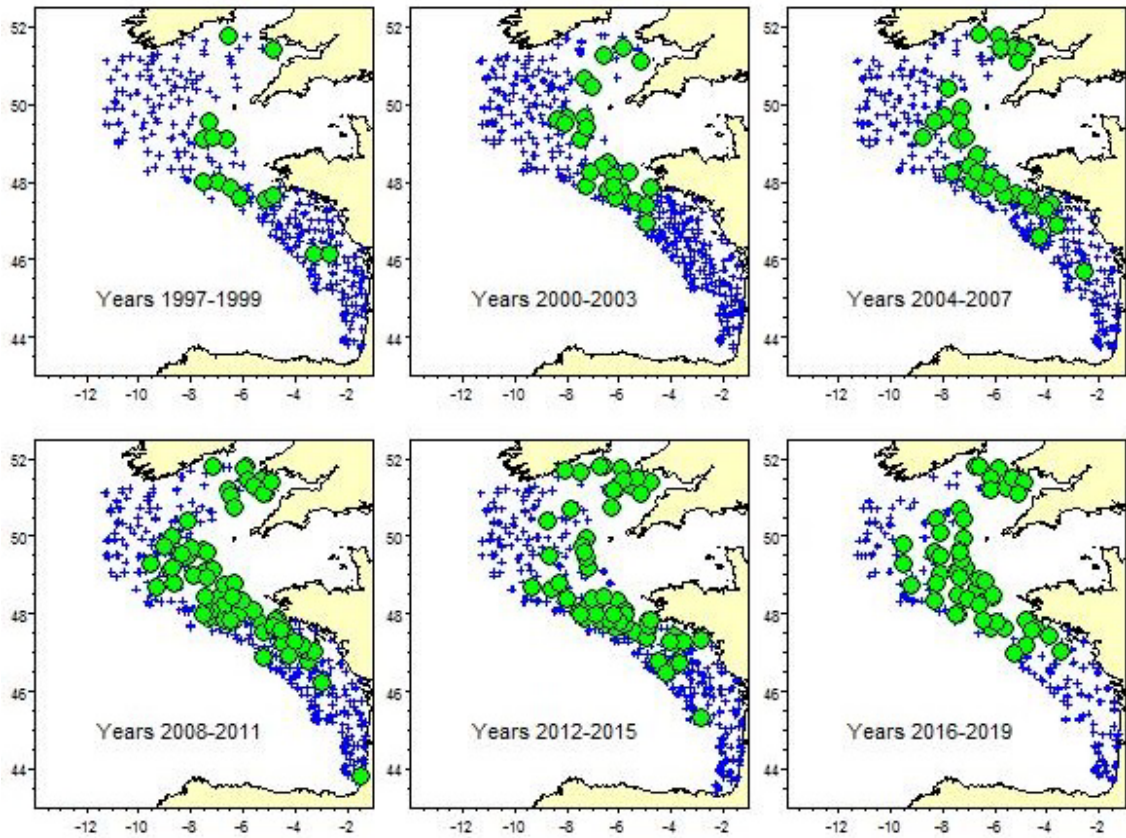


Figure 21. 27. Smooth-hounds in the Northeast Atlantic. Distribution of occurrences of *Mustelus* spp. (green points) in the EVHOE-WIBTS-Q4 survey (1997–2019) by groups of 4 years. Source: National data (Ifremer).



## 22 Angel shark *Squatina squatina* in the Northeast Atlantic

### 22.1 Stock distribution

Angel shark *Squatina squatina* was historically distributed from the British Isles southwards to western Africa, including the Mediterranean Sea (Roux, 1984). As such the species distribution covers parts of ICES subareas 4 and 6–9.

Stock structure is not known, but available data for this and other species of angel shark indicate high site specificity and possibly localized stocks. Mark–recapture data for angel shark have shown that a high proportion of fish are recaptured close to the original release location (Quigley, 2006), although some individuals undertake longer-distance movements. The failure of former populations in the southern North Sea and parts of the English Channel to re-establish is also suggestive of limited mixing. Studies on other species of angel shark elsewhere in the world have also indicated that angel sharks show limited movements and limited mixing (e.g. Gaida, 1997; Garcia *et al.*, 2015). STECF (2003) noted that angel sharks “*should be managed on smallest possible spatial scale*”. The long-term decline of this species from various parts of its geographic range have been reported in recent studies (e.g. Hiddink *et al.*, 2019; Shepherd *et al.*, 2019; Bom *et al.*, 2020; Ellis *et al.*, 2021).

Given that this species is considered to be extirpated from parts of its North Atlantic range and is highly threatened both in the ICES area and elsewhere in its geographical range, ICES provide advice at the species level.

### 22.2 The fishery

#### 22.2.1 History of the fishery

Angel shark is thought to have been the subject of exploitation for much of the 19th century and parts of the 20th century, and was exploited for meat, liver and skin. This species was the original fish termed ‘monkfish’ until catches declined and anglerfish *Lophius piscatorius* became a marketable species. As catches declined over the course of the 20th century, it was landed occasionally as a ‘curio’ for fish stalls.

Given the coastal nature of the species, it was also subject to fishing pressure from recreational fishing in parts of its range (e.g. the coasts of Ireland and Wales).

The species has been extirpated from parts of its former range, and most reports of this species in the ICES area are now from occasional bycatch records in trawl and gillnet fisheries (e.g. Tully, 2011; Iglésias *et al.*, 2020).

#### 22.2.2 The fishery in 2022

No new information.

### 22.2.3 ICES Advice applicable

In 2008, ICES advised that angel shark in the North Sea eco-region was “*extirpated in the North Sea. It may still occur in Division VIIId*” (ICES, 2008a). For the Celtic Seas, ICES advised that it “*has a localized and patchy distribution, and is extirpated from parts of its former range. It should receive the highest possible protection. Any incidental bycatch should not be landed, but returned to the sea, as they are likely to have a high survival rate*” (ICES, 2008b).

In both 2010 and 2012, ICES advised that it should remain on the list of Prohibited Species (ICES, 2012).

In 2015, ICES advised that “*when the precautionary approach is applied for angel shark in the Northeast Atlantic, no targeted fisheries should be permitted and bycatch should be minimized. ICES considers that this species should remain on the EU prohibited species list. This advice is valid for 2016 to 2019*”.

In 2019, ICES advised that “*when the precautionary approach is applied, there should be zero catches in each of the years 2020–2023*”. This advice was reiterated in 2023 for “*each of the years 2024–2027*”.

### 22.2.4 Management applicable

Council Regulation (EC) 43/2009 stated that “*Angel shark in all EC waters may not be retained on board. Catches of these species shall be promptly released unharmed to the extent practicable*”.

It was subsequently included on the list of Prohibited Species, under which it is prohibited for EU vessels to fish for, to retain on board, to transship and to land angel shark in EU waters (e.g. Council Regulations (EC) 2018/120). This was subsequently also translated into UK law since 2021.

In 2019, angel shark was listed as a prohibited species (in all Union waters) on Annex I of EU (2019), and thus is no longer specified on the annual documents relating to EU fishing opportunities.

Within the Mediterranean Sea, GFCM “*Recommendation GFCM/42/2018/2 on fisheries management measures for the conservation of sharks and rays in the GFCM area of application, amending Recommendation GFCM/36/2012/3*” states that “*CPCs shall ensure a high protection from fishing activities for elasmobranch species listed in Annex II of the SPA/BD Protocol of the Barcelona Convention [that includes angel shark], which must be released unharmed and alive, to the extent possible*” and that “*Specimens of shark species listed in Annex II of the SPA/BD Protocol shall not be retained on board, transhipped, landed, transferred, stored, sold or displayed or offered for sale*”.

Within the UK, angel shark is afforded protection through its listing on the Wildlife and Countryside Act (WCA) and it is also listed on Scottish Statutory Instrument (SI) 2012 No. 63 (the Sharks, Skates and Rays (Prohibition of Fishing, Trans-shipment and Landing) (Scotland) Order).

In 2017, angel shark was added to Appendices I and II of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS; see Section 22.12). CMS Parties that are Range States to Appendix I listed species should, under Article III(5), “*prohibit the taking of animals belonging to such species*”.

In 2019, The Spanish Ministerio para la Transición Ecológica (MITECO) updated the national “*Listado de Especies Silvestres en Régimen de Protección Especial y del Catálogo Español de Especies Amenazadas*” (List of Wild Species under Special Protection Regime and the Spanish Catalogue of Threatened Species) to include angel shark (Boletín Oficial del Estado, BOE, 2019).

## 22.3 Catch data

### 22.3.1 Landings

Angel shark became increasingly rare in landings data over the available time period and was reported only rarely prior to it being listed as a Prohibited Species (Table 22.1; Figure 22.1). Total landings have been <2 t for the last 30-years. It is believed that the peak in UK official landings in 1997 from Divisions 7.j-k were either misreported anglerfish (also called monkfish) or hake, given that angel shark is a more coastal species. These figures have been removed from the WGEF estimates of landings. French landings declined from >20 t in 1978 to less than 2 t per year prior to the prohibition on landings.

There are no data available for the numbers of angel shark landed during the recreational fisheries that existed in parts of their range.

### 22.3.2 Discards

Limited data are available. Analyses of the main discard observer programme for the English and Welsh fleets found that no angel sharks had been observed (Silva *et al.*, 2019), whilst observer trips conducted by the Sea Mammal Research Unit (SMRU) recorded three individuals over the period 2011–2014 (Allen Kingston, pers. comm. 2015). These specimens were caught on 29 April 2011 (50.93°N, 6.65°W, 95 m water depth) and 19 September 2014 (53.40°N, 3.60°W and 53.40°N, 3.63°W, 15–16 m water depth). All were caught in tangle or trammel nets (soak times of 64–78 hours), were of estimated individual weights of 15–25 kg and were all dead.

Examination of data collected under the French discard observer programme (2003–2013) indicated that only two individuals were observed (both in 2012) in the ICES area. According to observations from French fish markets and catches reported by fishermen, four additional individuals (two in 2007 and two in 2010) were also caught (S. Iglésias, pers. comm.). All these six individuals were caught off Pembrokeshire (Wales) at the southern entrance to St George's Channel. Iglésias *et al.* (2020) reported that a female angel shark (126 cm; 26 kg) caught by a bottom trawler (51.3810–51.4823°N; 5.5248–5.5603°W; 100 m depth; March 2018) was not discarded but eaten on board. It is unknown if this was an isolated incidence.

WKSHARK3 also reviewed available information on angel sharks observed during on-board observer programmes, also concluding this species was only observed very occasionally (ICES, 2017).

### 22.3.3 Quality of catch data

Catch data are incomplete, as data are unavailable for the periods when angel shark was more abundant. There are some concerns over the quality of some of the landings data (see above). The listing as a 'Prohibited Species' will result in commercial landings data nearing zero. Further studies of possible bycatch and fate of discards in known areas of occurrence would be needed to better estimate commercial catch.

Following the WKSHARKS data call in 2016, landings data-from 2005–2015 were re-assessed by WGEF. There were no major differences between previous landings and the new figures.

### 22.3.4 Discard survival

Limited data exist for the discard survival of angel shark caught in European fisheries. All three specimens observed by SMRU observers after capture by tangle- or trammel net were dead; soak times were 64–78 hours. Recently published observations from Corsica (Mediterranean) indicated that angel sharks caught by trammel nets in shallow water (<5 m depth) with shorter (<12 h) soak times could be released alive (Lapinski & Giovos, 2019).

Other angel shark species have been studied elsewhere in the world (Ellis *et al.*, 2017). Fennessy (1994) reported at-vessel mortality (AVM) of 60% for African angel shark *Squatina africana* caught by South African prawn trawlers. Braccini *et al.* (2012) reported AVM of 25% for Australian angel shark *S. australis* caught by gillnet (where soak times were <24 h).

## 22.4 Commercial catch composition

No data available.

## 22.5 Commercial catch and effort data

No data available for commercial fleets.

### 22.5.1 Recreational catch and effort data

Information from Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) was used by WGEF 2015 to inform on the status of angel shark. This indicated that the number of individuals caught by recreational fishers and reported to the specimen fish committee declined over the period 1958–2005 (Table 22.2), with an overall decline in the numbers caught (Figure 22.2).

Other data from the IFI National Marine Sport Fish Tagging Programme confirm the scarcity of angel shark. Tagging of angel sharks has declined markedly in the last 25 years. A total of 1029 individuals have been tagged since 1970, but only a single individual has been tagged since 2006, and no recaptured specimens reported since 2004 (Roche and O'Reilly, 2013 WD; Wögerbauer *et al.*, 2014 WD). Angel shark is now only caught by anglers very occasionally in Tralee Bay, estimated at <3 per year. The Irish angler tagging and specimen catch data have recently been combined with effort data from charter angling vessels to explore the apparent extirpation of this species from two former hotspots: Clew Bay and Tralee bay. This study showed a decline close to zero, despite apparent stable or increasing angler effort (Figure 22.4; Shephard *et al.*, 2019).

## 22.6 Fishery-independent data

Angel shark is encountered very rarely in trawl surveys, which may reflect the low abundance of the species, poor spatial overlap between surveys and refuge populations and their preferred habitats, and low catchability in some survey gears.

Occasional individuals have been captured in the UK beam trawl survey in Cardigan Bay, but the gear used (4 m beam trawl with chain mat) is not thought to be suitable for catching larger angel sharks.

Existing surveys are not considered appropriate for monitoring the status of this species. Dedicated, non-destructive inshore surveys in areas of known or suspected presence could usefully be initiated. Visual census, combined with citizen-science data, satellite imagery, and snorkel surveys have been conducted around the Canary Islands to evaluate angel shark habitat in the

region (Jimenez-Alvarado *et al.*, 2020). Surveys of eDNA in coastal waters could also usefully be undertaken to inform on potential sites of occurrence (Barker *et al.*, 2022; Faure *et al.*, 2023), as has been used for other angel sharks (e.g. Stoeckle *et al.*, 2021).

## 22.7 Life-history information

Limited life-history data are available (Table 22.3). Most recent biological data have come from studies in the Canary Islands (e.g. Meyers *et al.*, 2017), where this species is found regularly. Life-history parameters were recently collated by Ellis *et al.* (2021).

### 22.7.1 Habitat

Angel shark is a coastal species that has often been reported from sand bank habitats, sandy areas close to reefs, and similar topographic features. This ambush predator buries into the sand for camouflage. Angel sharks are thought to be nocturnally active (Standora and Nelson, 1977).

In terms of recent information on their habitats, a potential over-wintering area may occur off Pembrokeshire (51°30' to 52°00'N and 5°03' to 6°03'W), small specimens have been reported in Cardigan Bay (summer) and the western coast of Ireland (particularly Tralee Bay) may be important "summer areas" for the species (Wögerbauer *et al.*, 2014 WD). Barker *et al.* (2022) reported on the ongoing studies, coordinated by Zoological Society of London (ZSL) and Natural Resources Wales (NRW) to collate historic and recent sightings data (with >2000 records) around the Welsh coastline, especially Cardigan Bay to better understand habitat use and ecology in order to predict habitat suitability.

### 22.7.2 Spawning, parturition and nursery grounds

No specific information. Angel sharks giving birth have been reported from parts of the North Sea (e.g. Patterson, 1905) and small specimens have been found in the inshore waters of Cardigan Bay. Information from *Squatina squatina* in Wales (Barker *et al.*, 2022) and other angel shark species elsewhere in the world suggests that there may be an inshore migration in early summer, with parturition occurring during the summer.

In Canary Islands several spots have been identified as nursery areas. The first discovered and one of the most important is Teresitas beach (Escáñez *et al.*, 2016) but others are; Puerto del Carmen and Bay of Sardinia (Jimenez-Alvarado *et al.*, 2020). For more information: <https://asociaciontonina.com/portfolio/publicaciones/>

### 22.7.3 Age and growth

No information available for *Squatina squatina*. Studies on other species of angel shark have reported problems using vertebrae for validated age determination (Natanson and Cailliet, 1986; Baremore *et al.*, 2009), with tagging studies providing some data (Cailliet *et al.*, 1992).

### 22.7.4 Reproductive biology

Angel sharks give birth to live young. Patterson (1905) reported on a female (ca. 124 cm long) that gave birth to 22 young. Capapé *et al.* (1990) reported a fecundity of 8–18 (ovarian) and 7–18 (uterine) for specimens from the Mediterranean Sea. Embryonic development takes one year, but the reproductive cycle may be two (or more) years, as indicated by other members of the genus (Bridge *et al.*, 1998; Colonello *et al.*, 2007; Baremore, 2010). From studies around the Canary

Islands, the reproductive cycle has been estimated at three years, which includes two years of ovarian development, six months of gestation period and six months of ovarian reabsorption (Osaer, 2009). Litter sizes ranged from 7–25 pups with size at birth from 24–30 cm (Osaer, 2009).

### 22.7.5 Movements and migrations

Tagging data indicate high site fidelity (Capapé *et al.*, 1990; Quigley, 2006; ICES, 2013). More than half of tagged angel sharks were recaptured less than 10 km from their original location, but individuals are capable of travelling longer distances within a relatively short window (Figure 22.3; Wögerbauer *et al.*, 2014 WD). Occasional longer-distance movements have been reported, with fish tagged off Ireland being recaptured off the south coast of England and in the Bay of Biscay (Quigley, 2006).

Seasonal migrations are suspected, with fish moving to deeper waters in the winter before returning to inshore waters for the summer. Other species of angel shark have also been shown to move into coastal waters in the summer, typically to give birth (Vögler *et al.*, 2008).

The uncommon landing of about ten large individuals observed in 2000 from a French trawler fishing off southern Ireland, provide further evidence for localized aggregation of the species (S. Iglésias, *pers. comm.*).

### 22.7.6 Diet and role in the ecosystem

Angel shark is an ambush predator that predaes on a variety of fish (especially flatfish) and various invertebrates (Ellis *et al.*, 1996, 2021). In the Canary Islands, Narvaez (2012) found that teleosts were the most important prey item (89.8 %), followed by cephalopods (9.4 %).

## 22.8 Exploratory assessment models

An exploratory stock assessment of the Tralee Bay (Division 7.j) population, using data from the IFI Marine Sportfish Tagging Programme (Section 22.5.1), was undertaken (Bal *et al.*, 2014 WD; ICES, 2014). This was updated after review (Bal *et al.*, 2015 WD), with the approach, results and a discussion of the current state of the assessment presented in full in the WGEF 2015 report. In summary, Bal *et al.* (2015) suggested that the current population of angel shark around Ireland is very low compared to the whole historical time-series, although the actual population size remained uncertain. This trend was robust and indicated an important decline starting in the 1980s, concurring with anecdotal reports on angel shark abundance.

## 22.9 Stock assessment

Whilst no quantitative stock assessment has been benchmarked, due to data limitations, the WGEF perception of the stock is based largely on analyses of historical and contemporary trawl surveys.

Recent studies using recreational catch data have shown that the stock has declined dramatically in Clew and Tralee Bays - two former hotspots on the west of Ireland (Shephard *et al.*, 2019). Angler catches of angel shark are now extremely rare at these locations, with only occasional anecdotal reports. Although it is not possible to conduct a quantitative stock assessment, it is evident that the species is in a critically poor state even in important areas of its original geographic range. Ireland's Marine Institute is currently undertaking a multi-disciplinary research project on Angel shark in Tralee Bay, and this study may further clarify current stock abundance, as well as produce information on migration, nursery grounds, feeding etc.

Historically, coastal trawl surveys around the British Isles often reported angel shark, especially in the western English Channel (Garstang, 1903; Rogers and Ellis, 2000) and Bay of Biscay (Quéro and Cendrero, 1996). In contrast, contemporary surveys encounter this species only very infrequently, if at all. Such patterns have been reported elsewhere in the biogeographic range of angel shark (e.g. Jukic-Peladic *et al.*, 2001).

The apparent scarcity of angel sharks in contemporary trawl surveys is in stark contrast to early texts on British fishes, which generally considered that angel shark was encountered regularly in British seas. Indeed, Yarrell (1836) stated that “*It is most numerous on the southern coast of our island; but it is occasionally taken in the Forth, and some other parts of the east coast, particularly around Cromer and Yarmouth. It is common on the coasts of Kent and Sussex ...It is also taken in Cornwall*”. Similarly, Day (1880–1884) wrote “*In the Firth of Clyde it is by no means uncommon... In fact it is common in the North Sea and Bristol Channel. Occasionally taken off Yorkshire and is common on the Dogger Bank... taken on the coasts of Kent and Sussex, Hampshire and common at all times along the south coast...Common in Cornwall*”. Similar examples are also evident in other accounts (see Table 22.4 and Ellis *et al.*, 2021).

WGEF considers that the comparisons of historical data with the near-absence in recent data (landings, surveys, observer programmes, angling data) are sufficient to consider the species to be severely depleted in the Celtic Seas ecoregion and possibly extirpated from the North Sea ecoregion (noting that Zidowitz *et al.* (2017) reported a single specimen from the Central North Sea that was caught in 2002). Whilst its status in the Bay of Biscay and Iberian coastal waters is unknown, it is considered very rare, with only occasional individuals reported.

## 22.10 Quality of the assessment

No formal stock assessment has been undertaken.

## 22.11 Reference points

No reference points have been proposed for this stock.

## 22.12 Conservation considerations

Angel shark is listed as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List, both globally and in European waters (Morey *et al.*, 2019) and has been listed on the OSPAR List of Threatened and Declining Species since 2008 with the last assessment (OSPAR, 2021) showing the status to be ‘poor’ across all OSPAR areas of occurrence.

In 2010, angel shark was added to the prohibited species list removing it from fishing opportunities in EU (and since, 2021, EU and UK) waters. Angel shark was listed on Appendices I and II of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) at the 12<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP12) in 2017 (CMS, 2018). Contracting Parties to CMS that are Range States (countries in the area of jurisdiction of which species occur) of species listed on Appendix I should prohibit the taking of such species, whilst the Appendix II listing indicates that international cooperation and agreements should be developed to aid the conservation and management of the listed species (<https://www.cms.int/en/convention-text>). Following the CMS listing, angel shark was subsequently, in 2018, added to Annex 1 of the CMS Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on the Conservation of Migratory Sharks.

National conservation measures include the listing of angel shark on Schedule 5 of the UK's Wildlife and Countryside Act (WCA, 1981) in 2008 making it an offence to intentionally kill, injure or take this species in English and Welsh waters. The species was included under Schedule 5 (animals which are protected at all times) of the Northern Ireland Wildlife Order (1985) since 2011, and in the Sharks, Skates and Rays (Prohibition of Fishing, Trans-shipment and Landing) (Scotland) Order (2012) which prohibits landings.

The species of angel shark (*Squatina squatina*) occurring in the ICES area is one of three Critically Endangered species included in the Eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean Angel Shark Conservation Strategy (Gordon *et al.*, 2017). This framework aims to improve protection and implementation of legislation, through identifying threats to these species as well as geographic and policy priorities.

## 22.13 Management considerations

Angel shark is thought to have declined dramatically in the ICES area and Mediterranean Sea, as evidenced from landings data, survey information and the decline in the numbers tagged in Irish waters. The contemporary occurrence of angel shark in the southern parts of the ICES area and off the coasts of northwest Africa remains uncertain, whilst the Canary Islands have been considered as the last hotspot of the species (Meyers *et al.*, 2017).

Since ICES advised that this species should receive the highest protection possible, it has been listed as a prohibited species on European and subsequently also UK fishery regulations.

Dedicated, non-destructive surveys of areas of former local abundance would be needed to inform on current habitat and range, and to assess the possibilities of spatial management.

Given the perceived low productivity of this species and that they have shown high site fidelity, any population recovery would be expected to occur over a decadal time frame.

Improved liaison and training the fishing industry is required to ensure that any specimens captured are released. National observer programmes encountering this species could usefully collect information on the vitality of discarded individuals.

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## 22.15 Tables and Figures

**Table 22.1a. Angel shark in the Northeast Atlantic. Reported landings (t) for the period 1978–2004. French landings from ICES and Bulletin de Statistiques des Peches Maritimes. UK data from ICES and DEFRA. UK landings for 1997 considered to be misreported fish. Data for 2000 onwards updated during WGEF (2021). Blank cell = no data reported; + = an unspecified value  $\leq 0.5$  tonnes.**

	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983
France	8	3	32	26	29	24	19	18.7	19.5	18	13
UK											
Total	8	3	32	26	29	24	19	18.7	19.5	18	13

	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994
France	9	13	14	12	11	2	2	1	1	1	1
UK						2	1	1			
Total	9	13	14	12	11	4	3	2	1	1	1

	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
France	2	1	2	+	1					0.03
UK			(47)			0.04	0.01	0.02		
Total	2	1	2	0	1	0.04	0.01	0.02	0	0.03

**Table 22.1b. Angel shark in the Northeast Atlantic. Reported landings (t) for the period 2005–2019, following WSHARK2 (ICES, 2016) and subsequent data calls. Revised UK landings for 2017–2018 in 2020. Blank cell = no data reported**

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	
France		1.03	0.40	0.74	0.27	1.60	1.40	0.97	1.22	0.02	0.01	0.53	0.03
UK		0.06	0.04	0.01									
Total		1.09	0.44	0.75	0.27	1.60	1.40	0.97	1.22	0.02	0.01	0.53	0.03

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	
France		0.02				0.07	0.01
UK		0.13	0.02	0.08			
Total		0.15	0.02	0.08	0	0.07	0.01

**Table 22.2. Angel shark in the Northeast Atlantic. Numbers of specimen angel shark (total weight >22.68 kg) reported to the Irish Specimen Fish Committee from 1958–2005.**

Year	1958	1959	1960	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969
No. specimen fish reported	3	1	0	0	4	1	15	13	5	13	0	2

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Year	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981
No. specimen fish reported	1	3	3	1	4	2	1	5	4	10	5	10


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Year	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993
No. specimen fish reported	7	3	2	2	0	1	1	2	2	2	1	3

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Year	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
No. specimen fish reported	2	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	0

**Table 22.3. Angel shark in the Northeast Atlantic. Summary of life-history parameters for *Squatina squatina*.**

<b>Common name</b>	Angel shark			
<b>Scientific name</b>	<i>Squatina squatina</i>			
<b>Stock unit</b>	Unknown			
<p>The stock structure is unknown, but available data for this and other species of angel sharks indicates high site fidelity, possibly with localized stocks. STECF (2003) noted that angel sharks “<i>should be managed on smallest possible spatial scale</i>”. However, given that angel shark is perceived as highly threatened throughout the ICES area (and elsewhere in European waters), ICES provide advice at the species level.</p>				
<b>Length–weight relationship</b>	W = 0.021.L <sup>2.8269</sup> (n = 24)		Ellis <i>et al.</i> (2021)	
<b>Reproductive mode</b>	Aplacental viviparity		Capapé <i>et al.</i> (1990)	
<b>Reproductive cycle</b>	Possibly biennial, based on data for congeneric species		Baremore (2010)	
<b>Spawning season</b>	Parturition: Summer (possibly June to July)		Quigley (2006)	
<b>Fecundity (ovarian)</b>	8–18 (mode = 13)		Capapé <i>et al.</i> (1990)	
<b>Fecundity (uterine)</b>	8–18 (mode = 13) in the Mediterranean Up to at least 22 in the Atlantic		Capapé <i>et al.</i> (1990) Patterson (1905)	
<b>Development (months)</b>	Annual		Capapé <i>et al.</i> (1990)	
<b>Length at birth/hatching</b>	25–28 cm		Capapé <i>et al.</i> (1990)	
<b>Maximum length</b>	244 cm		Quigley (2006)	
	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Combined</b>	
<b>Length of smallest mature fish</b>	128 cm	80 cm (?)	–	Capapé <i>et al.</i> (1990)
<b>Length at 50% maturity</b>	–	–	–	–
<b>Length of largest immature fish</b>	–	–	–	–
<b>Age at 1<sup>st</sup> maturity</b>	–	–	–	–
<b>Age at 50% maturity</b>	–	–	–	–
<b>Age at 100% maturity</b>	–	–	–	–
<b>L<sub>inf</sub></b>	–	–	–	–
<b>K</b>	–	–	–	–
<b>t<sub>0</sub></b>	–	–	–	–
<b>Maximum age (years)</b>	–	–	–	–
<b>Trophic role</b>	Ambush predator that feeds on fish, including flatfish, and larger crustaceans (Ellis <i>et al.</i> , 1996)			

**Table 22.4. Angel shark in the Northeast Atlantic. Regional chronology of perceived status of angel shark.**

Area	Description
Southern North Sea	<p>Laver (1898) <i>"This frequents the entire Essex coast. It is usually caught in nets. Though occasionally eaten by fishermen, it is according to my taste, far too rank in flavour for a more delicate palate"</i></p> <p>Murie (1903) <i>"The 'fiddlers' are got all round the Kent coast in moderate quantity, but Webb regards it as somewhat of a rarity just at Dover. It is not a common fish in the Thames estuary, in one sense, though there are seasons when it is very frequently got in the trawlers' nets. In 1893 they were unusually plentiful during the summer months in the neighbourhood of the Oaze, Girdler, Gilman, and so called S. Channel generally. From June till August there were few boats but had examples among their catch, and some of the specimens were of large size"</i></p> <p>Patterson (1910) <i>"has been brought into (Lowestoft) on several occasions"</i></p> <p>Poll (1947) wrote <i>"Espèce commun, surtout en été"</i> [A common species, especially in summer]</p>
English Channel	<p>Buckland (1881) <i>"found in the North Sea, the British Channel, the Mediterranean ... It is taken on the 'long lines' which are set for ray, &amp;c ... It is common on the bays of Archachon and, I believe, on the sandy banks all along the Bay of Biscay. They are frequently seen in the markets of Dieppe, and are not uncommon at Brighton and Hastings"</i></p> <p>Aflalo (1904) <i>"familiar on most parts of the coast, and is a frequent object of unintentional capture on the long-lines, as well as in both trawl and drift-nets ... Small examples of from 12 to 18" are common in many south coast estuaries, notably at Teignmouth, where a few are brought ashore almost every week during May in the sand-eel seines worked just outside the bar"</i></p> <p>Le Danois (1913) <i>"à Roscoff, assez commun vers la fin de l'été"</i> [At Roscoff, it is quite common in late summer]</p> <p>Cooper (1934) <i>"Several specimens of this species are caught every year by anglers, usually when Topo fishing, but it appears to have been more common on the south coast of England some twenty or thirty years ago than it is today"</i></p> <p>MBA (1957) <i>"A haul of the trawl in Cawsand Bay will generally yield several specimens. Occasionally trawled on other grounds"</i></p>
Irish Sea Ireland	<p>Herdman and Dawson (1902) <i>"common off our coasts in spring and summer. It occurs not infrequently in the trawl net in the Lancashire district. We have taken it as near Liverpool as the Rock and Horse Channels, and the Deposit Buoy. We have also taken it near Piel in the Barrow Channel, and off Maughold Head. Mr Walker records it from Rhos weir and Colwyn Bay, and Professor White from the Menai Straits. It has been frequently taken off the Isle of Man, one is recorded from Port Erin, and we have taken it also in the Ribble, and have seen it taken on the offshore grounds by the trawlers"</i></p> <p>Forrest (1907) <i>"... frequently met with it off Aberffraw ... from Barmouth ... not uncommon in the Menai Straits, Colwyn Bay and along the north coast ... (taken in) St Tudwal's Roads, Red Wharf Bay, and other places"</i></p> <p>Williams (1954) <i>"Taken rather infrequently off Strangford Bar. Said to be common off the north shore of Ireland"</i></p> <p>Went &amp; Kennedy (1976) listed it as common noting that it was <i>"more often caught on rod and line than by any other method"</i></p>



**Table 22.4. (continued). Angel shark in the Northeast Atlantic. Regional chronology of perceived status of angel shark.**

Area	Description
France (Bay of Biscay and Mediterranean)	<p>Moreau (1881) <i>“L’Ange se trouve sur toutes nos côtes, mais il paraît plus commun dans l’océan que dans la Méditerranée, il est même assez rare à Cette”</i></p> <p>[Angel shark is on all our coasts, but it seems more common in the (Atlantic) ocean than in the Mediterranean, it is quite rare at Sète]</p> <p>Quéro <i>et al.</i> (1989) recorded individual fish from trawl surveys, including one from coastal waters near Pornic (just south of the Loire Estuary) in 1973 and one further offshore south-west of the mouth of the Gironde in 1975</p>
Spain	<p>Lozano Rey (1928) reported that angel shark <i>“vive en todo el litoral ibérico, aunque parece más frecuente en las costas del Atlántico que en las del Mediterráneo, pero en este tampoco es rara ... Los individuos jóvenes se pescan en la misma orilla. Nosotros hemos capturado ejemplares de esta especie, de menos de treinta centímetros de longitud, en la bahía de Santander, a un par de metros de profundidad”</i></p> <p>[lives all along the Iberian coast, although it seems more common in the Atlantic coasts than in the Mediterranean, but this is not unusual ... Young individuals are caught in the same bank. We have captured specimens of this species, less than 30 cm long, in the Bahía de Santander, in waters a few meters deep]</p> <p>In relation to the Bahía de Santander, García-Castrillo Riesgo (2000) noted <i>“Hoy en día, esta especie de angelote no está presente en el entorno de la Bahía. La última referencia que tenemos data de 1985, cuando se recogió un ejemplar adulto y moribundo en el Puntal. Por el contrario a principios de siglo, según los datos de la Estación Biológica de Santander, los jóvenes eran frecuentes en los arenales del Puntal, el sable de Afuear, Enmedio y el fondeadero de la Osa, siendo aún más abundantes en al Abra del sardinero y las Quebrantas”</i>.</p> <p>[Today, this kind of angelfish is not present in the environment of the Bahía. The last reference we have dates from 1985, when a dying adult specimen was collected in the Puntal. Rather early in the century, according to data from the Biological Station of Santander, the young were frequent off the beach at Puntal, saber Afuear, Enmedio and the anchorage of the Osa, still more abundant in the Abra del Sardinero and Quebrantas]</p>
Portugal	<p>Nobre (1935) wrote <i>“Esta espécie aparece freqüentemente no norte do País, sendo apanhada nas rédes de fundo”</i></p> <p>[This species appears frequently in the north of the country, where it is caught in bottom nets]</p>
Italy	<p>Tortonese (1956) stated it was <i>“Più o meno commune in tutti i nostri mari”</i></p> <p>[more or less common in all our seas]</p>

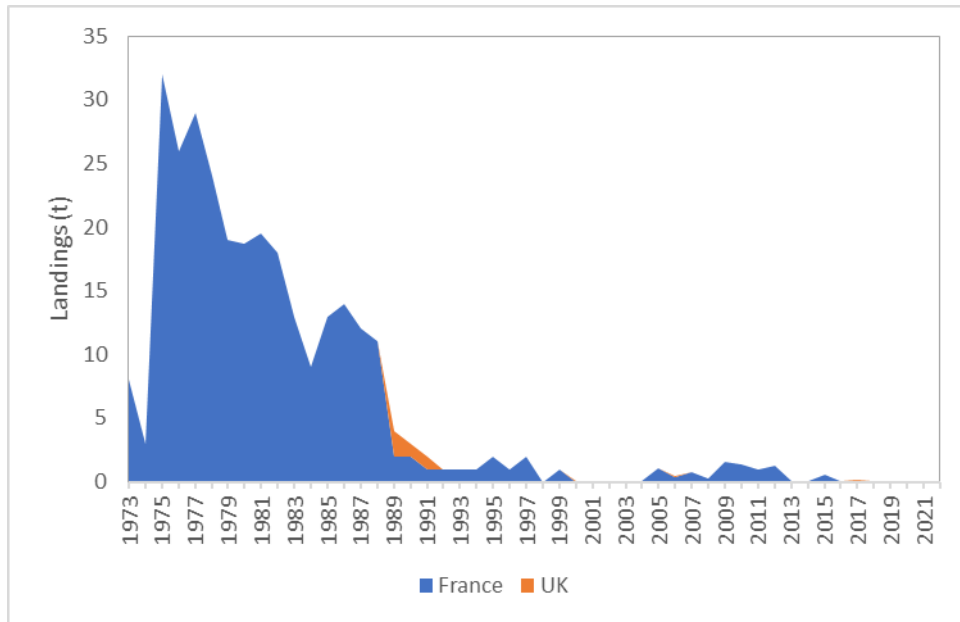


Figure 22.1. Angel shark in the Northeast Atlantic. Total reported landings of *Squatina squatina* (1973–2022). Angel shark has been listed as a non-retained/prohibited species on European fisheries regulations since 2009 and so this species is now reported very rarely in landing statistics.

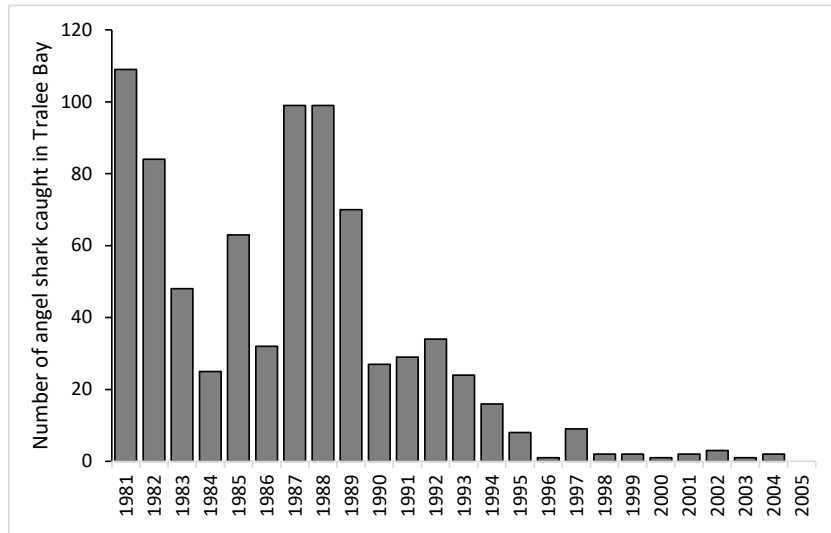
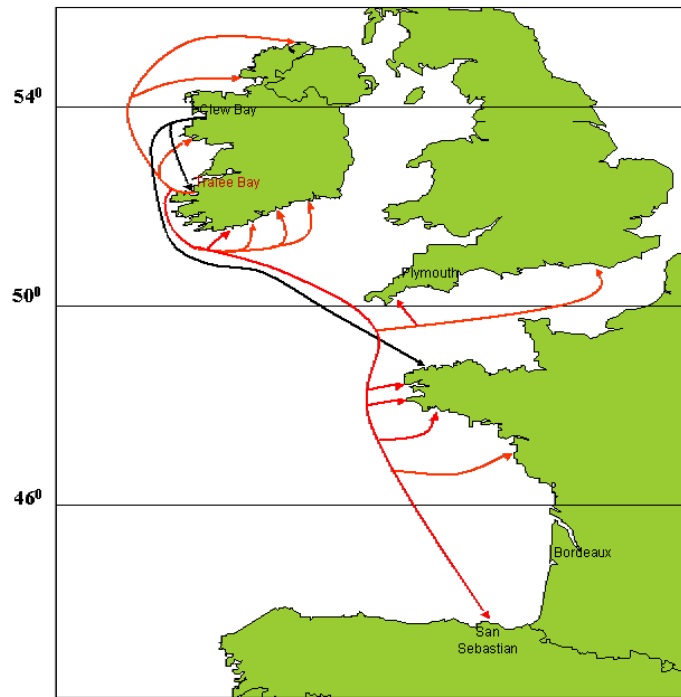


Figure 22.2. Angel shark in the Northeast Atlantic. Numbers of angel shark caught by two charter boats in Tralee Bay 1981–2005. Adapted from Irish Central Fisheries Board data presented in ICES (2008).



**Figure 22.3. Angel shark in the Northeast Atlantic. Longer-distance movements of angel shark tagged off the west coast of Ireland, 1970–2006. Source: Irish Central Fisheries Board.**

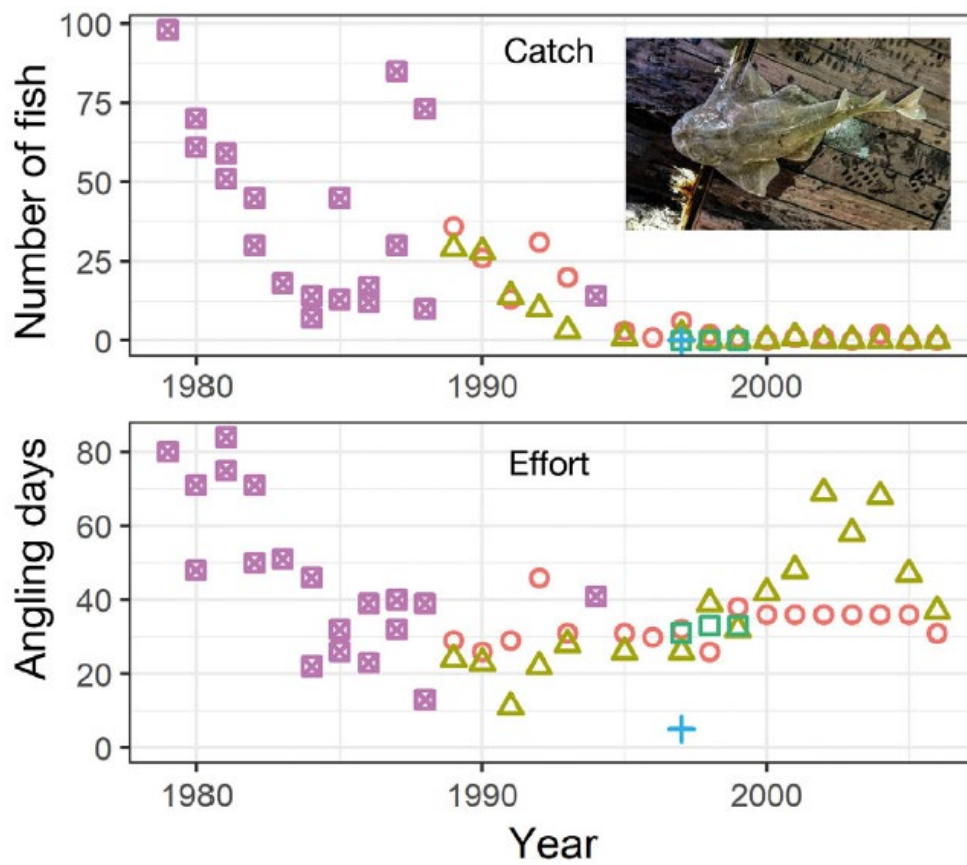


Figure 22.4. *Squatina squatina* annual angling catch and effort for charter vessels in Tralee Bay, Ireland. Inset photograph of *S. squatina* (100 cm total length) caught and released alive from FV 'Eblana' in 2016. Colours of the data points refer to different vessels. Figure from Shephard *et al.* (2019).

## 23 White skate *Rostroraja alba* in the North-east Atlantic

### 23.1 Stock distribution

White skate *Rostroraja alba* is distributed in the eastern Atlantic from the British Isles to southern Africa, including the Mediterranean Sea (Stehmann and Bürkel, 1984). As such, the species distribution covers parts of ICES subareas 7–9, and may possibly have extended into the southern parts of subareas 4 and 6.

The stock structure within the overall distribution area is unknown, therefore ICES provide advice for the whole ICES area.

### 23.2 The fishery

#### 23.2.1 History of the fishery

*R. alba* is thought to have been subject of targeted exploitation for much of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, with targeted fisheries in the English Channel, Brittany and possibly the Isle of Man (Irish Sea). It was viewed as a highly marketable skate due to its large size and thickness of the wings (Ellis *et al.*, 2010).

In 1964, 59 tonnes of *R. alba* were landed in the port of Douarnenez (Brittany) from a target long-line fishery (Du Buit, *pers. comm.*). After this, the fishery and local stock collapsed. The use of the landing name 'Raie blanche' (white skate) is now discontinued in French fish markets and only known by the oldest fishermen and fish-market workers. Up to 2009, only occasional individuals were landed in France, often under the name '*Dipturus batis*'. It was estimated that  $13 \pm 10$  individuals ( $117 \pm 89$  kg) were landed in 2005 in France under the name '*D. batis*'. During a sampling programme of large skates in French ports (2006–2007), only one *R. alba* specimen was positively identified from the 4110 skates examined (Iglésias *et al.*, 2010). Prior to the inclusion of *R. alba* on the EU prohibited list, individuals were recorded occasionally in Portuguese landing ports (Serra-Pereira *et al.*, 2011).

In recent decades, *R. alba* may be a very occasional bycatch in some trawl and gillnet fisheries, although as a prohibited species, individuals caught should be released promptly. In 2013, there was an authenticated record of an individual caught (and released) in the English Channel (J. Ellis, *pers. comm.*). Nowadays, as the species is largely unknown by fishermen and does not have highly conspicuous morphological characters for its identification, individuals might occasionally be mixed with other skates, in particular those with long snout including *Dipturus* spp. and *Leucoraja fullonica*.

#### 23.2.2 The fishery in 2022

In January 2023, one specimen was caught by Spanish fishermen in the north coast of Spain. Identification have been confirmed by pictures (Rodriguez – Cabello *pers. comm.*).

No other information was made available to WGEF.

### 23.2.3 ICES Advice applicable

In 2014, ICES advised “on the basis of the precautionary approach ... there be no catches of this species. Measures should be taken to minimize bycatch to the lowest level”. ICES (2014) also stated that “*Rostroraja alba* is designated on the EU prohibited species list in the entire ICES area. This is a high-level, long-term conservation strategy aimed at very depleted and vulnerable species. ICES supports this listing, having reviewed it in 2010”.

In 2016, ICES advised that “when the precautionary approach is applied, there should be zero catches of this species in each of the years 2017, 2018, and 2019.”

In 2019, ICES advised the precautionary approach with zero catches of this species in each of the years 2020, 2021, 2022, and 2023.

In 2023, ICES advised the precautionary approach with zero catches of this species in each of the years 2024, 2025, 2026, and 2027.

### 23.2.4 Management applicable

Council Regulation (EC) 2019/124 continues to prohibit European Union vessels to fish for, to retain on board, to tranship or to land *R. alba* in Union waters of ICES subareas 6–10. Council Regulation (EC) 2018/120 also states that “when accidentally caught, species...shall not be harmed” and “specimens shall be promptly released”. This prohibited status has been in force since 2009.

Regulation (EU) 2015/812 requires that all white skate caught and discarded should be reported.

*R. alba* is legally protected in UK waters, being listed on the Wildlife and Countryside Act. Catch data

### 23.2.5 Landings

*R. alba* became increasingly rare in landings prior to the requirements for species-specific recording (Ellis *et al.*, 2010), and so there is great uncertainty on historical levels of exploitation.

Some of the nominal landings reported for *R. alba* are thought to refer to either other large-bodied skates (*Dipturus* spp.) or shagreen ray *Leucoraja fullonica*, as this species also has a sharply pointed snout. In addition to possible misidentifications, there are likely input errors, especially as the FAO code for Rajidae (RAJ) could easily be input as RJA (*R. alba*).

Landings from around Scotland are assumed to refer to *L. fullonica*, and landings from other areas outside the former distribution have been assigned to Rajiformes for the periode 2009-2014 (see ICES, 2016). Other nominal landings of *R. alba* (Table 23.1 and Table 23.2) may still be unreliable.

Landings from France under the FAO code RJA, *Rostroraja alba* are corrected into RAJ as those landings data refer to a mixture of species such as *Amblyraja radiata*, *Rajella lintea*, *Bathyraja spinicauda*, *Rajella fyllae* and *Amblyraja hyperborea*.

### 23.2.6 Discards

Limited data are available. The discard observer programme for the English and Welsh fleets did not record any *R. alba* (Silva *et al.*, 2012). The Portuguese Pilot Study for Skates recorded single specimens of *R. alba* (47 and 62 cm L<sub>T</sub>) in two trips using trammel nets, from a total of 20 fishing trips and a total sample of 667 skates. There is uncertainty in the reliability of some nominal records of *R. alba* recorded in other national observer programmes.

One specimen was by-caught in a monitored crayfish fishery in the south-west of Ireland in 2020.

### 23.2.7 Quality of catch data

Both landings and discard data for *R. alba* are very limited and may be confounded with other species. The nominal landings presented are considered unreliable.

### 23.2.8 Discard survival

There are no species-specific data on the discard survival of *R. alba*. Discard survival of skates has been examined for a range of other skate species, with at-vessel mortality low in some in-shore fisheries, but more limited data available for post-release mortality (Ellis *et al.*, 2017). The two specimens recorded in the EU/PNAB observer trips were considered in “good” health condition (following Enever *et al.*, 2009).

## 23.3 Commercial catch composition

No data available.

## 23.4 Commercial catch and effort data

No data available.

## 23.5 Fishery-independent information

*R. alba* is encountered very rarely in trawl surveys, which may reflect the low abundance of the species and/or poor spatial overlap between surveys and refuge populations and/or their favoured habitats. Existing surveys are not considered appropriate for monitoring the status of this species.

Although not taken in English trawl surveys (Ellis *et al.*, 2005), occasional individuals have been captured in the Irish Groundfish survey along the west coast of Ireland, in the Spanish survey at Porcupine and in the Portuguese Groundfish survey in recent years. One egg-laying female (185 cm L<sub>T</sub>) was caught in the Portuguese Groundfish Survey in 2007.

## 23.6 Life-history information

Although taken periodically along the west coast of Ireland (Quigley, 1984), the biology of this species in northern European seas is largely unknown. It has been better studied in the Mediterranean Sea (Capapé, 1976; 1977). Kadri *et al.* (2014) examined specimens from the Mediterranean: the smallest mature fish were 110 cm (male) and 120 cm (female). The youngest mature female in this study was estimated to be 17 y, and the oldest fish 35 y.

*R. alba* egg cases are occasionally found in Galway Bay and Tralee Bay in the West of Ireland (G. Johnston, pers. comm.).

French fishers consider this species to live preferentially on harder substrates, and so it may have been caught more frequently in static set nets and longline fisheries (Iglésias, pers. comm.).

Recent acoustic monitoring collected information on movement patterns of three *R. alba* within a protected area in the West coast of Portugal (Sousa *et al.*, 2019). A mature female (138 cm) stayed in the area for 20 months while the two others, which were immature, moved from the area after

three to four months. The three skates displayed daily patterns of activity being more mobile at sunset and sunrise with a relatively low activity during day light. They also seem to spend more time in deeper water but the mature female was also detected at shallower depth during spring and summer.

### **23.7 Exploratory assessment models**

No exploratory assessments have been undertaken.

### **23.8 Stock assessment**

No formal stock assessment has been undertaken. The perceived stock status is based on the comparison between recent and historical trawl survey catch data.

Historically, trawl surveys around the British Isles reported *R. alba* (Rogers and Ellis, 2000), whereas it has now disappeared from parts of their former range. Similar longer-term declines was also reported for the Bay of Biscay (Quéro and Cendrero, 1996).

WGEF considers that the comparison of historical data with the near-absence in recent data sources (historical landings, surveys, observer programmes) is sufficient to consider the species to be severely depleted and near-extirpated from various parts of the Celtic Seas and Biscay-Iberian ecoregions.

### **23.9 Quality of the assessment**

No formal stock assessment has been undertaken.

### **23.10 Reference points**

No reference points have been proposed for this stock.

### **23.11 Conservation considerations**

*R. alba* is listed as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List (Gibson *et al.*, 2008; Nieto *et al.*, 2015). It is listed on the OSPAR List of Threatened and Declining Species (OSPAR Commission 2010). It is protected on the UK's Wildlife and Countryside Act.

*R. alba* is listed as a prohibited species for which there is a prohibition to fish for, retain on board, tranship, land, store, sell, display or offer for sale Union waters of ICES subareas 6-10 in Regulation (EU) 2019/1241, this regulation has been consolidated the 01/01/2021.

In 2020, WKSTATUS reviewed and updated the OSPAR status assessments of *R. alba*. Experts specified that there is no information suggesting an improvement in the status of this stock since 2010, the year of the last assessment. Therefore, the species continues to justify inclusion in OSPAR List (ICES, 2020).

### **23.12 Management considerations**

Since ICES advised that this species should receive the highest protection possible, it has been listed as a prohibited species on EC fishery regulations.



Given the low abundance of this species and its high conservation interest, WGEF recommend that (i) any data on *R. alba* collected from national observer programmes be verified whenever possible (e.g. photographed) and (ii) that ongoing national observer programmes collect information on the health state (e.g. lively, sluggish, dead) of any discards of this species.

Dedicated, non-destructive surveys of areas of former abundance would be needed to inform on current habitat and range.

Given the perceived low productivity of this species, any population recovery would take a decadal time frame.

As this species could be overlooked in catches of mixed skates, improved identification material could usefully be developed.

Although, regulation requires any catch to be reported, it is highly probable that fishers cannot identify this species as they rarely encountered it.

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## 23.14 Tables and Figures

**Table 23.1. White skate in the Northeast Atlantic. Nominal landings of *R. alba* in the ICES area between 2005 – 2008 not changed by WKSHARK2. The accuracy of data is unclear, due to possible input errors for the codes RAJ (Rajidae) and RJA (*Rostroraja alba*).**

Year	France	Ireland	Portugal	UK	Total
2005	1	-	4.65	-	5.65
2006	-	-	5.51	-	5.51
2007	1.52	-	-	-	1.52
2008	0.73	-	-	0.95	1.68

**Table 23.2. White skate in the Northeast Atlantic. Nominal landings of *R. alba* in the ICES area between 2009-2022. Some national data reported from 2009-2014 as white skate have been reassigned to Rajiformes (indet.) or *L. fullonica* (see ICES, 2016). The accuracy of remaining data (below) is unclear, due to possible input errors for the codes RAJ (Rajidae) and RJA (*Rostroraja alba*).**

Year	France	Ireland	Portugal	UK	Total
2009	9.1	-	-	0.1	9.2
2010	4.7	-	-	0.1	4.8
2011	10.0	-	-	-	10.0
2012	2.0	-	-	0.2	2.2
2013	2.7	-	-	0.0	2.7
2014	4.0	0.3	-	0.1	4.4
2015	7.5	0.0	-	-	7.5
2016	4.2	0.1	-	-	4.3
2017	4.3	-	-	0.1	4.4
2018	7.0	0.4	-	-	7.4
2019	-	0.1	-	-	0.1
2020	-	-	-	0.1	0.1
2021	-	-	-	0.1	0.1
2022	-	-	-	0.6	0.6

## 24 Greenland shark *Somniosus microcephalus* in the Northeast Atlantic

### 24.1 Stock distribution

The known North Atlantic distribution of Greenland shark *Somniosus microcephalus*, which has been defined primarily by observations of specimens caught in cold-water commercial fisheries, extends from temperate waters to the Arctic Ocean (MacNeil *et al.*, 2012). It ranges from Georgia (USA) to Greenland, Iceland, Spitzbergen and the Arctic coasts of Russia and Norway to the North Sea and Ireland, with only very occasional individuals recorded further south (Ebert and Stehmann, 2013). Due to their known tolerance for extreme cold water and their ability to inhabit abyssal depths, Greenland sharks may be more widespread. The known distribution is also compromised by taxonomic problems in this genus (MacNeil *et al.*, 2012). The metapopulation structure is unknown.

### 24.2 The fishery

#### 24.2.1 History of the fishery

Fishing for Greenland shark has been a part of the Scandinavian, Icelandic and Inuit cultures for centuries, extending back to the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century in Norway and Iceland, respectively. Although the meat of Greenland shark may be toxic when fresh (e.g. Anthoni *et al.*, 1991; McAllister, 1968), it is eaten in some countries after curing.

In the early to mid-20th century, Greenland sharks were caught in large quantities as a source of liver oil. At that time, peak annual catches e.g. in Norway are thought to have been in the order of 58 000 individuals (Ebert and Stehmann, 2013; MacNeil *et al.*, 2012). After the invention of synthetic oil in the late 1940s, demand for shark oil diminished, and no intensive fisheries for Greenland sharks have been reported since (Nielsen *et al.*, 2014).

Greenland shark is still targeted in small-scale artisanal fisheries in Iceland and Greenland. Artisanal fisheries target Greenland shark with hook and line, longline or gaffs, but it is also taken in seal nets and cod traps (Ebert and Stehmann, 2013). There is also substantial bycatch in longline, trawl and gillnet fisheries in the cooler waters of the North Atlantic.

#### 24.2.2 The fishery in 2022

No specific changes in the fishery were apparent in 2022. Apart from Iceland, no countries have reported landings since 2016. Iceland reported landings of 16 tonnes in both 2020 and 2021, and 13 tonnes in 2022.

#### 24.2.3 ICES Advice applicable

ICES has not been asked to provide advice on Greenland shark.

## 24.2.4 Management applicable

In 2016, Regulation (EU) 2016/2336 specified conditions for fishing for deep-sea stocks in the north-east Atlantic and provisions for fishing in international waters of the north-east Atlantic and included the Greenland shark to the list of deep-sea sharks on EC quota regulations for deep-sea fishes. Therefore from 2016 to 2018, Greenland shark was subject to the zero TAC for deep-sea sharks in EU vessels fishing in Union and international waters of ICES subareas 5–10 (EC, 2015). In 2019 and 2020, it was subject to the prohibition apply to deep-sea sharks (Council regulation (EU) 2018/2025). Since 2021, the EU regulation for prohibited species no longer mentions a list of deep-sea sharks but individual species, which do not include Greenland shark (Council regulation (EU) 2021/92). In 2018, NAFO agreed to prohibit direct fishing of Greenland sharks and minimizing bycatch. These conservation measures were expanded in 2022 to include banning of fishing, retention and landing of (part or whole) Greenland sharks in the regulatory area (NAFO, 2022).

## 24.3 Catch data

### 24.3.1 Landings

Limited landings data are available. More comprehensive landings data are only available from Iceland ([www.hagstofa.is](http://www.hagstofa.is) and Marine Freshwater Research Institute databases). Reported annual landings by Iceland (Table 24.1) from ICES Division 5.a and Subarea 14 have varied from about 2 tonnes (2007) to 87 tonnes (1998). Monthly Icelandic landings of Greenland shark (2009–2021) indicate a peak during the late spring and summer months (Figure 24.1).

### 24.3.2 Discards

Limited data are available. Greenland shark is a bycatch in trawl fisheries for Greenland halibut *Reinhardtius hippoglossus* and northern shrimp *Pandalus borealis*, as well as in gillnet and longline fisheries (MacNeil *et al.*, 2012; Nielsen *et al.*, 2014).

In the Barents Sea, bycatch of Greenland shark in bottom trawls were related to sea temperature, with more bycatch at lower water temperatures (Rusyaev and Orlov, 2013). Despite limited data on Greenland shark bycatch in the commercial trawl fishery, Rusyaev and Orlov (2013) estimated an annual catch of 140–150 tonnes in the Barents Sea.

In local fishing communities in Greenland, Greenland shark accounts for 50% of the total waste produced by the fishing industry. Estimated annual amounts of waste products of Greenland shark from fishing and hunting in specific counties may be *ca.* 1000 tonnes (Gunnarsdóttir and Jørgensen, 2008).

### 24.3.3 Quality of catch data

As observers are not mandatory in the fisheries that may have a bycatch of Greenland shark, bycatch levels are uncertain. In some areas there may be confusion with other members of the genus or even basking sharks (MacNeil *et al.*, 2012).

### 24.3.4 Discard survival

No estimates on discard survival are available for this species. According to on-board observers, some Greenland sharks caught in offshore trawl and longline fisheries are released alive (MacNeil *et al.*, 2012).

Studies with electronic tags have indicated that another deep-water shark, the leafscale gulper shark *Centrophorus squamosus*, one of the species occurring in European seas, can survive after being caught by longline (2–3 h soak time) from waters of 900–1100 m (Rodríguez-Cabello and Sánchez, 2014). Quantified data on the at-vessel mortality and post-release mortality of deep-water sharks that may be a by-catch in existing deep-water commercial fisheries are currently lacking (Ellis *et al.*, 2017).

## 24.4 Commercial catch composition

No information available.

## 24.5 Commercial catch and effort data

### 24.5.1 Recreational CPUE data

There are recreational catch and release fisheries for Greenland sharks in Norway (year-round) and Greenland (in March; MacNeil *et al.*, 2012), but CPUE data are not available.

## 24.6 Fishery-independent information

Greenland sharks are caught regularly during gillnet and bottom-trawl surveys around Greenland, such as the Greenland Institute of National Resources Annual bottom trawl survey (Nielsen *et al.*, 2014). Irregular catches are also reported from the annual German Greenland groundfish survey (71 individuals between 1981 and 2019, Figure 24.2). Trawl surveys conducted in the Barents Sea also encounter Greenland shark. Occasional catches are also reported in various Icelandic surveys, but with a total of just 68 observations over the period 1936–2012.

Existing scientific surveys are not appropriate for monitoring the abundance of Greenland sharks in their distribution area because catches are rare.

## 24.7 Life-history information

### 24.7.1 Habitat and abundance

Greenland sharks show a marked preference for cold water with most observations from waters of -1.8 to 10°C and the majority of records from waters <5°C (Skomal and Benz, 2004; Stokesbury *et al.*, 2005; Fisk *et al.*, 2012; MacNeil *et al.*, 2012). They occur on continental and insular shelves and upper slopes (Ebert and Stehmann, 2013). Confirmed observations cover a broad depth range from abyssal depths of at least 1560 m (Fisk *et al.*, 2012) to shallow water (Yano *et al.*, 2007; MacNeil *et al.*, 2012). Devine *et al.* (2018) found that off the northern Canadian coast, shark densities peaking at intermediate temperatures sampled, and at depths between 450–800 m. Though primarily considered a demersal species, it may be caught both at the surface and in the pelagic zone (e.g. Stokesbury *et al.*, 2005; MacNeil *et al.*, 2012). They often associate with fjord habitats (MacNeil *et al.*, 2012).

Using baited remote underwater video cameras, Devine *et al.* (2018) calculated Greenland shark abundance and biomass in Arctic Canada. Density estimates varied from 0.4 to 15.5 individuals per km<sup>2</sup> (biomass: 93.3–1210.6 kg per km<sup>2</sup>) among regions; being highest in warmer (>0 °C), deeper areas and lowest in shallow, sub-zero temperature regions.

### 24.7.2 Spawning, parturition and nursery grounds

The only captures of Greenland shark with near-term embryos were near fjords in the Faroe Islands. Based on observations on two presumed neonatal specimens captured by mid-water trawl off Jan Mayen Island, Kondyurin and Myagkov (1983) suggested that parturition may occur in the Norwegian Sea in July–August. Specimens of presumed neonatal size have also been reported from Canadian, Norwegian and Greenland fjords (Bjerkan and Koefoed, 1957).

### 24.7.3 Age and growth

Greenland shark is the second largest shark in the ICES area and the largest fish inhabiting Arctic seas (Ebert and Stehmann, 2013). Bigelow and Schroeder (1948) reported a maximum size of 640 cm L<sub>T</sub> and weight of 1023 kg. Females may attain a larger size than males. The growth rate of Greenland sharks is unknown, but observations from tagging experiments indicate growth rates of 0.5–1 cm y<sup>-1</sup> (Hansen, 1963). Conventional vertebral ageing methods are not applicable for Greenland shark (MacNeil *et al.*, 2012). However, a recent study using radiocarbon analysis from eye lenses suggests that Greenland sharks live to be several hundred years-old (Nielsen *et al.*, 2016).

### 24.7.4 Reproductive biology

The Greenland shark is an aplacental viviparous species (Carrier *et al.*, 2004; Ebert and Stehmann, 2013). The exact size at birth as well as the gestation period remain unknown, but size at birth is thought to be *ca.* 40–100 cm L<sub>T</sub> (MacNeil *et al.*, 2012). Size-at-maturity is difficult to determine. The onset of maturity in male Greenland sharks probably occurs at *ca.* 260 cm L<sub>T</sub> but is variable, and males may reach maturity at *ca.* 300 cm L<sub>T</sub> (Yano *et al.*, 2007). Females from Icelandic waters mature at 355–480 cm L<sub>T</sub> (MacNeil *et al.*, 2012). Based on changes in ovary weight, Yano *et al.* (2007) suggested that females matured at >400 cm L<sub>T</sub>. Nielsen *et al.* (2016) suggested the age at sexual maturity to be at least 156 ± 22 years. Fecundity is uncertain, but has been suggested to be approximately ten (Bjerkan and Koefoed, 1957; Ebert and Stehmann, 2013; Carter and Soma 2020); however, Nielsen *et al.* (2020) suggested a much larger fecundity, estimating up to 200–324 pups per pregnancy (depending on maternal size) with a body length-at-birth of 35–45 cm.

### 24.7.5 Movements and migrations

Studies using conventional and electronic (satellite and acoustic) tags have informed on the movements and migrations of Greenland sharks. Recent studies deploying archival pop-off tags (PATs) have shown that sharks display a broad vertical distribution, but no obvious diel movements were noted (Campana *et al.*, 2015; Fisk *et al.*, 2012). Tagged sharks move into deeper water when they mature, and it is possible that they migrate offshore to mate and/or give birth (Campana *et al.*, 2015). A recent study revealed a previously unknown directed migration from Canadian Arctic to NW-Greenland (Hussey *et al.* 2018). Previous studies have also examined the behaviour of Greenland sharks in the Northwest Atlantic (Skomal and Benz, 2004; Stokesbury *et al.*, 2005). All such studies have found examples of localized movements and site fidelity, as well as some larger scale movements.

### 24.7.6 Diet and role in ecosystem

Greenland sharks feed on a wide variety of invertebrates, fish and marine mammals, indicating they are generalist predators on both benthic and pelagic organisms (MacNeil *et al.*, 2012; Nielsen *et al.*, 2014), and they are important predators in Arctic food webs (Leclerc *et al.*, 2012). They are also important scavengers, including of whales (Leclerc *et al.*, 2011). Recent studies showed an ontogenetic dietary shift with small sharks (<200 cm) mainly feeding on lower trophic level prey such a squid, while larger sharks feed on seals as well as epibenthic and benthic fishes. Additionally, it was indicated that Greenland sharks are capable of active predation on fast swimming mammals and large fishes (Nielsen *et al.*, 2019).

## 24.8 Exploratory assessment models

No exploratory stock assessments have been undertaken.

## 24.9 Stock assessment

No stock assessment has been undertaken.

### 24.10 Quality of the assessment

No stock assessment has been undertaken.

### 24.11 Reference points

No reference points have been proposed for this stock.

## 24.12 Conservation considerations

On the basis of possible population declines and limiting life-history characteristics, the Greenland shark is listed as Vulnerable in the IUCN Red List (Kulka *et al.*, 2020). It is listed vulnerable in the Swedish Red List of endangered species (Svensson *et al.*, 2010).

## 24.13 Management considerations

Stock status and many other aspects of the biology of Greenland sharks are unknown. Given the large body size of this species and perceived low population productivity, further studies to better understand population dynamics and sources of mortality are required.

Ruud (1968) reported a longer-term decline in Greenland shark in the Oslofjord, but it is unclear as to how such local depletions towards the south of the distribution range relate to wider population trends.

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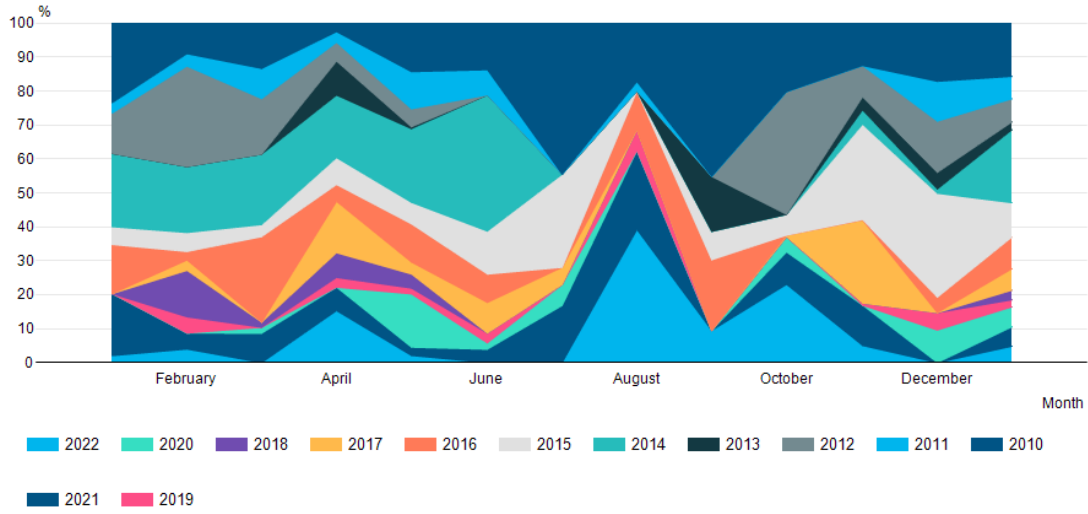
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## 24.15 Tables and Figures

**Table 24.1.** Greenland shark *Somniosus microcephalus* in the Northeast Atlantic. Preliminary estimates of landings (t) for the period 1992–2022). Data were updated with landings from ICES historic nominal landings database (ICES, 2016) and national landings data provided to the WG (June 2023).

Year	Iceland	Greenland	Portugal	Sweden	Total
1992	68				68
1993	41				41
1994	42				42
1995	43				43
1996	61				61
1997	73				73
1998	87				87
1999	51				51
2000	45				45
2001	57				57
2002	56				56
2003	55				55
2004	58				58
2005	50		0.3		50
2006	28		0.5		29
2007	2	17	0.7		20
2008	42		0.6		43
2009	26			0.4	26
2010	43				43
2011	18				18
2012	19				19
2013	6				6
2014	60	8			68
2015	28	17			45
2016	26				26
2017	17				18
2018	9				8
2019	6				6
2020	16				16
2021	16				16
2022	13				13



Source: Directorate of fisheries

Figure 24.1. Greenland shark (*Somniosus microcephalus*) in the Northeast Atlantic. Monthly Icelandic landings of Greenland shark 2010–2022. Data from [www.hagstofa.is](http://www.hagstofa.is)

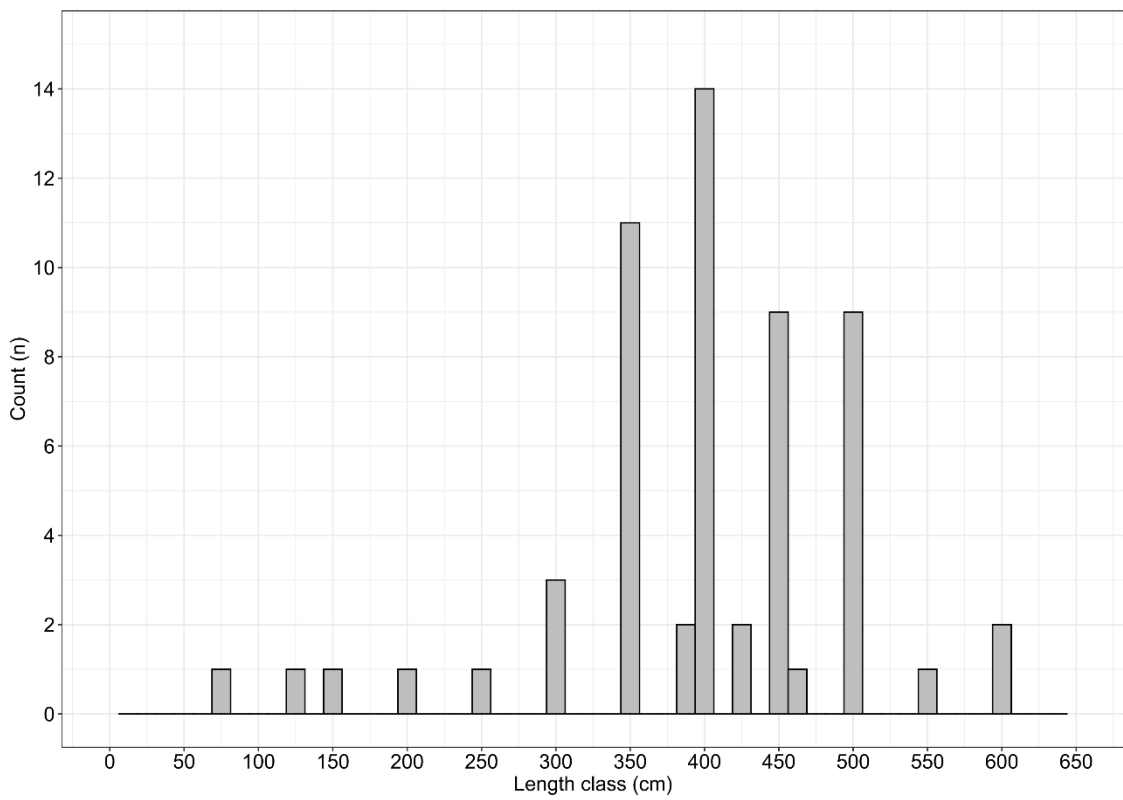


Figure 24.2. Greenland shark (*Somniosus microcephalus*) in the Northeast Atlantic. Length distribution of Greenland shark captured during the annual German Greenland Groundfish Survey (1981–2020; n = 72; length measurements available for n = 60 specimens).

## 25 Catsharks (*Scyliorhinidae*) in the Northeast Atlantic

### 25.1 Stock distribution

This section addresses four species of catsharks that occur on the continental shelf and upper slope of the ICES area: lesser-spotted dogfish (or small-spotted catshark) *Scyliorhinus canicula*, greater-spotted dogfish *Scyliorhinus stellaris*, black-mouth dogfish (or black-mouth catshark) *Galeus melastomus* and Atlantic catshark *Galeus atlanticus*. Other catsharks that occur in deeper waters (*Apristurus* spp. and *Galeus murinus*) are not included here (see Section 5). All catsharks are demersal and oviparous (egg-laying) species.

These species have been referred to as catsharks, dogfishes and other names including hounds. Names recognised by FAO may not be suitable to minimise confusions with *Scyliorhinus canicula* being referred to as small-spotted catshark and *S. stellaris* as nursehound. Therefore, ICES refer to these species as follows:

English name	Scientific name
Lesser-spotted dogfish	<i>Scyliorhinus canicula</i>
Greater-spotted dogfish	<i>Scyliorhinus stellaris</i>
Black-mouth dogfish	<i>Galeus melastomus</i>
Atlantic catshark	<i>Galeus atlanticus</i>

**Lesser-spotted dogfish:** *S. canicula* is an abundant species occurring on a range of substrates (from mud to rock) on the European continental shelves, from coastal waters to the upper continental slope, but is most abundant on the shelf. Its distribution ranges from Norway and the British Isles to the Mediterranean Sea and Northwest Africa (Ebert and Stehmann, 2013). ICES currently consider 4 stock units for this species: (i) North Sea ecoregion (Subarea 4 and divisions 3.a and 7.d), (ii) Celtic Seas and west of Scotland (Subarea 6 and divisions 7.a–c and 7.e–j), (iii) northern Bay of Biscay (divisions 8.a–b and 8.d), and (iv) Atlantic Iberian waters (divisions 8.c and 9.a).

See stock annexes for information about *S. canicula* in northern Bay of Biscay (divisions 8.a–b and 8.d) and in the Cantabrian Sea and Atlantic Iberian waters (divisions 8.c and 9.a).

**Greater-spotted dogfish:** *S. stellaris* is a locally frequent inshore shark of the Northeast Atlantic continental shelf and is generally found from shallow water to depths of about 125 m on rough or rocky bottoms, including areas with algal cover (e.g. kelp forests) (Ebert and Stehmann, 2013). It is Europe's largest catshark, growing to at least 130 cm.

This species is currently only assessed for the subareas 6 and 7, as it is locally common in parts of this area, and data are limited for other parts of the species' biogeographic range, where it occurs at lesser density.

See stock annex for information about *S. stellaris* in subareas 6 and 7.

**Black-mouth dogfish:** *G. melastomus* is a small-sized shark (<90 cm), found on the upper slope in the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic from northern Norway and the Faroe Islands to Senegal (Ebert and Stehmann, 2013).

This species is currently assessed over two management units (i) Celtic Seas and west of Scotland (Subarea 6 and divisions 7.a–c and 7.e–j), and (ii) Bay of Biscay and Atlantic Iberian waters (Subarea 8 and Division 9.a).

See stock annex for information about *Galeus melastomus* in Atlantic Iberian waters (Subarea 8 and Division 9.a).

Atlantic catshark: *Galeus atlanticus* is a small catshark found on the continental slopes living in depths of 330–790 m. Its distribution in the Eastern Atlantic ranges from North of Spain to Portugal into the Mediterranean and further south to Morocco and possibly to Mauritania. Northern range limits are unknown (Ebert and Stehmann, 2013), as there is confusion between this species and *G. melastomus* (see Rey *et al.*, 2006 for distinguishing characters). The stock status of *G. atlanticus* is not assessed.

## 25.2 The fishery

### 25.2.1 History of the fishery

Catsharks are a bycatch of demersal trawl, gillnet and longline fisheries over much of the ICES area. They are usually of low commercial value and, with the exception of some seasonal, small-scale fisheries in some coastal areas, are not subject to target fisheries.

The retention patterns of catsharks in the North Sea and Celtic Seas ecoregions are highly variable, with varying proportions retained/discarded (Silva and Ellis, 2019). Larger individuals are landed for human consumption (more so in the southern parts of the ICES area). They are also landed in some areas as bait for pot fisheries, especially in fisheries for whelk *Buccinum undatum* or brown crab *Cancer pagurus* around the British Isles.

### 25.2.2 The fishery in 2022

No new information.

### 25.2.3 ICES Advice applicable

Before 2012, ICES advice on catsharks was included in the regional demersal elasmobranch advice. Species-specific advices for catsharks have been given since 2012. Advice is provided every two years.

The last assessments of catsharks were carried out in 2023 valid for 2024 and 2025. The table below presents a summary of the last assessments.

Table 25.2. Summary of the catsharks stocks assessed in ICES areas and the advice provide for years 2024-2025.

STOCK	STOCK CODE	ASSESSMENT CATEGORY	ADVICE BASIS	ADVISED LANDINGS (2024–2025)
Lesser-spotted dogfish ( <i>Scyliorhinus canicula</i> ) in Subarea 4 and divisions 3.a and 7.d	syc.27.3a47d	3	MSY approach	2680 tonnes
Lesser-spotted dogfish ( <i>Scyliorhinus canicula</i> ) in Subarea 6 and divisions 7.a-c and 7.e-j	syc.27.67a-ce-j	3	MSY approach	3984 tonnes
Lesser-spotted dogfish ( <i>Scyliorhinus canicula</i> ) in divisions 8.a-b and 8.d	syc.27.8abd	3	MSY approach	ICES has not been requested to provide advice on fishing opportunities for this stock.
Lesser-spotted dogfish ( <i>Scyliorhinus canicula</i> ) in divisions 8.c and 9.a	syc.27.8c9a	3	MSY approach	ICES has not been requested to provide advice on fishing opportunities for this stock.
Greater-spotted dogfish ( <i>Scyliorhinus stellaris</i> ) in sub-areas 6 and 7	syt.27.67	3	MSY approach	ICES advises that when the MSY approach is applied, landings should be no more than 682 tonnes
Black-mouth dogfish ( <i>Galeus melastomus</i> ) in subareas 6 and 7 (West of Scotland, southern Celtic Seas, and English Channel)	sho.27.67	3	MSY approach	Catches in each of the years 2024 and 2025 should be decreased by no less than 30% compared to the average catches in 2020-2022
Black-mouth dogfish ( <i>Galeus melastomus</i> ) in Subarea 8 and Division 9.a	sho.27.89a	3	MSY approach	ICES has not been requested to provide advice on fishing opportunities for this stock.

## 25.2.4 Management applicable

These species are not subject to species-specific fisheries management measures in EU and UK waters.

*Galeus melastomus* was originally included in the list of deep-water sharks, but Council Regulation (EC) 1182/2013 removed this species from this list following ICES advice. This review was based on the fact that its main distribution extended to upper slope and outer shelf habitats, which are not considered deep-water habitats, and that it had different life-history traits from other species on the list (with the assumption of lower vulnerability towards fishing pressure). There is no TAC for catsharks in the ICES area..

## 25.3 Catch data

### 25.3.1 Landings

Landings of catsharks were traditionally reported in generic category groups (e.g. dogfishes and hounds) in some countries, though in recent years more species-specific landings have become available. The lack of historical landings data and the uncertainty associated with recent species-specific information suggest data herein should be viewed with caution.

Nevertheless, in areas where *Scyliorhinus canicula* is much more abundant than *S. stellaris*, reported landings may be regarded as representative of the former species. The species is of minor interest to small-scale fisheries and local markets and most landings are being sold through fish auction markets.

ICES estimates of landings are presented in tables (25.1a–g). Some reported data were corrected, allocation to stocks were consolidated based on expert knowledge.

- i. Some landings of catsharks have previously been reported in generic ‘dogfish’ categories, this fraction of the landings is reducing in recent years to a few percent since 2016;
- ii. Some landings reported as either *S. canicula* or *S. stellaris* may comprise a fraction of the other species. For example, Portuguese landings from 9.a assigned to *S. stellaris* are likely to correspond to *S. canicula* only;
- iii. It is unclear as to whether catsharks used for pot bait are reported in landings data.

The confusion between *S. canicula* and *S. stellaris* is likely to have a greater impact on data for the lesser abundant *S. stellaris*.

Nominal landings data for *S. canicula* (including possible mixing with *S. stellaris*) from Subarea 4 and divisions 3.a and 7.d (Table 25.1a), subareas 6 and 7 (Table 25.1b), divisions 8.a–b and 8.d (Table 25.1.c) are reported mainly from France and Spain, while those from divisions 8.c and 9.a are reported by Spain and Portugal (Table 25.1d).

Nominal landings data for *G. melastomus* from subareas 6 and 7 (Celtic Seas) have only been reported by France and Spain (Table 25.1e) and were minor in recent years. There are no reported landings prior to 2002. It is likely that this species was caught in deep-water fisheries prior to these years, but was discarded or reported under generic landing categories.

Landings data for *G. melastomus* from Subarea 8 are reported mainly by Spain, whereas most landings from Division 9.a are from both the Portuguese and the Spanish fleets (Table 25.1f). In 2010, reported landings declined due to the introduction of the zero-TAC for deep-water sharks (where this species was previously included). Following the removal of this species from the list of deep-water sharks in 2013, international landings increased to reach their highest value in 2020 (183 tonnes).

Given the widespread discarding of catsharks, reported landings are not considered representative of catch.

### 25.3.2 Discards

*Scyliorhinus canicula* and other catsharks are often discarded by continental shelf fisheries (e.g. Silva and Ellis, 2019). The potentially high discard survival of species in the Scyliorhinidae family, at least for continental shelf fisheries, means that landing data are likely to be more representative of dead removals.

Discard information of *S. canicula* is available from several countries and areas (Table 25.2a–d). Discard data for *Scyliorhinus stellaris* (syt.27.67) is reported on Table 25.2.e and discard data for *Galeus melastomus* is also available from several countries in Subareas 6, 7, 8 and 9 (Table 25.2f–g). The “Spanish Discards Sampling Programme” for otter and pair bottom trawl fleets, covering ICES Subareas 6, 7, 8c and North 9, provides data on elasmobranchs discards annually since 2003. The sampling strategy and the estimation methodology follow the “Workshop on Discard Sampling Methodology and Raising Procedures” guidelines (ICES, 2003). The on-board observers programme is based on a stratified random sampling design. Métier is the lower stratum and trips (the sampling units) are randomly or quasi-randomly selected for sampling within métiers. Discard estimates for several elasmobranchs species show high variation between years, exceeding 50% CV (Santos *et al.*, 2010).

In the Portuguese crustacean bottom otter trawl fishery operating in Division 9.a, the most frequently discarded demersal elasmobranchs are *G. melastomus* and *S. canicula*. Discard information (sampling effort and discard estimates) has been compiled and reported annually.



Revised discard estimation methods were used for the two species between 2020 and 2022. These estimates were derived by multiplying the total fishing hours of the fleet in 2020-2022 by the average DPUE (Discards per Unit of Effort) values from the period 2017-2019, as detailed in Fernandes (2021 WD11). *Scyliorhinus canicula* and *G. melastomus* are also among the most discarded species by commercial fishing vessels with a fishing permit to set gillnets or trammel nets (LOA  $\geq$  12 m) (Figueiredo *et al.*, 2017 WD). Frequency of occurrence (%) of both species in the discards from hauls with gillnets and/or trammel nets from those vessels range between 31% and 57% for *S. canicula* and between 0% and 6% for *G. melastomus* (Figueiredo *et al.*, 2017 WD). For further details regarding estimated total discarded weight, length distribution and sex ratio for both species please refer to ICES (2014), Prista and Fernandes (2013 WD), Figueiredo *et al.* (2017 WD) and Fernandes (2021 WD11).

Discards in French fisheries have been estimated for stocks syc.27.347d, syc.27.8abd, syc.27.7a-ce-j, syt.27.67, sho.27.67, sho.27.89a. The raising factor of observed discards to the total fleet is fishing effort by DCF level 6 métier.

### 25.3.3 Discard survival

*Scyliorhinus canicula* have been shown to have a high discard survival in beam and otter trawl fisheries (Revill *et al.*, 2005; Rodriguez-Cabello *et al.*, 2005; Barragán-Mendez *et al.*, 2020), and anecdotal observations suggest that it would also have high survival in coastal longline fisheries. A review of survival studies on this species and other sharks can be found in Ellis *et al.*, (2016). There are no data for discard survival of these species in gillnet fisheries. There are also no data for the survival of *G. melastomus* caught in fisheries operating along the outer continental shelf and upper slope. A study of survival of deep-water sharks caught by longline indicated some survivorship for this species using this fishing gear (Rodríguez-Cabello and Sanchez, 2017).

### 25.3.4 Quality of catch data

Accurate species-specific landings data are not currently available for all stocks. The ongoing (since 2012) French programme "Elasmobranches On Shore" aims to better evaluate the relative proportion of species mixed under a single landing name, as it is for *S. canicula* and *S. stellaris* (Mayot *et al.*, 2021). This programme will enable to correct a large part of the French Landings Data. To date, the results have been only partially communicated. In the past, only *S. canicula* was used for catsharks landing but labelling has been improving in recent years in France with the progressive appearance of the landing name *S. stellaris* in fish markets.

## 25.4 Commercial catch composition

Data from national observer programmes have provided information on the size distribution of the retained proportions of the catch. In general, only larger individuals of catsharks are retained. However, retention of *S. canicula* and *S. stellaris* may depend locally more on market demand rather than size as these species can be often landed as bait for pot fisheries (Silva and Ellis, 2021).

The length distributions for *S. canicula* from France (divisions 7.a-c.e.k, for stocks syc.27.3a47d and syc.27.8abd; 2011–2015) and Spain (OTB Basque fleet for stock syc.27.8abd; 2011–2015) were shown in ICES (2017a). Length-distributions of *S. canicula* from the Basque country trawl fleet are shown on Figure 25.1a. Catch length ranges from 10 cm to 73 cm. However, the proportion retained is from 40 cm to 73 cm, while fish of lengths from 10 cm to 50 cm are mostly discarded. Length data for discarded catches is available for the Spanish fleet operating in ICES divisions 8.c and 9.a. Catch length range from 10 cm to 70 cm but the proportion retained is mostly from 40 cm to 65 cm (Figure 25.1b).

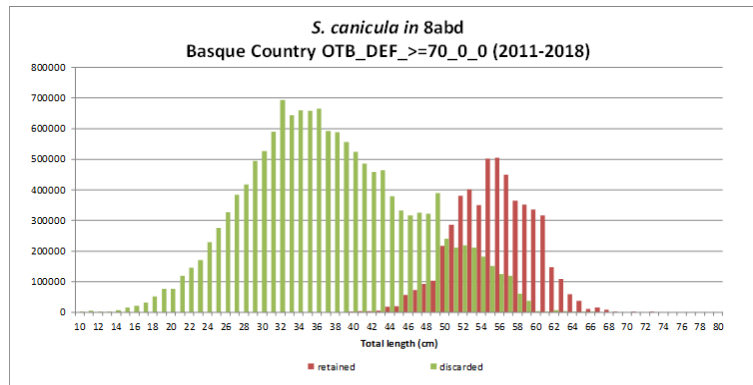


Figure 25.1a. Catsharks (Scyliorhinidae) in the Northeast Atlantic. Length frequencies of *S. canicula* retained (in red) and discarded (green) recorded from the trawl fleet of the Basque country from 2011 to 2018 in ICES divisions 8.a-b, d.

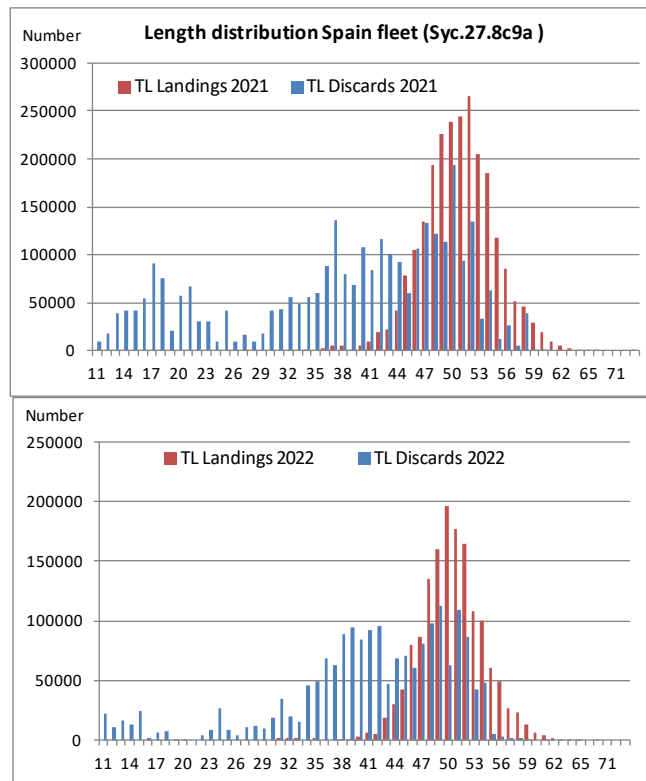


Figure 25.1b. Catsharks (Scyliorhinidae) in the Northeast Atlantic. Length frequency distribution of *S. canicula* landed and discarded by the Spanish fleet in ICES areas 8.c and 9.a in 2021 and 2022.

Length–frequency distribution of *S. canicula* and *Galeus melastomus* obtained from specimens sampled at Portuguese landing ports and onboard observers programme, respectively, are shown in Figures 25.1c and 25.1d.

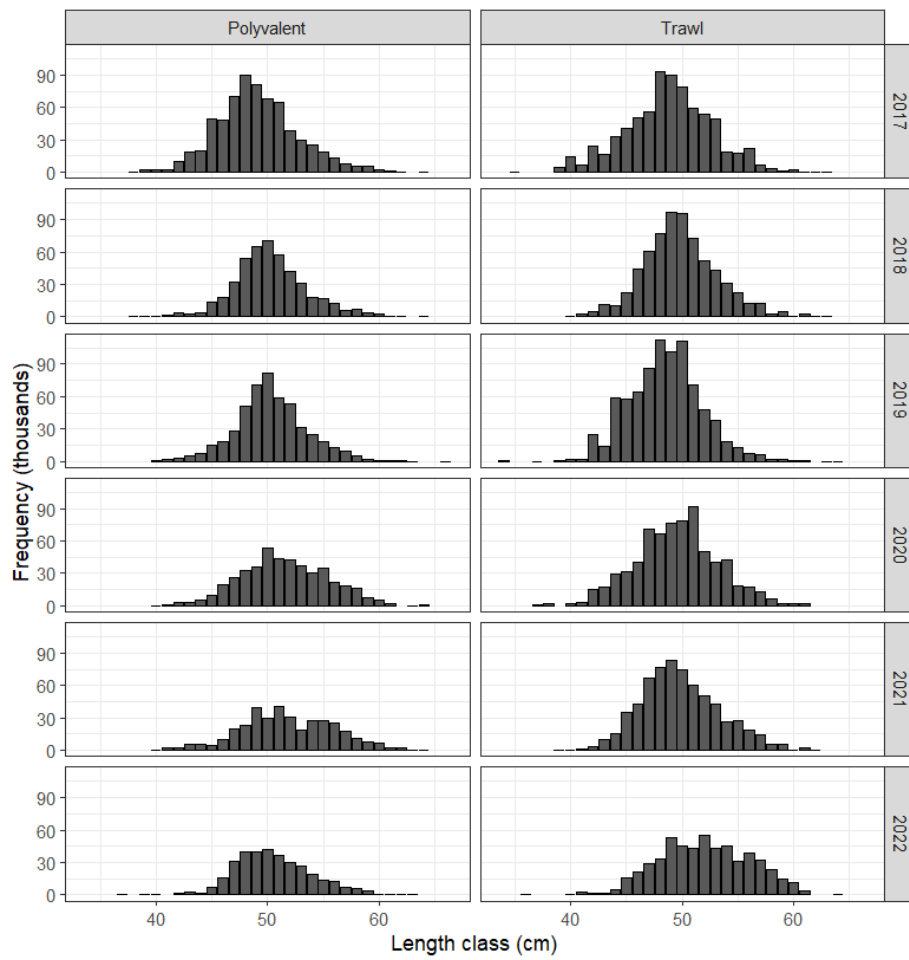


Figure 25.1c. Catsharks (Scyliorhinidae) in the Northeast Atlantic. Length–frequency distribution of *S. canicula* from specimens sampled at Portuguese landing ports from polyvalent and trawl fleets raised to total landings (2019–2022).

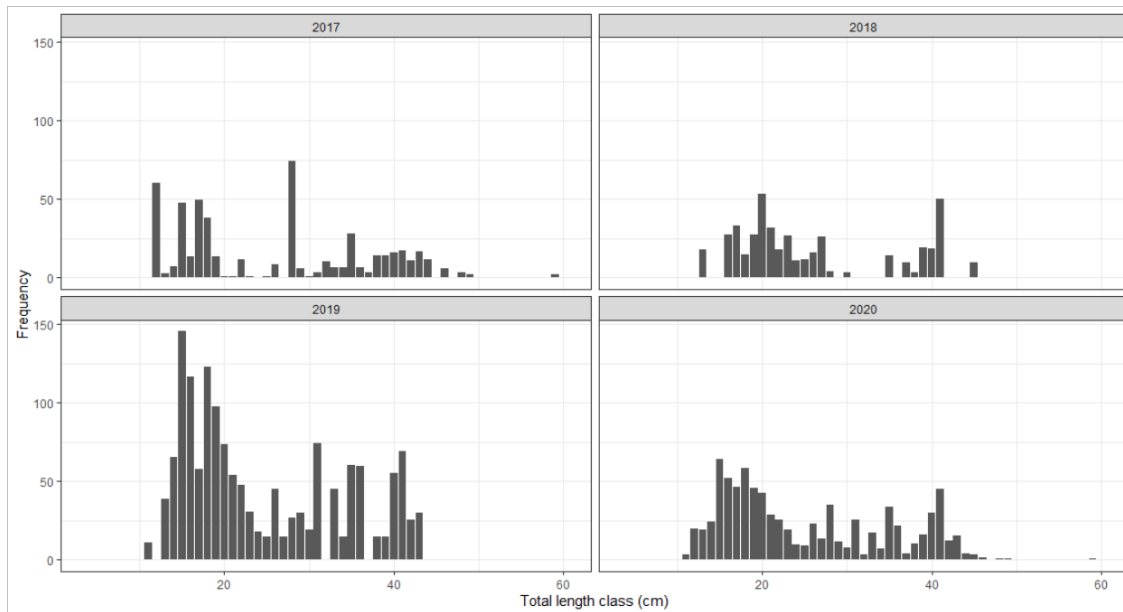


Figure 25.1d. Catsharks (Scyliorhinidae) in the Northeast Atlantic. Length frequency distribution of *G. melastomus* of discards in the Portuguese trawl fleet (OTB\_CRU\_55; 2017–2020).

For the assessments of each stock, length distributions of the landings and discards submitted to InterCatch were analysed, and were used depending on their reliability (see section 25.9 for stock-by-stock details).

## 25.5 Commercial catch–effort data

Commercial effort data are not used for assessment of Scyliorhinidae stocks in the ICES area.

## 25.6 Fishery-independent information

Groundfish surveys provide valuable information on the spatial and temporal patterns in the species composition, size composition, sex ratio and relative abundance of catsharks. These surveys were not designed primarily to inform on these populations, and so the gears used, timing of the surveys and distribution of sampling stations may not be optimal. However, these surveys provide the longest time-series of species-specific information.

Depending on the area and species, one to several surveys provide reliable time-series of data (Table 25.3).

Table 25.3. Summary of the surveys available for each of the stocks assessed in ICES areas.

ICES stock code	Survey used for assessment
syc.27.3a47d	IBTS-Q1 and Q3, BTS-Eng-Q3, CGFS-Q4, and BTS-BE-Q3 (included since 2021).
syc.27.67a-ce-j	EVHOE-WIBTS-Q4, IGFS-WIBTS-Q4, Spanish Porcupine Bank survey SP-PORC-WIBTS-Q3, and UK (E&W)-BTS-Q3 (2005-2020).
syc.27.8abd	EVHOE-WIBTS-Q4
syc.27.8c9a	Spanish surveys in the South (Gulf of Cadiz) SpGFS-GC-WIBTS-Q1-Q4 (ARSA) and in the North of Spain (SpNGFS-WIBTS-Q4) and Portuguese survey (PtGFS-WIBTS-Q4)
syt.27.67	UK (E&W)-BTS-Q3 and CGFS-Q4 (included since 2021)
sho.27.67	Spanish Porcupine Bank survey SP-PORC-WIBTS-Q3
sho.27.89a	EVHOE-WIBTS-Q4 survey in Subarea 8, Spanish IBTS-CG-Q1-Q4 (ARSA) and the Portuguese Crustacean Surveys/ <i>Nephrops</i> TV Surveys (PT-CTS UWTV (FU 28-29)).

Survey data used for assessment were taken from DATRAS, national database or from working documents e.g. Fernández-Zapico *et al.* (2022).

For the stock syc.27.3a47d biomass index of the following surveys are available and have been used in the stock assessment (Figure 25.2). These are: NS-IBTS-Q1 and NS-IBTS-Q3 (kg per hour), d FR-CGFS-Q4 (kg per swept area), BTS-BEL-Q3 and BTS-Eng-Q3 surveys (kg per hour).

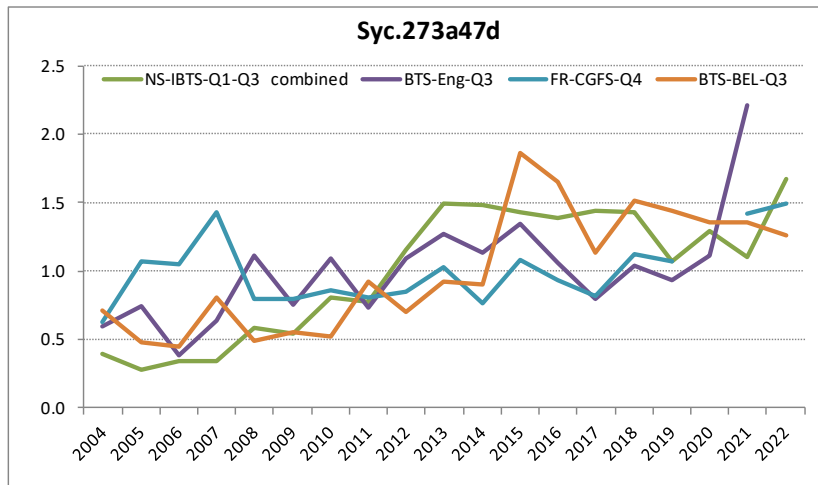


Figure 25.2. *Scyliorhinus canicula* in Subarea 4 and Divisions 3.a and 7.d. Yearly normalized values for the biomass survey indices from the NS-IBTS-Q1, NS-IBTS-Q3, FR-CGFS-Q4, BTS-BEL-Q3 and BTS-Eng-Q3 surveys.

For the stock syc.27.67a-ce-j four surveys index are available. These are: EVHOE-WIBTS-Q4, IGFS-WIBTS-Q4, Spanish Porcupine Bank survey SP-PORC-WIBTS-Q3, and UK (E&W)-BTS-Q3 (2005-2020). Each of these surveys are considered reliable indicator and provides spatial coverage of the stock (Figure 25.3).

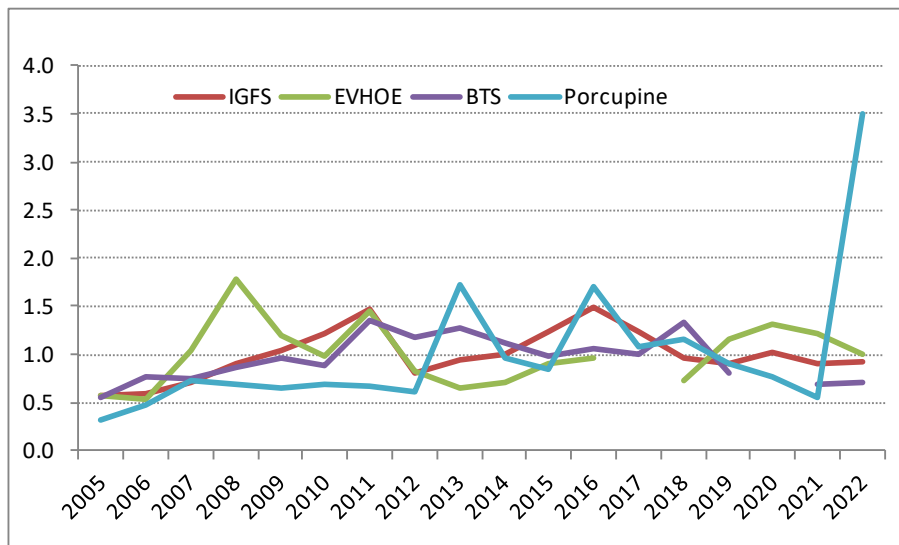


Figure 25.3. *Scyliorhinus canicula* in in Subarea 6 and divisions 7.a-c and 7.e-j (West of Scotland, Irish Sea, southern Celtic Seas). Yearly normalized values for the biomass survey indices from the four surveys.

In the case of *Scyliorhinus canicula* in Divisions 8abd (syc.27.8abd), the French survey EVHOE WIBTS Q4 is the one that covers this stock and provides the biomass index (kg/km<sup>2</sup>) for the stock assessment (Figure 25.17 in section 25.9.4).

For syc.27.8c9a, three surveys provide reliable time series of abundance or biomass index which are used in the assessment of this stock. These are the Spanish bottom trawl survey carried out in the north of Spain waters, Galician and Cantabrian Sea shelf (Figure 25.4) (Blanco et al., 2022 WD07; Fernández-Zapico et al., 2023) and in the south of Spain, Gulf of Cádiz (Figure 25.5) which is carried out in two seasons in Spring (Q1) and Autumn (Q4). The Portuguese survey (PtGFS-WIBTS-Q4) also included covers all the central area of Division 9.a (Figure 25.6).

In 2022, the biomass of *S. canicula* increased in both, 9a and 8c Divisions compared to the previous year returning to the upper-middle values of the time series. The mean biomass of the last two years was markedly higher to the previous five years in 9c and slightly higher in 8c (Figure 25.4).

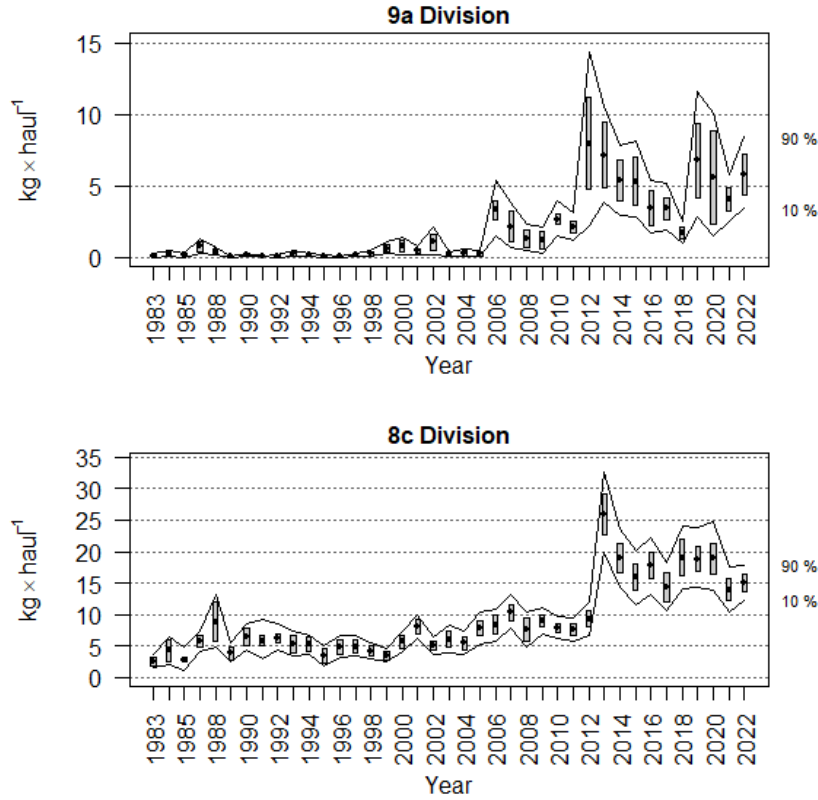


Figure 25.4. Evolution of *Scyliorhinus canicula* biomass index during the North Spanish shelf bottom trawl survey time series in the two ICES Divisions covered by the survey. Boxes mark parametric standard error of the stratified biomass index. Lines mark bootstrap confidence intervals ( $\alpha=0.80$ , bootstrap iterations = 1000).

The surveys in Gulf of Cadiz were not conducted in 2021 due to a vessel breakdown. In the autumn survey the biomass index slightly decreased however remaining in the high values of the time series. In the spring survey, there was a notable increase in biomass following a significant decline in 2020 (Figure 25.5).

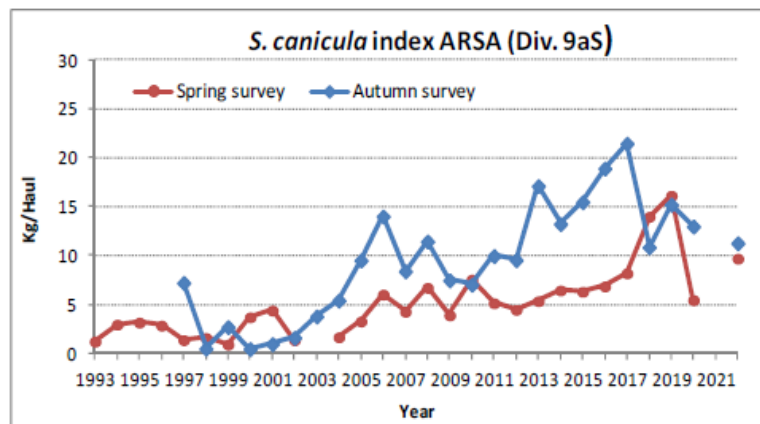


Figure 25.5. Evolution of *Scyliorhinus canicula* biomass index during the South Spanish bottom trawl surveys (ARSA) conducted in Gulf of Cádiz (ICES Div. 9aS).

Due to technical problems followed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the PtGFS-WIBTS-Q4 survey was not conducted in 2019 and 2020. In 2021 and 2022 the survey (PtGFS-WIBTS-Q4) was carried out on a new vessel and more information is required to conclude about the continuity of the series. Therefore these last two years were not included in the assessment (Figure 25.6).

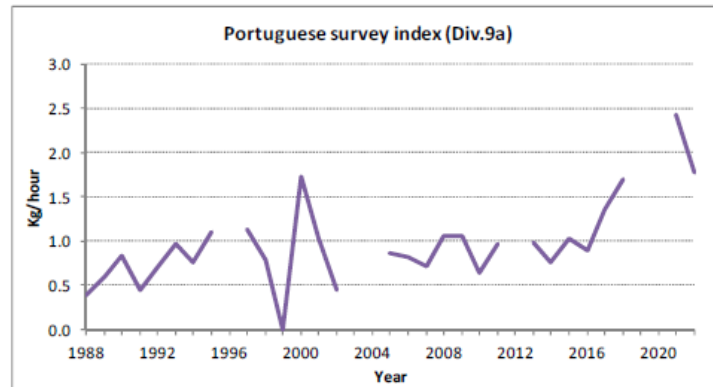


Figure 25.6. Evolution of *Scyliorhinus canicula* biomass index obtained from Portuguese bottom trawl survey (ICES Div. 9a).

In the case of greater-spotted dogfish (*Scyliorhinus stellaris*) in subareas 6 and 7 two surveys provide biomass index. The French survey FR-CGFS-Q4 in Division 7.d (kg.km<sup>-2</sup>) and UK (E&W)-BTS-Q3 in divisions 7.a and 7.f (kg.hr<sup>-1</sup>). The evolution of the time series is shown in Figure 25.7.

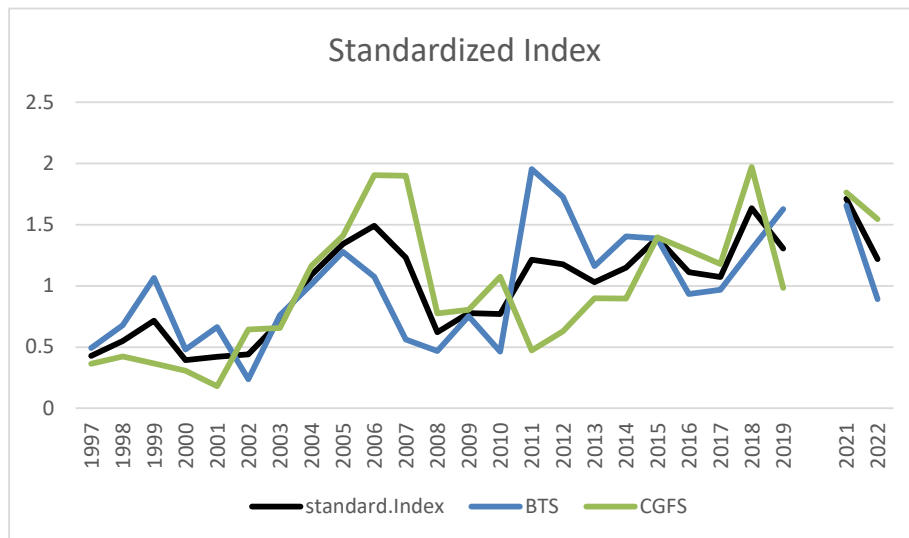
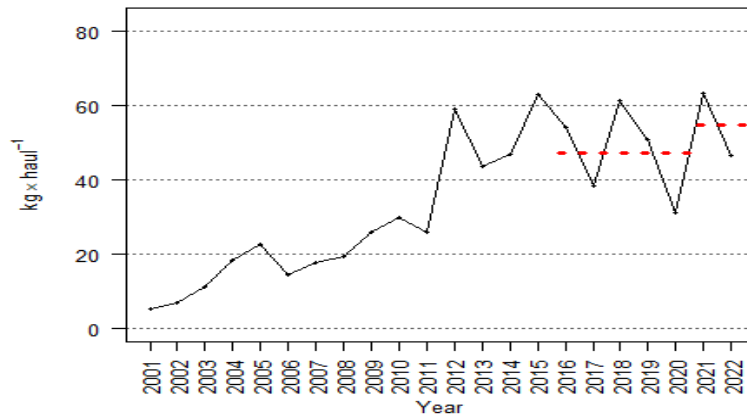


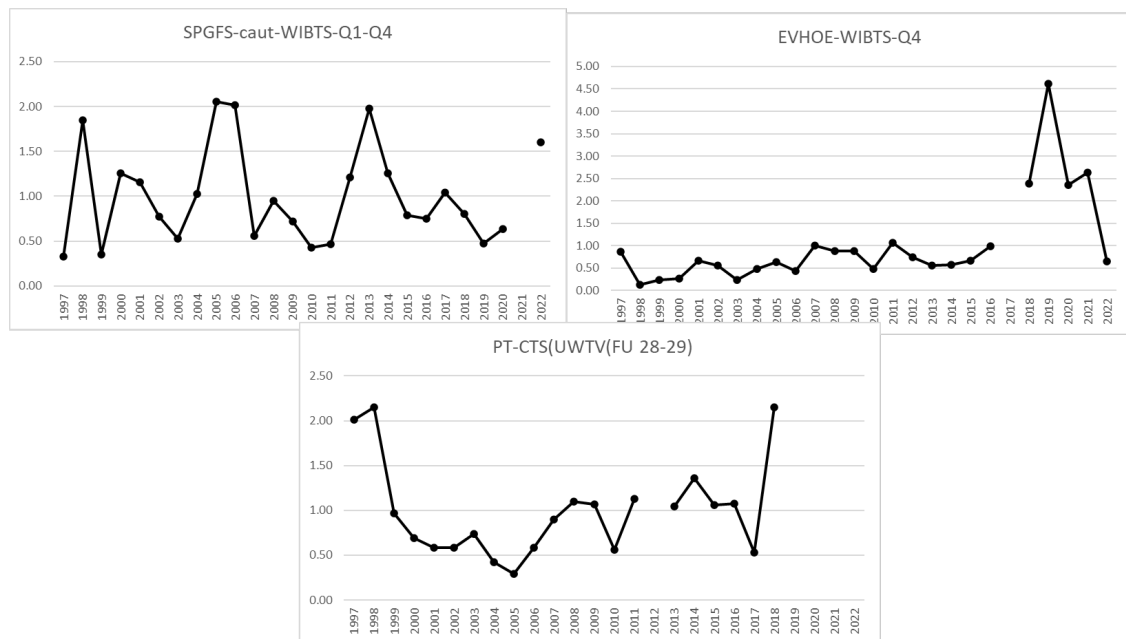
Figure 25.7. Catsharks (*Scyliorhinidae*) in the Northeast Atlantic. *Scyliorhinus stellaris* in subareas 6 and 7 (Celtic Seas and West of Scotland). Standardized indices of exploited biomass (individuals >50 cm TL) from CGFS-Q3, BTS and combined standardized index (1997–2022).

For sho.27.67, the Spanish Porcupine Bank survey (SP-PORC-WIBTS-Q3) provides a reliable biomass index that is used within the assessments. In 2022, there was a decline in the biomass and abundance of *G. melastomus*. However, these values remained relatively high when compared to the two-year average, in contrast to the trends observed over the previous five years (Figure 25.8 and see Figure 25.23 in section 25.9.7).



**Figure 25.8.** Catsharks (Scyliorhinidae) in the Northeast Atlantic. Changes in the biomass index in kg per haul of *Galeus melastomus* during the Porcupine Bank survey SP-PORC-WIBTS-Q3 (2001–2022). Dotted lines compare mean stratified biomass in the last two years and in the preceding five years.

For the stock sho.27.89a three surveys are available. These are: the French survey EVHOE-WIBTS-Q4 which is conducted in survey in Subarea 8, the Spanish surveys in the south (9a) IBTS-CG-Q1-Q4 (ARSA) and the Portuguese Crustacean Surveys/Nephrops TV Surveys (PT-CTS UWTV (FU 28-29)) in Division 9 (Figure 25.9).

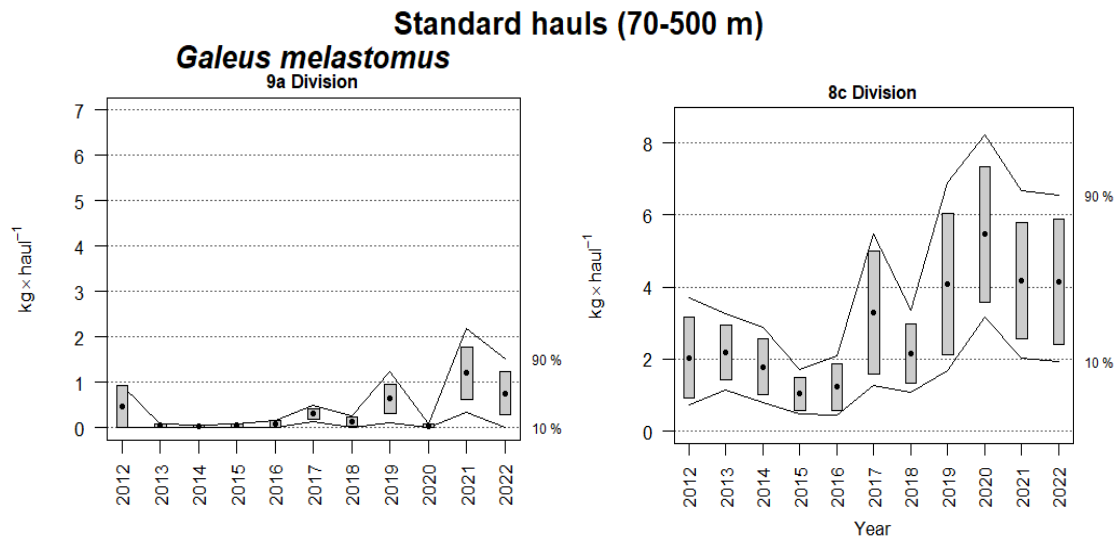


**Figure 25.9.** Time series of biomass index of *Galeus melastomus* obtained from Spanish surveys in the Gulf of Cadiz, Div.9a (top left), French survey EVOHE (Top right) in division 8abd and Portuguese trawl survey in Div. 9 (bottom).

The Spanish SpN-GFS-WIBTS-Q4 survey catches *G. melastomus*. However, data are only shown as general trends and not used for assessment since most of the biomass (nearly the 75%) is caught in the additional deeper hauls (depths over 500 m) that are not standardized (Blanco *et al.*, 2022; Fernández-Zapico *et al.*, 2023). In the standard hauls, the biomass of *G. melastomus* remained consistent with the previous year in Division 8c and experienced a slight decrease in Division 9a. In both cases, the indices were among the highest values observed in the time series (see Figure 25.10).



In contrast, during additional deeper hauls, the biomass of *G. melastomus* in Division 9a strongly decreased in 2022 compared to the previous year. However, in Division 8c, there was a notable increase (Fernández-Zapico et al., 2023).



**Figure 25.10.** Evolution of *Galeus melastomus* stratified biomass index in standard hauls (70- 500 m) during the North Spanish shelf bottom trawl survey between 2012 and 2022 in the two ICES Divisions. Boxes mark parametric standard error of the stratified biomass index. Lines mark bootstrap confidence intervals ( $\alpha=0.80$  bootstrap iterations = 1000)

Due to technical problems followed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the PT CTS (UWTV [FU 28–29]) survey was not conducted in 2019 and 2020. In 2021 and 2022 the survey was carried out on a new vessel and more information is required to conclude about the continuity of the series. Therefore these last two years were not included in the assessment.

Catsharks occur out of the range of assessment stock units. *S. stellaris* is a coastal species that is caught only occasionally in surveys in the Biscay and Iberian ecoregions. *G. melastomus* is caught in the northern North Sea (Division 4.a) and Norwegian Deep, but most IBTS-Q1 and Q3 survey stations are <200 m deep, and so catch rates may not be informative of stock size.

### 25.7 Life-history information

While data on life-history parameters in the study area have not been updated, recent studies have been conducted focusing on social behavior, sexual dimorphism, and population genomics (Barragán-Méndez, et al., 2020; Manuzzi et al., 2019). Summaries of knowledge on life history of the various species are provided in the corresponding stock annexes and in WD Ellis et al., 2023).

Catsharks can have protracted spawning periods, with *S. canicula* bearing egg cases observed for much of the year. This protracted egg-laying season may result in no apparent cohorts in length distributions. Age and growth parameters are uncertain for all the species considered here.

The reproductive biology of *S. canicula* has been studied in different regions by different authors. According to Ellis and Shackley (1997), males in the Bristol Channel mature at lengths of 49–54 cm (L<sub>50%</sub> at 52 cm) and females at 52–64 cm (L<sub>50%</sub> at 55 cm). The egg-laying season lasts at least ten months with a peak in June and July, and fecundity increases with fish length. Egg cases are often laid on erect, sessile invertebrates (e.g. bryozoans, poriferans and hydroids). In the Portuguese Coast southern to Nazaré Canyon, *S. canicula* individuals attained maturity at smaller sizes: 42.6 cm (6 years) for males and 44.5 cm (7 years) for females (Moreira et al., 2022). Although,

data for *S. stellaris* in the Atlantic may be lacking, studies in the Mediterranean suggested that for both sexes length-at-maturity ranges from 76–79 cm (Capapé, 1977).

The reproductive biology of *G. melastomus* was studied from specimens collected off the Portuguese southern slope by Costa *et al.*, (2005). Sex ratio from specimens caught by commercial crustacean trawlers was 1:1. This species is sexually dimorphic with males approaching maturity at smaller sizes than females ( $L_{50\%}$  males = 49.4 cm;  $L_{50\%}$  females = 69.7 cm). Mating and egg deposition were found to take place all year round, with peaks of reproductive activity in winter and in summer.

A large nursery ground for *G. melastomus* was found in an Irish offshore Special Area of Conservation in 2018 (Marine Institute, 2019).

## 25.8 Exploratory assessment models

No exploratory assessment was presented in 2023, stock were assessed following the ICES category 3 framework.

## 25.9 Stock assessment

### 25.9.1 Approach

Scyliorhinidae stocks were assessed in 2023 using ICES stock data category 3 rules. Indices of the total biomass were used for all stocks except greater-spotted dogfish in subareas 6 and 7 where exploited biomass indices were used. Survey data used are described above (see Section 25.6).

### 25.9.2 Lesser-spotted dogfish (*Scyliorhinus canicula*) in Subarea 4, and divisions 3.a and 7.d (North Sea, Skagerrak and Kattegat, Eastern English Channel)

The assessment of the status of the stock syc.27.3a47d, *Scyliorhinus canicula* in Subarea 4 and Divisions 3.a and 7.d, was presented to WGEF in 2023 following the ICES rfb rule (ICES, 2021b) for Category 3 stocks.

The rfb rule is defined as:

$$A_{y+1} = A_y \times r \times f \times b \times m \quad (\text{Eq 1})$$

Where  $A_{y+1}$  and  $A_y$  refer to the advised catch in 2024 (and 2025) and 2022, respectively;  $r$  is the stocks stock size indicator,  $f$  a fishing mortality proxy,  $b$  a biomass safeguard and  $m$  a multiplier derived based on species-specific life-history parameters.

A stability clause is also included in Equation 1 to restrict the change in advised catch to +20%/-30% conditional on  $b$  exceeding 1.

The input values for the application of the rfb rule for syc.27.3a47d are listed in Table 25.4. Following the rfb rule and our assessment of the stock, the advised catches in 2024 and 2025 should not exceed 2680 tonnes. The advice change (12.2%) is within the range of +20% compared to  $A_y$ , and therefore the stability clause was not applied.

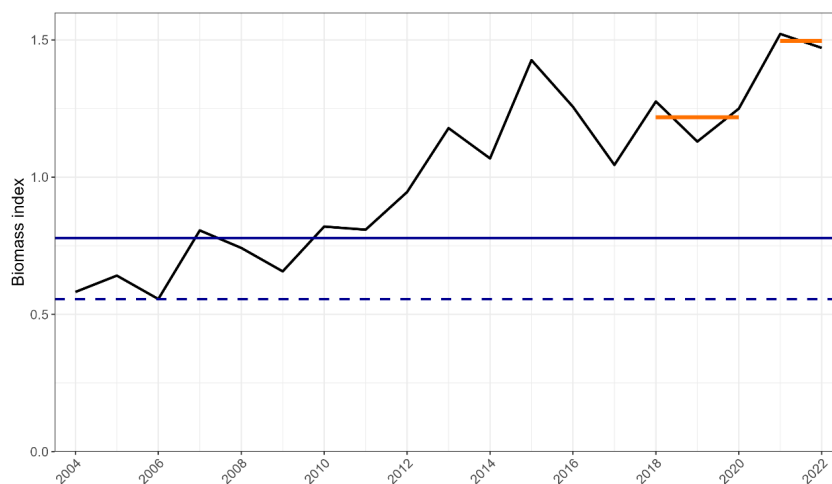
Table 25.4. *Scyliorhinus canicula* in Subarea 4 and Divisions 3.a and 7.d. Estimates used in the rfb rule, with details and comments. All values have been rounded to two decimal places when appropriate; calculations were done using unrounded values.

Variable	Estimate	Input data	Comments
<b>r</b>	1.23	Stoc size indicator of biomass index. From the combined index. NS-IBTS-Q1 and NS-IBTS- Q3, FR-CGFS-Q4, BTS-BEL-Q3 and BTS-Eng-Q3	Index A(2021,2022)= 1.50 Index B (2018-2020) =1.22
<b>b</b>	1.00	Set to 1.00 at $I_{2022}/I_{trigger}$	$I_{loss} = 0.56$ $I_{trigger} = 0.78$ $I_{2022} = 1.47$
<b>m</b>	0.95	Set at 0.95 when a species-specific k parameter is < 0.20	$k = 0.118 \text{ year}^{-1}$
<b>f</b>	0.96	Length data collected from commercial discards and landings 2019 - 2022. $L_c$ and $L_{F=M_c}$ calculated based on pooled data from 2019 - 2022	$L_c = 51 \text{ cm}$ $L_{mean} = 58 \text{ cm}$ $L_{mode} = 56 \text{ cm}$ $L_{F=M} = 60 \text{ cm}$
<b>A<sub>y</sub></b>	2389 tonnes	ICES advice in 2022	ICES (2021a)
<b>A<sub>y+1</sub></b>	2680 tonnes	$A_{y+1} = A_y \times r \times f \times b \times m$	

The stock size indicator used for this stock corresponds to the mean biomass index taken from the combined average of NS-IBTS-Q1 and NS-IBTS-Q3 (kg per hour) and FR-CGFS-Q4 (kg per swept area), BTS-BEL-Q3 and BTS-Eng-Q3 surveys (kg per hour). Survey indices are then normalized to their respective long term mean and a single biomass index is calculated taking the mean of the four normalized indices. The survey index (figure 25.11 and table 25.5) spans the time period of 2004-2022 and covers most of the stock area.

Following the technical guidelines of the rfb rule (ICES, 2022), r is calculated as the average of the two most recent years of data (2021 and 2022) divided by the average of the three years prior to the most recent two (2018-2020). Consequently, r is 1.23.

The parameter b is set as 1.00 because the survey index in 2022 (1.47) is above  $I_{trigger}$  (0.78) and the ratio  $I_{2022}/I_{trigger}$  is 1.88. Here,  $I_{trigger}$  has been set as  $1.4 \times I_{loss}$  with  $I_{loss}$  being the lowest point in the survey index (0.56 in 2006) between 2004-2022.



**Figure 25.11.** *Scyliorhinus canicula* in Subarea 4 and Divisions 3.a and 7.d. Biomass index from 2004-2022, calculated as the combined CPUE indices from the NS-IBTS-Q1, NS-IBTS-Q3, FR-CGFS-Q4, BTS-BEL-Q3 and BTS-Eng-Q3. Orange lines show the two parts of the “2-over-3” rule used to calculate r. The solid and dashed blue lines show the calculated  $I_{trigger}$  and  $I_{loss}$  values, respectively.

**Table 25.5. *Scyliorhinus canicula* in Subarea 4 and Divisions 3.a and 7.d. Yearly normalized values for the biomass survey index. Values have been round to two decimal places; calculations were done using unrounded values.**

Year	NS-IBTS-Q1, NS-IBTS-Q3 combined	BTS-Eng-Q3	FR-CGFS-Q4	BTS-BEL-Q3	Combined index
2004	0.39	0.59	0.63	0.71	0.58
2005	0.28	0.74	1.07	0.48	0.64
2006	0.34	0.38	1.05	0.45	0.56
2007	0.34	0.64	1.43	0.81	0.81
2008	0.58	1.11	0.79	0.49	0.74
2009	0.54	0.75	0.79	0.55	0.66
2010	0.81	1.09	0.86	0.52	0.82
2011	0.77	0.73	0.81	0.92	0.81
2012	1.15	1.09	0.85	0.70	0.95
2013	1.49	1.27	1.03	0.92	1.18
2014	1.48	1.13	0.76	0.90	1.07
2015	1.43	1.34	1.08	1.86	1.43
2016	1.39	1.06	0.93	1.65	1.26
2017	1.44	0.79	0.82	1.13	1.04
2018	1.43	1.04	1.12	1.51	1.28
2019	1.07	0.93	1.07	1.44	1.13
2020	1.29	1.11		1.35	1.25
2021	1.10	2.21	1.42	1.35	1.52
2022	1.67		1.49	1.26	1.47

#### Estimation of length-based indicators (used to derive f-proxy)

Length information for lesser-spotted dogfish is available for both landings and discards. Length data is available from the period 2016-2022 (Figure 25.12), however, earlier years (2016-2018) did not cover the entire length distribution available and therefore were excluded. In 2022, data is provided by 6 countries. Data from France, the Netherlands, England and Scotland for 2019-2022 were considered for the calculation of the length based reference points.

To determine the f-proxy (f),  $L_{mode}$  was calculated as 56 cm (Figure 25.13); as per the technical guidelines of the rfb rule (ICES, 2022).  $L_c$  was calculated as 51cm, which is the first length class above a 50% threshold of the numbers at  $L_{mode}$ .  $L_{mean}$  in 2022 is then calculated as 58 cm.



Figure 25.12. *Scyliorhinus canicula* in Subarea 4 and Divisions 3.a and 7.d. Length frequency distribution by year and catch category (discards and landings).

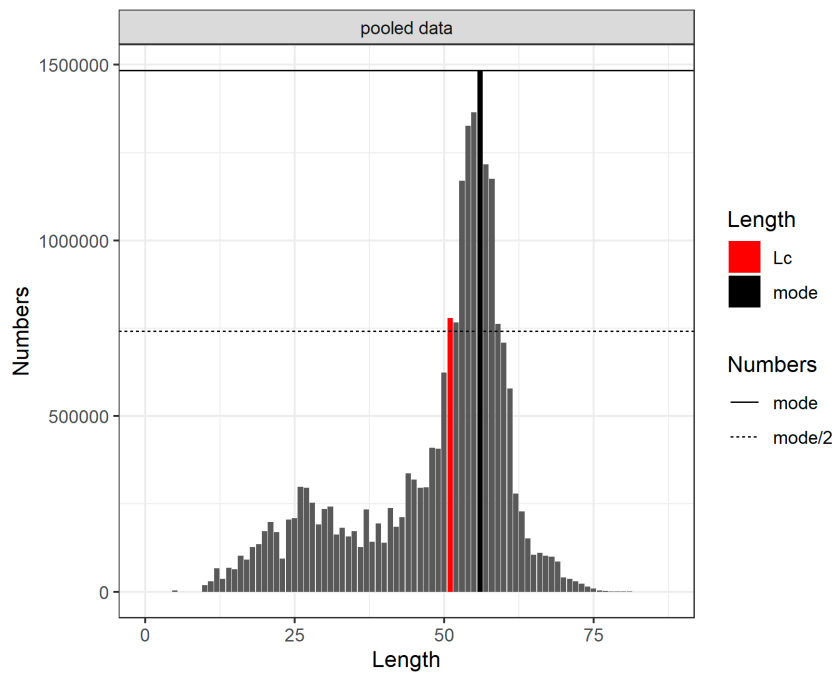


Figure 25.13. *Scyliorhinus canicula* in Subarea 4 and Divisions 3.a and 7.d. Pooled length frequency distribution (2019-2022) used to calculate the length based reference points. Shown in red is the  $L_c$  (length at first capture), black the  $L_{mode}$ , horizontal black line and dashed line the number of fish at  $L_{mode}$  and  $L_{mode}/2$ , respectively.

Information on (female) life history parameters were taken from Ivory *et al.*, (2005) and detailed in Ellis *et al.*, (2023). The study used vertebrae for analysis of life history parameters and samples were collected from the Iris Sea (Divisions 7.a,g) (table 3). These values are listed in Table 25.6.

**Table 25.6** *Scyliorhinus canicula* in Subarea 4 and Divisions 3.a and 7.d. Life history parameters taken from Ivory *et al.*, (2005) and Ellis *et al.*, (2023 – Table 2).

Study area	Sex	N	$L_{inf}$	k
Irish Sea (Div. 7.a,g)	F	405	87.4	0.118
Irish Sea (Div. 7.a,g)	M	301	75.1	0.150

$L_{\infty}$  was set at 87.4cm. The target reference length ( $L_{F=M}$ ) is then calculated as:

$$L_{F=M} = 0.75 L_c + 0.25 L_{\infty} \quad (\text{Eq 2})$$

$$0.75 \times 51 + 0.25 \times 87.4 = 60.1 \text{ cm}$$

Such that  $f$  in 2022 is calculated as:

$$f = L_{\text{mean}2022} / L_{F=M} \quad (\text{Eq 3})$$

And  $f$  in 2019, 2020 and 2021 is calculated as:

$$f = L_{\text{meanyear}} / L_{F=M}$$

Where the  $L_{\text{meanyear}}$  equals each of the years 2019, 2020 and 2021. The  $L_{\text{mean}}$  and  $f$  values per year are found in table 25.7.

**Table 25.7.** *Scyliorhinus canicula* in Subarea 4 and Divisions 3.a and 7.d.  $L_{\text{mean}}$  values and calculated  $f$  values for years 2019-2022.

Year	$L_c$	$L_{\text{mean}}$	$L_{F=M}$	$f$
2019	51	56.9	60.1	0.95
2020	51	56.6	60.1	0.94
2021	51	57.1	60.1	0.95
2022	51	57.8	60.1	0.96

### 25.9.3 Lesser-spotted dogfish (*Scyliorhinus canicula*) in Subarea 6 and divisions 7.a–c and 7.e–j (Celtic Seas and West of Scotland)

The assessment of *Scyliorhinus canicula* in the Celtic Seas (syc.27.a-ce-j) is normally assessed on a biennial cycle as a Category 3 stock, for which survey data are available. Advice was last provided in 2021 for 2022 and 2023. This is the first year for which the rfb rule is used by ICES to assess the stock and provide a catch forecast.

#### Input data and application of the rule

For this stock assessment the following inputs are available:

- Landings information. Reported discards are considered unreliable.
- Four survey indices, combined to produce a relative biomass index
- Length-frequency from commercial catches, including landings and discards.

## Catch Data

Species specific landings are available from 2005 onwards (Table 25.1b). The annual declared quantity of discards is highly variable. Discard information is considered incomplete and is therefore not used in the analysis.

## Survey indices

Four survey indices are used in the assessment: EVHOE-WIBTS-Q4 [G9527], IE-IGFS-WIBTS- Q4 [G7212], SP-PORC-WIBTS-Q3 [G5768], and UK (E&W)-BTS-Q3 [B6596]. Each of these is considered reliable indicator and provides spatial coverage of the stock. All surveys are part of the International Bottom Trawl Survey series and use standardized gear and sampling methods. Each survey was normalized by comparing each annual value to the long-term mean value of the survey (Table 25.8). In turn, the mean value for each year is calculated for the normalized values (Figure 25.14). The total survey time series is truncated to the shortest of the available time series. Missing values, where a particular survey did not take place in a particular year, are not included in the calculations.

**Table 25.8. Survey table. Blank cells are those where the survey either did not take place or was incomplete for a given year.**

Year	IGFS	EVHOE	BTS	Porcupine	Mean
2005	0.580338	0.562735	0.553182299	0.312698216	0.502238
2006	0.595856	0.523538	0.772145391	0.465586901	0.589282
2007	0.715388	1.038879	0.740839568	0.722993533	0.804525
2008	0.904412	1.774894	0.869817888	0.693304148	1.060607
2009	1.043453	1.187699	0.960058642	0.644049169	0.958815
2010	1.221342	0.988494	0.876907218	0.69552456	0.945567
2011	1.469445	1.44855	1.348407484	0.660713205	1.231779
2012	0.809587	0.825392	1.181256671	0.61385784	0.857523
2013	0.949369	0.658538	1.281835915	1.726371974	1.154029
2014	1.006604	0.713901	1.115675052	0.962943552	0.949781
2015	1.243513	0.903362	0.979738561	0.847146543	0.99344
2016	1.488877	0.953113	1.064355256	1.709529534	1.303969
2017	1.240122		0.992921196	1.075017957	1.102687
2018	0.965951	0.732328	1.337822872	1.149056725	1.04629
2019	0.908676	1.159249	0.811032765	0.912202777	0.94779
2020	1.016664	1.321806		0.772596983	1.037022
2021	0.909472	1.212301	0.680016583	0.54546486	0.836814
2022	0.930929	0.99522	0.711146688	3.490941521	1.532059

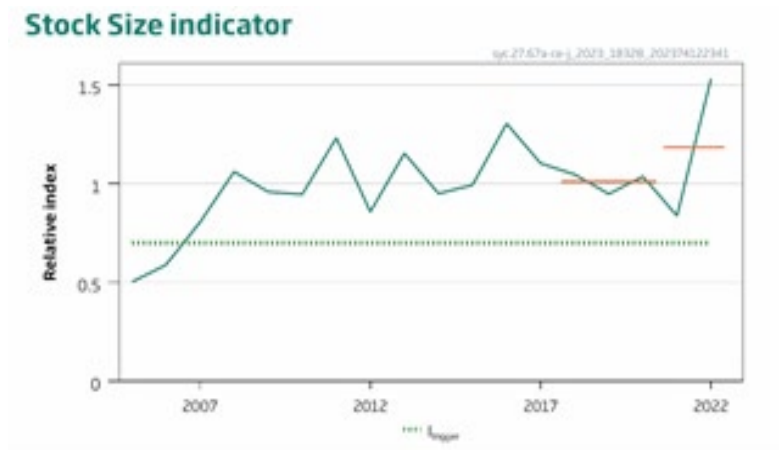


Figure 25.14. Combined survey index from each normalized survey index (see Figure 25.3).

### Length data

Landings and length data are taken from submissions to the ICES WGEF data call. Lengths from both landings and discards are included (Figure 25.15). Lengths are illustrated for each year from 2020-2022. It was agreed by the group (WGEF 2023) that no individual year’s data showed a representative reflection of the lengths in the catch. Therefore these data were pooled to create a combined length frequency (Figure 25.15).

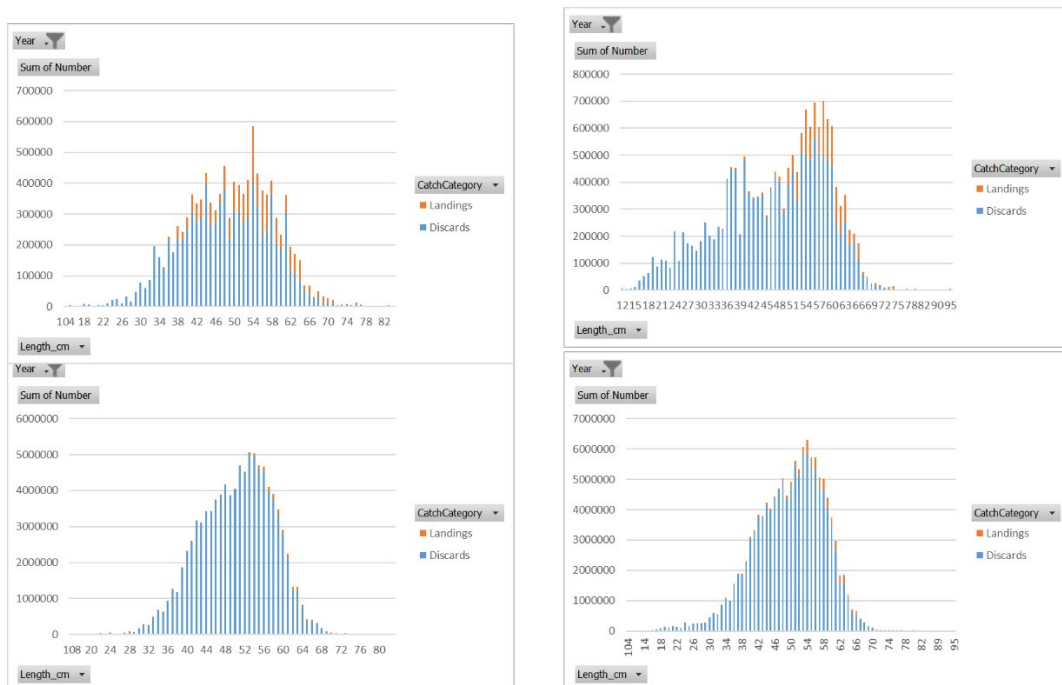


Figure 25.15. Length frequencies by year. Top left 2020. Top Right 2021. Bottom left 2022. Bottom right combined 2020-2022.

### Application of the rfb rule.

The rfb rule is defined as:

$$Ay+1 = Ay \times r \times f \times b \times m$$



where  $A_{y+1}$  and  $A_y$  refer to the advised catch in 2024 (and 2025) and 2022, respectively;  $r$  is the stock size indicator,  $f$  a fishing mortality proxy,  $b$  a biomass safeguard and  $m$  a multiplier derived based on species-specific life-history parameters.

If data are incomplete, other methods may be more appropriate. In this case data are available for each of these variables so the rfb rule was applied.

To calculate the values for the assessment, the R package “cat3advice” provided by Simon Fisher was used. The complete run is provided in Appendix 1 of syc.27.a-ce-j rfb document in WGEF SharePoint. Table 25 9 show the results of the advice.

**a) Biomass trend: r**

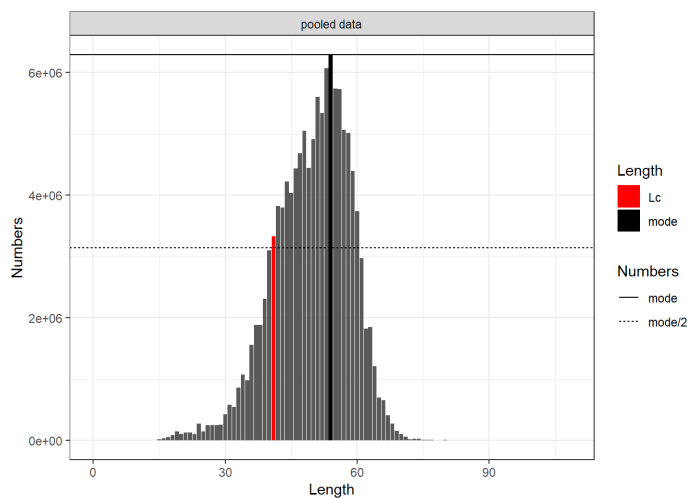
Stock biomass trend ( $r$ ) is calculated by taking the mean value of the last two years and dividing by the mean value of the previous three years. In this case

$$r = \text{mean}_{(2021-2022)} / \text{mean}_{(2018-2020)}$$

$$r = 1.18 / 1.01 \text{ therefore } r = 1.17$$

**b) Length at first capture,  $L_c$**

Following ICES guidelines of the rfb rule (ICES, 2022),  $L_c$  was calculated as 40 cm, which is the first length class above a 50% threshold of the numbers at  $L_{mode}$ .  $L_{mean}$  in 2022 is then calculated as 52 cm (Figure 25.16).  $L_{inf}$  was set at 87.4 cm, taken from fishbase.se.



**Figure 25.16.** *Scyliorhinus canicula* in Subarea 6 and divisions 7.a–c and 7.e–j 4. Combined length frequency distribution (20209-2022) used to calculate the length based reference points. Shown in red is the  $L_c$  (length at first capture), in black the  $L_{mode}$ , Horizontal black line and dashed line the number of fish at  $L_{mode}$  and  $L_{mode}/2$ , respectively.

**c) Fishing pressure proxy: f**

Mean catch length ( $L_{mean} = L_{2022}$ ): 52 cm  
 MSY proxy length ( $L_{F=M}$ ): 53 cm  
 f: Fishing pressure proxy relative to MSY proxy ( $L_{2022}/L_{F=M}$ ): 0.99

**d) Biomass safeguard: b**

Last index value ( $I_{2022}$ ): 1.53

Index trigger value ( $I_{\text{trigger}} = I_{\text{loss}} \times 1.4$ ): 0.70

b: index relative to trigger value: 1.00

**e) Multiplier: m**

$m < m(\text{hr} = \text{"rfb"}, k = 0.1)$

$m = 0.95$

**Table 25.9. Main parameters used in the rfb-rule assessment of syc.27.67 and results of the advice.**

Previous landings advice A (2022, 2023)	3596 tonnes	
Stock biomass trend		
Index A (2021, 2022)	1.18	
Index B (2018, 2019, 2020)	1.01	
r: Index ratio (A/B)	1.17	
Fishing pressure proxy		
Mean catch length ( $L_{\text{mean}} = L_{2022}$ )	52 cm	
MSY proxy length ( $L_{F=M}$ )	53 cm	
f: multiplier for relative mean length in catches ( $L_{\text{mean}}/L_{F=M}$ )	0.99	
Biomass safeguard		
Last index value ( $I_{2022}$ )	1.53	
Index trigger value ( $I_{\text{trigger}} = I_{\text{loss}} \times 1.4$ )	0.7	
b: multiplier for index relative to trigger $\min\{I_{2022}/I_{\text{trigger}}, 1\}$	1.00	
Precautionary multiplier to maintain biomass above $B_{\text{lim}}$ with 95% probability		
m: multiplier (generic multiplier based on life history)	0.95	
RFB calculation: $A_{y+1} = A_y \times r \times f \times b \times m$	3984 tonnes	
Stability clause (+20%/-30% compared to $A_y$ , only applied if $b \geq 1$ )	Not applied	
Discard rate	Unquantified	
Landings advice for 2024 and 2025 ( $A_y \times$ stability clause)	3984 tonnes	
% advice change	10.8 %	

#### 25.9.4 Lesser-spotted dogfish (*Scyliorhinus canicula*) in divisions 8.a–b and 8.d (Bay of Biscay)

An assessment of the status of the stock syc.27.8abd (lesser spotted dogfish, *Scyliorhinus canicula*) in Divisions 8abd using the ICES rfb rule (ICES, 2021) was presented at WGEF 2023. The ICES framework for category 3 stocks was applied (rfbm rule to provide MSY advice, Method 2.1 (ICES, 2022)). ICES has not requested to provide advice for this stock this year.

##### Stock indicator

A total biomass index derived from the EVHOE WIBTS Q4 survey (kg/km<sup>2</sup>) was used as index of stock development (Figure 25.17).

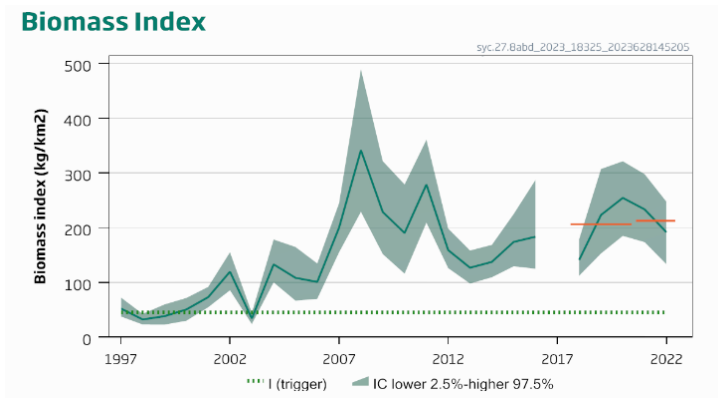


Figure 25.17. Syc.27.8abd. Total biomass index derived from the EVHOE WIBTS Q4 survey (kg/km<sup>2</sup>) G9527. The survey was incomplete in 2017. The horizontal orange lines show the mean stock indicators for 2021- 2022 (212 kg/km<sup>2</sup>) and 2018–2020 (206 kg/km<sup>2</sup>). Index ratio = 1.03

**Catch scenarios**

The advice is based on the ratio (r: Index ratio (A/B)) of the mean of the last two index values (index A) and the mean of the three preceding values (index B), multiplied by the landing average of the last three years ( $A_y$ ); a ratio of observed mean length in the catch relative to the target mean length (f) (Figure 25.18, Table 25.10); a biomass safeguard (b); and a generic multiplier based on life history (m) (Tables 25.11 and 25.12).

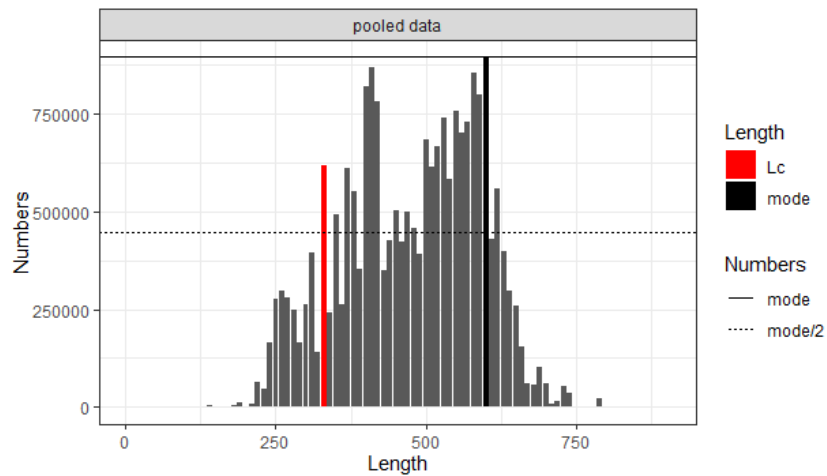


Figure 25.18. Syc.27.8abd. Commercial annual length–frequency distribution of catches (1 cm classes) and for the period for 2019-2022 . Lc in red and Lmode in black.

Table 25.10. Syc.27.8abd. Fishing pressure proxy parameters used in the rfb assessment

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2019-2022
<b>L<sub>mean</sub> (cm)</b>	52.8	47.9	48.7	48.1	
<b>MSY proxy length (L<sub>(F=M)</sub> (cm)</b>	41.6	41.6	41.6	41.6	
<b>L<sub>mean</sub>/ L<sub>(F=M)</sub> =f</b>	1.27	1.15	1.17	1.16	
<b>1/f</b>	0.79	0.87	0.85	0.87	
<b>L<sub>mode</sub> (cm)</b>					60.0
<b>Lc (cm)</b>	40.0	33.0	32.0	26.0	33.0

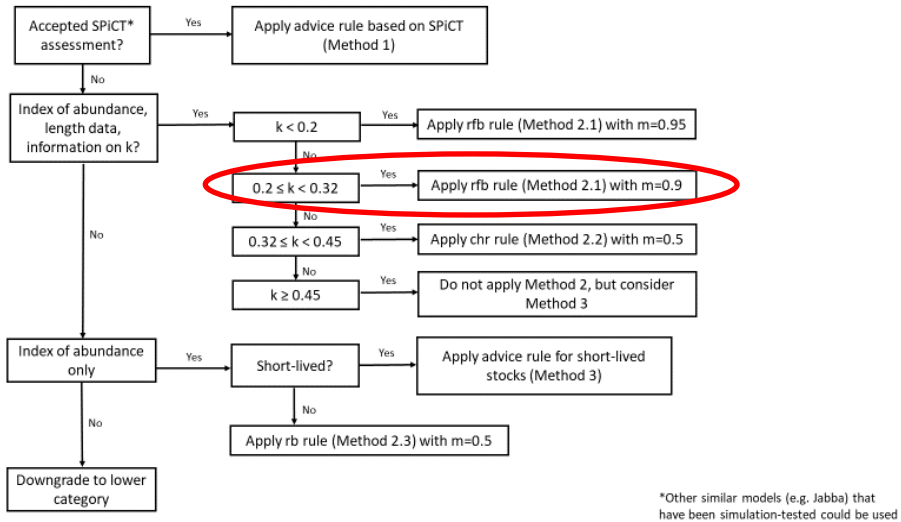
Table 25.11. Syc.27.8abd. Life history parameters used in the rfb-rule assessment

Area	ICES Div.	Linf (cm)	K	Reference
Galicia and Cantabrian Sea	Div. 8.c	67.5	0.21	Rodriguez-Cabello <i>et al.</i> , (2005)

**Table 25.12. Syc.27.8abd. Main parameters used in the rfb-rule assessment.**

<p><math>A_y</math> Landing average in last three years, (2020-2022) = 754 ton</p> <p>r: Index ratio (A/B) = 1.03.</p> <p>b multiplayer = 1</p> <p>f: multiplier = 1.2</p> <p>m multiplier = 0.9 (K = 0.21)</p> <p><math>(I_{loss})</math> (1998) = 32 kg/km<sup>2</sup></p> <p><math>I_{trigger} = I_{loss} \times 1.4 = 45 \text{ kg/km}^2</math></p>
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Following rfb-rule (Figure 25.19), the landings in 2024 and 2025 should not exceed 807 t. Since the advice corresponds to an increase of 7% in relation to the landings average of the last three years (754 t), the stability clause was not applied (Table 25.13).



**Figure 25. 19. The decision tree for applying ICES advice rules to stocks in category 3; stocks with life history information, catch data, and a biomass or abundance index. The left-hand boxes refer to the reliable data and information to be used in the provision of advice; k refers to the von Bertalanffy growth parameter k (unit: yr-1).**

**Table 25.13. Syc.27.8abd. in ICES Division 27.8abd. Basis for the catch scenarios.**

Landing average in last three years, $A_y$ (2020-2022)	754 tonnes	
Stock biomass trend		
Index A (2021, 2022)	212 (kg/km <sup>2</sup> )	
Index B (2018, 2019, 2020)	206 (kg/km <sup>2</sup> )	
r: Index ratio (A/B)	1.03	
Fishing pressure proxy		
Mean catch length ( $L_{\text{mean}} = L_{2022}$ )	48.7 cm	
MSY proxy length ( $L_{F=M}$ )	41.6 cm	
f: multiplier for relative mean length in catches ( $L_{\text{mean}}/L_{F=M}$ )	1.2	
Biomass safeguard		
Last index value ( $I_{2022}$ )	192	
Index trigger value ( $I_{\text{trigger}} = I_{\text{loss}} \times 1.4$ )	45	
b: multiplier for index relative to trigger $\min\{I_{2022}/I_{\text{trigger}}, 1\}$	1	
Precautionary multiplier to maintain biomass above $B_{\text{lim}}$ with 95% probability		
m: multiplier (generic multiplier based on life history)	0.9	
RFB calculation: $A_{y+1} = A_y \times r \times f \times b \times m$	807 tonnes	
Stability clause (+20%/-30% compared to $A_y$ , only applied if $b \geq 1$ )	Not applied	
Discard rate	69	
Landing advice for 2024 and 2025 ( $A_y \times$ stability clause)	807 tonnes	
% advice change <sup>^</sup>	7 %	

### 25.9.5. Lesser-spotted dogfish (*Scyliorhinus canicula*) in divisions 8.c and 9.a (Atlantic Iberian waters)

Lesser-spotted dogfish has been assessed since 2014 under category 3 of ICES DLS (ICES, 2018) using biomass indicator trends estimated from survey data. Assessment of this stock has been provided by ICES WGEF every two years but the last scientific advice was conducted in 2018; since then, ICES has not been requested to give advice on this stock. Previous assessment was based on landings data and biomass index applying the 2 over 5 rule. In 2023, the rfb-rule was applied for the first time to this stock. Biomass index, fishery data and results from length based indicators (LBI) are presented as well as the application of the rfb rule.

#### Survey Data

The stock size indicator used in this analysis corresponds to the standardized biomass index obtained from several surveys conducted in the area:

1) The Spanish annual bottom trawl survey carried out in the North of Spain Demersales (SpNGFS-WIBTS-Q4) corresponding to ICES Divisions 8c and 9a (north). The survey index time series started in 1983 and is standardized from 1990. Evolution of the biomass index time series is shown on Figure 25.4.

2) The Spanish surveys conducted in the south of Spain (Gulf of Cádiz, Div. 9a south) in two seasons, one in spring (mainly in March) and other in autumn (November) (Sp GC-GFS- WIBTS-Q1 and Q4). Spring survey has been performed since 1993 (except in 2003) and the autumn survey since 1997 (Figure 25.5).

3) The Portuguese Groundfish Survey (PtGFS-WIBTS-Q4) carried out along the Portuguese coast (ICES Div. 9a) at the beginning of the 4th quarter, in October since 1981 (Figure 25.6). It covers depths from 20 to 500 m, following the standard IBTS methodology for the western and southern areas (ICES, 2017).

The stock indicator (Figure 25.20 and Table 25.14) is obtained from the average of the survey biomass index of all surveys previous normalized to the time series. The stock size indicator was

truncated in time to the shortest time series available. Missing values, when a particular survey did not take place in a particular year, are not included in the calculations (Table 25.8). In 2021 the surveys in Gulf of Cádiz were not conducted. In 2021 and 2022 the Portuguese survey PT-GFS-WIBTS-Q4 was carried out with a new research vessel without calibration therefore these two years were not included in the analysis of the stock indicator.

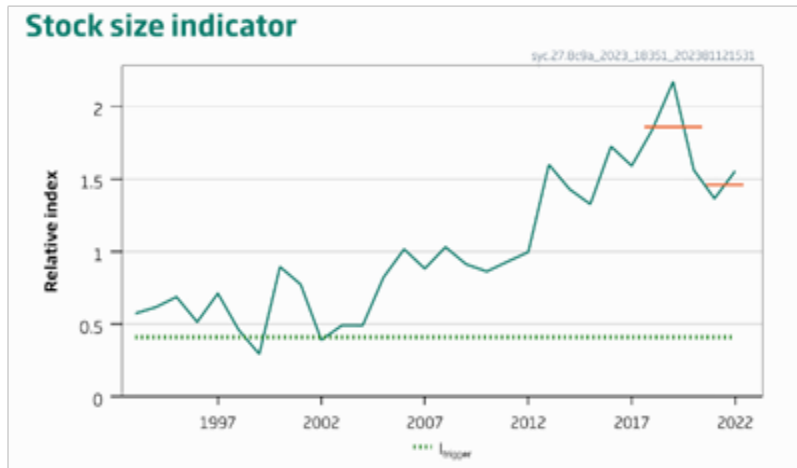


Figure 25.20. Stock size indicator of *S. canicula* (syc.27.8c9a) is the mean normalized biomass index from the average of the two Spanish trawl surveys in the Gulf of Cadiz: SP GCGFS-WIBTS-Q1 (G7511) and SP-GCGFS-WIBTS-Q4 (G4309), the Portuguese survey PT-GFS-WIBTS-Q4 (G8899) and the Northern Spanish survey SP-NGFS-WIBTS-Q4 (G2784). The horizontal orange lines show the mean stock indicators for 2021 and 2022 and 2018–2020.

Table 25.14. *Scyliorhinus canicula* in Atlantic Iberian waters, divisions 8.c and 9.a. Yearly normalized values of the biomass survey indices. Values have been round to two decimal places, calculations were done using unrounded values.

Year	Pt-WIBTS-Q4	Sp-N-WIBTS-Q4	Sp-GC-WIBTS-Q1-Q4 (Combined)	Stock Indicator
1993	0.98	0.49	0.25	0.57
1994	0.77	0.48	0.60	0.62
1995	1.11	0.31	0.64	0.69
1996		0.45	0.58	0.51
1997	1.14	0.46	0.54	0.71
1998	0.79	0.40	0.19	0.46
1999		0.34	0.24	0.29
2000	1.74	0.54	0.40	0.89
2001	1.06	0.76	0.50	0.77
2002	0.46	0.49	0.23	0.39
2003		0.56	0.42	0.49
2004		0.51	0.47	0.49
2005	0.88	0.73	0.86	0.82
2006	0.82	0.84	1.38	1.02
2007	0.73	1.02	0.90	0.88
2008	1.06	0.72	1.31	1.03
2009	1.06	0.86	0.81	0.91
2010	0.65	0.79	1.15	0.86
2011	0.98	0.74	1.07	0.93
2012	1.00	1.01	0.98	1.00

2013	0.76	2.54	1.49	1.60
2014	1.04	1.86	1.38	1.43
2015	0.91	1.58	1.49	1.33
2016		1.71	1.74	1.72
2017	1.36	1.39	2.01	1.59
2018	1.71	1.80	2.01	1.84
2019		1.87	2.47	2.17
2020		1.85	1.27	1.56
2021		1.36		1.36
2022		1.51	1.60	1.55

## Fishery data

### *Landings*

The landings of this stock correspond mainly to Spanish and Portuguese fleets. French landings in the last period are minor and close to 0.05 tonnes (Table 25.1d).

### *Discards*

*Scyliorhinus canicula* is often discarded from continental shelf fisheries. The potentially high discard survival of species in the Scyliorhinidae family, at least for continental shelf fisheries, means that landing data are likely to be more representative of dead removals. The low market value is the main factor that forces the fleet to discard these species. Discard data is available for the Spanish trawl fleet but not for all the stock/area (Table 25.2d), therefore was not considered in the assessment.

### *Length-distribution of landings*

Annual landings length frequency distributions for the Spanish and Portuguese fleet are shown on Figure 25.21. Maximum observed length in Portuguese landings is 66 cm and length range usually from 34-64 cm, whereas in 8c the maximum length recorded from commercial fisheries is 75 cm however length distributions usually ranged from 30 to 62 cm. Biological parameters are available for this stock both in Div. 9a and 8c and in other ICES areas (Ellis *et al.*, 2023) with some differences among them. According to these values and the maximum length observed both in surveys and landings in both areas an asymptotic length of 70 cm has been applied based on Froese (2004) equation (Table 25.19).

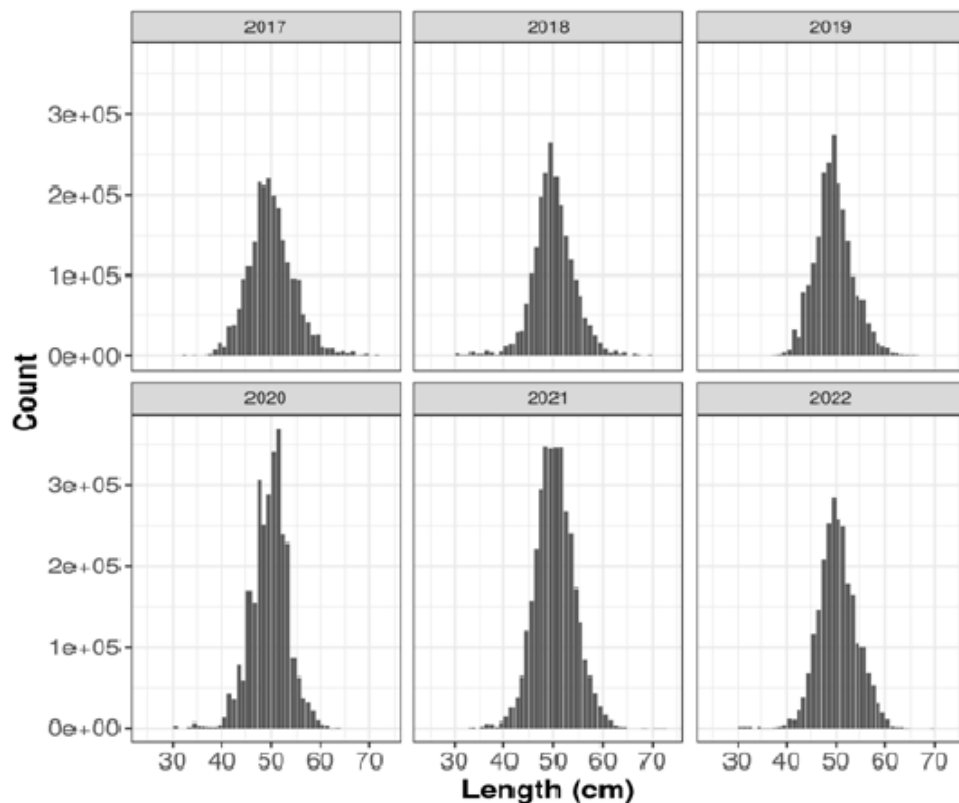


Figure 25.21. *Scyliorhinus canicula* (syc.27.8c9a). Landings length–frequency distribution for both areas and fleets combined.

Table 25.19. *Scyliorhinus canicula* (syc.27.8c9a). Biological parameters used for calculating the LBI parameters.

Parameter	Value	Definition	Source
$L_{\infty}$ (cm)	70	Asymptotic average maximum length	Maximun observed length from PT landings based on $L_{inf}=L_{obs} / 0.95$ (Froese, 2004)
$L_{mat}$	54.2	Length at 50% maturity	Rodriguez-Cabello et al., 1998
a	0.0023	Condition factor parameter of length-weight relationship	Gandara et al., 1994 (IEO Data)
b	3.09	Slope parameter of length-weight relationship	Gandara et al., 1994 (IEO Data)
M/K	1.5	ratio of natural mortality to von Bertalanffy growth rate	Jensen, 1996

The length distribution of discards was not used because discards data are incomplete and dead discards are unknown. Nevertheless, trials with the available length distribution data of discards were done and results did not change the estimated LBI.

The output of the LBI indicators is presented in Table 25.20 (considering 1 cm length classes). The  $F_{MSY}$  proxy ( $L_{mean}/L_{F=M}$ ) value is below the threshold value but very close to 1 (threshold value) and the stock size indicator is above the  $I_{trigger}$  which suggests that the syc.27.8c9a stock is exploited at sustainable levels.

Table 25.20. *Scyliorhinus canicula* in Iberian waters ICES Div.8c9a. Indicator table for LBI analysis. Results from the length landings distribution Portuguese and Spanish fleet combined for the period (2019-2022).



Year	Conservation				Optime Yield	MSY	L <sub>c</sub>	L <sub>mean</sub>	L <sub>F=M</sub>
	L <sub>c</sub> /L <sub>mat</sub>	L <sub>25%</sub> /L <sub>mat</sub>	L <sub>max 5</sub> /L <sub>inf</sub>	P <sub>mega</sub>	L <sub>mean</sub> /L <sub>opt</sub>	L <sub>mean</sub> /L <sub>F=M</sub>			
2017	0.84	0.88	0.87	0.38	1.09	0.35	45.5	51.0	51.6
2018	0.86	0.88	0.85	0.37	1.09	0.34	46.5	51.1	52.4
2019	0.86	0.88	0.84	0.32	1.09	0.30	46.5	50.7	52.4
2020	0.88	0.88	0.82	0.38	1.09	0.35	47.5	51.0	53.1
2021	0.86	0.88	0.84	0.41	1.10	0.38	46.5	51.2	52.4
2022	0.86	0.88	0.84	0.41	1.10	0.37	46.5	51.1	52.4

The results of the advice based on applying the rfb rule is presented in the table below (Table 25.21).

Table 25.21. Lesser-spotted dogfish in divisions 8.c and 9.a (syc.27.8c9a). Input parameters and results of the advice following the rfb rule.

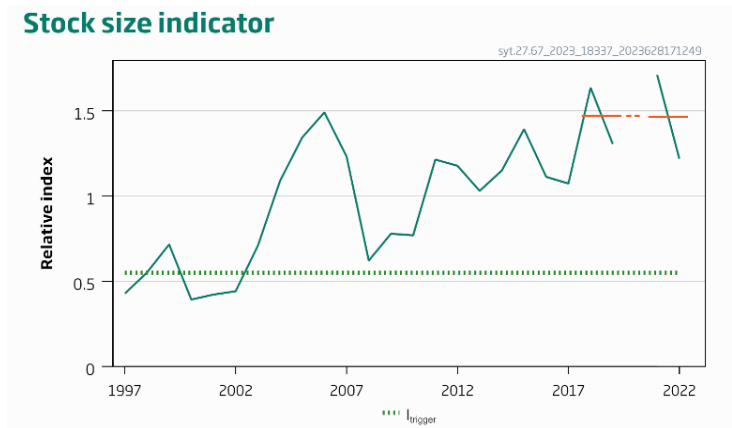
Landings average in last 3 years A <sub>y</sub> (2020-2022)	1328 tonnes
Stock biomass trend	
Index A (2021, 2022)	1.46 kg.h <sup>-1</sup>
Index B (2018, 2019, 2020)	1.86 kg.h <sup>-1</sup>
r: Index ratio (A/B)	0.79
Fishing pressure proxy	
Mean catch length (L <sub>mean</sub> = L <sub>2022</sub> )	51.1 cm
MSY proxy length (L <sub>F=M</sub> )	52.4 cm
f: multiplier for relative mean length in catches (L <sub>mean</sub> /L <sub>F=M</sub> )	0.98
Biomass safeguard	
Last index value (I <sub>2022</sub> )	1.55
Index trigger value (I <sub>trigger</sub> = I <sub>loss</sub> × 1.4)	0.41
b: multiplier for index relative to trigger min{I <sub>2022</sub> /I <sub>trigger</sub> , 1}	1
Precautionary multiplier to maintain biomass above B <sub>lim</sub> with 95% probability	
m: multiplier (generic multiplier based on life history)	0.95
RFB calculation: A <sub>y+1</sub> = A <sub>y</sub> × r × f × b × m	977 tonnes
Stability clause (+20%/-30% compared to A <sub>y</sub> , only applied if b ≥ 1)	Not applied
Discard rate	Unquantified
Landings advice for 2024 and 2025 (A <sub>y</sub> × stability clause)	977 tonnes
% advice change	26%

### 25.9.6. Greater-spotted dogfish (*Scyliorhinus stellaris*) in subareas 6 and 7 (Celtic Seas and West of Scotland)

The greater-spotted dogfish (*Scyliorhinus stellaris*) in subareas 6 and 7 (syt.27.67), was assessed as an ICES Category 3 stock. The rfb rule was applied. This is the first time ICES assessed this stock using the rfb rule and the previous advice did not recommended a catch level. Therefore, A<sub>y</sub>, the advice value for the current year, was replaced by the average landings in recent years. Survey indices were used to derive the r and b factors of the RFB rule and the f factor was derived from length distribution of landings. Discards data were insufficient to be included in the assessment. Further, survival is expected to be high for *S. stellaris*, as for the related *S. canicula* but has not been quantified for *S. stellaris*. Lastly, the m multiplier of 0.95 was applied as the coefficient k of the Von Bertalanffy growth model is considered smaller than 0.2.

Survey indices were calculated following methods from WSKATE (ICES, 2021), two indices of exploitable biomass (individuals ≥50 cm TL). The standardized survey index was calculated from the UK (E&W)-BTS-Q3 index in kg.h<sup>-1</sup> and the CGFS-Q4 index in kg.km<sup>-2</sup>. The standardized index is the average of the two indices standardized to their long-term mean for years 1997–2022 (Figure 25.22). Data from 2020 were not included because UK(E&W)-BTS-Q3 covered only

Division 7.f, so that the main part of the stock area, Cardigan Bay and Anglesey in 7.a, was not sampled due to COVID-19 (Silva and Ellis, 2021 WD10) and CGFS Q4 only covered the French part of 7.d. As a consequence, the assessment is based on the comparison of the combined index in 2018 and 2019 to the average of the index in 2021–2022. Reported landings have increasing since 2009 and seem to stabilize in recent years. This is mainly explained by the labelling improvement for *Scyliorhinus stellaris* in logbooks and sales records.



**Figure 25. 22.** Greater spotted dogfish in subareas 6 and 7. The stock size indicator is the mean normalized exploitable biomass index (individuals of  $\geq 50$  cm total length) from the average of the UK(E&W) BTS Q3 survey in divisions 7.a and 7.f in  $\text{kg}\cdot\text{hr}^{-1}$  and FR-CGFS-Q4 survey in Division 7.d in  $\text{kg}\cdot\text{km}^{-2}$ . The horizontal orange lines show the mean stock size indicator for years 2018–2019 (2020 missing) and 2021–2022.

Landings length distribution were taken from data submitted to InterCatch (Figure 25.23). The cat3advice R package was used to analyse length data as follows:

- Length at first capture ( $L_c$ ) was calculated from pooled data for years 2019–2022, using 2 cm length classes. Five cm length classes resulted in the same  $L_c$  estimate, but 1 cm length classes resulted in a smaller  $L_c$ , because of uneven length distribution (Figure 1)
- $L_c=60$  cm was retained as resulting from a smoother length distribution because high and low, including empty length classes are observed in the length distribution by 1 cm classes.

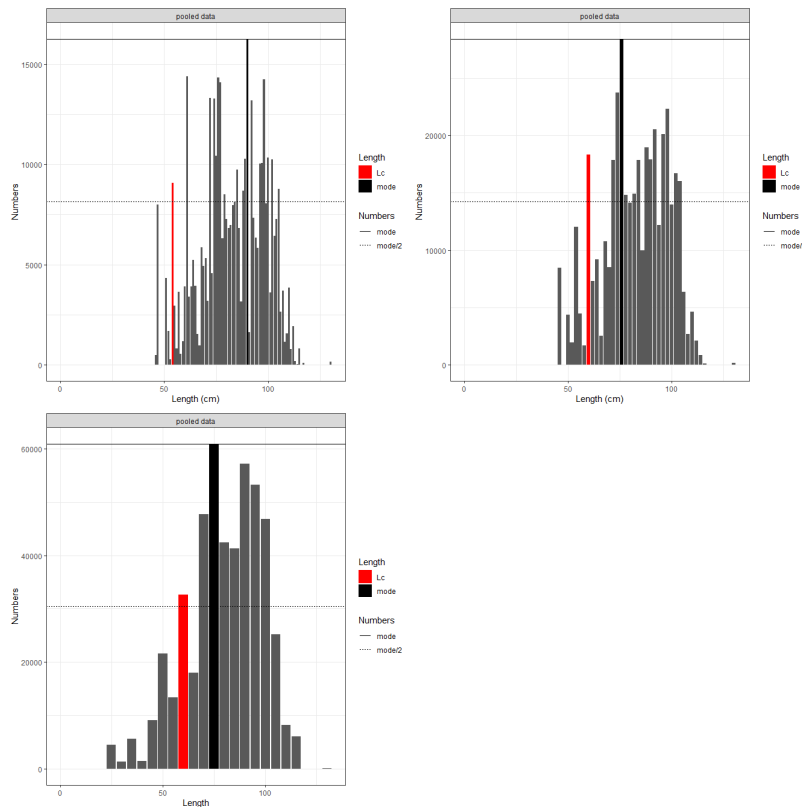


Figure 25.23. *Scyliorhinus stellaris* in subareas 6 and 7. Length frequency distribution of the landings, pooled data from 2019 to 2022, with  $L_c$  (red bar) and mode of the distribution (black bar) using length bins of 1, 2 and 5 cm.

The length distribution of discards was not used because discards data are incomplete and survival, which is expected to be high, has not been estimated. Although, trials where the available length distribution data of discards were included did not change the estimated LBIs, length distribution of discards was considered too uncertain to be included. The rfb rule was applied as detailed in the table below (25.22).

Table 25.22. Greater-spotted dogfish in subareas 6 and 7. Input parameters and results of the advice following the rfb rule.

Variable	Estimate	Input data	Comment
r: biomass indicator			
Index A (2021-2022)	1.46456411	Stock-size indicator: mean	UK(E&W)-BTS-Q3 in kg.hr <sup>-1</sup>
Index B (2018-2019)	1.47027873	normalized exploitable biomass index (individuals of ≥ 50 cm TL) from the average of the UK(E&W)-BTS-Q3 (B6596) in divisions 7.a and 7.f and FR-CGFS-Q4 (G3425) in Division 7.d	FR-CGFS-Q4 in kg.km <sup>-2</sup> 2020 data not used for UK-BT, survey coverage reduced (COVID-19 disruption)
r: Stock biomass trend	0.99611324		
f: length distribution of landings from 2019 to 2020			
		cm	
$L_\infty$	127.3684		No realistic estimate of $L_\infty$ from growth study. $L_{max}$ =121 cm taken from Heesen and al. (2015). $L$ estimated as $L_{max}/0.95$ =127.3684 (rfb)

			calculation carried out with unrounded input)s
$L_{mean}$	86.79916 (20122)	Mean length (cm) in the catch 2022, using 2 cm bins	
$L_c$	60	Length at first capture (cm) in landings, using 2 cm bins and pooling length data from 2019 to 2022	Length data are not numerous so four year were pooled and length classes aggregated. Larger length classes of 5cm result in the same $L_c$ .
$L_{F=M}$	76.84211	cm	$0.75 * L_c + 0.25 * L_{\infty}$
$f$ : multiplier for relative mean length in catches ( $L_{mean}/L_{F=M}$ )	1.12957816506019		
<b>b: Biomass safeguard</b>			
$I_{loss}$	0.3924567	Lowest index in the time series (2000)	The biomass index shows an increasing trend since the beginning of the time series
$I_{trigger} = I_{loss} \cdot 1.4$	0.5494394		
$I_{2022}$	1.2185871		
$b$	1	$\min(1, I_{y-1}/I_{trigger})$	
<b>m: Based on the parameter k of the Von Bertalanffy growth</b>			
m linked to von Bertalanffy k	0.95	k estimated from the Von Bertalanffy model adopted for the species	No suitable growth estimate. Species considered moderately productive so $k < 0.2$
Stability clause		Not applied	
$A_y \times r \times f \times b \times m$	$638 \times 0.99611324$ $\times 1.12957816506019$ $\times 1 \times 0.95$	$A_y * r * f * b * m$	RFB rule applied for the first time and previous advice did not quantify catch. $A_y$ taken as average of landings in the three last years 538, 677 and 699 tonnes in 2020, 2021, 2022.

Landings data are presented in table 25.1e and time series of biomass indices used for assessment are given in the following table 25.23.

Table 25.23. Greater-spotted dogfish in subareas 6 and 7 (syt.27.67). Yearly normalized values of the biomass survey index.

Year	Standardized biomass indices			Values for calculating the r rator
	CGFS	UK-BTS	Average	
1997	0.36268204	0.49173998	0.42721101	
1998	0.42430385	0.67740496	0.5508544	
1999	0.36674425	1.06501176	0.71587801	
2000	0.30572944	0.47918398	0.39245671	

2001	0.18025511	0.66300954	0.42163232	
2002	0.64449483	0.2380663	0.44128056	
2003	0.65591037	0.76010688	0.70800862	
2004	1.16348182	1.01400183	1.08874182	
2005	1.40933907	1.27769223	1.34351565	
2006	1.90615687	1.07539532	1.4907761	
2007	1.90082376	0.56272498	1.23177437	
2008	0.77402183	0.46809633	0.62105908	
2009	0.80499998	0.75235288	0.77867643	
2010	1.07565818	0.46315287	0.76940552	
2011	0.4724864	1.95501536	1.21375088	
2012	0.6285922	1.72607698	1.17733459	
2013	0.89801222	1.16233545	1.03017384	
2014	0.89566642	1.40418745	1.14992694	
2015	1.39682669	1.38766957	1.39224813	
2016	1.29006137	0.9345857	1.11232353	
2017	1.17932249	0.96724914	1.07328581	
2018	1.97138967	1.29995407	1.63567187	
2019	0.98336385	1.62640732	1.30488558	Index B: 1.47027873
2020				
2021	1.76288132	1.6582009	1.71054111	
2022	1.54679599	0.89037824	1.21858711	Index A: 1.46456411

### 25.9.7. Black-mouth dogfish (*Galeus melastomus*) in subareas 6 and 7 (Celtic Sea and West of Scotland)

An assessment of the status of blackmouth catshark, (*Galeus melastomus*) in the Celtic Sea, subareas 6 and 7 (sho.27.67) was presented at WGEF 2023. A biomass index, catch statistics and results from length based indicators (LBI) were considered for assessment, but the rb rule rather than the rfb rule was applied in the final assessment.

This species is normally assessed on a biennial cycle as a Category 3 stock, for which survey data are available. Advice was last provided in 2021 for 2022 and 2023. This is the first year for which the rfb rule is used by ICES to assess the stock and provide a catch forecast.

#### Stock indicator

The stock size indicator is based on the biomass index ( $\text{kg}\cdot\text{hr}^{-1}$ ) obtained from the Spanish bottom trawl survey carried out annually in Porcupine (SP-POR-WIBTS-Q3 survey). This is the only survey that provides data for this stock which started in 2001 (Figure 25.24).

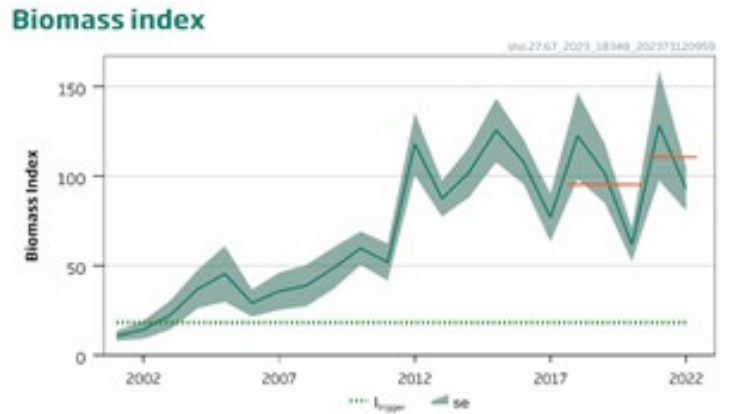


Figure 25.24. *Galeus melastomus* (sho.27.67). Biomass index derived from Spanish Porcupine survey (SP-POR WIBTS-Q3). The horizontal orange lines show the mean stock indicators for 2021- 2022 and 2018–2020. Index ratio = 1.16.

**Length data**

Landings and length data are taken from submissions to the ICES WGEF data call. Lengths from both landings and discards were considered at WGEF. (Figure 25.25). Length data were available for 2019, 2021 and 2022. No data were submitted for 2020. It was agreed that even when three years of data (four year time-span) were combined, the supplied length frequency could not be considered to be representative of the stock, and therefore length could not be used in the assessment. Therefore instead of the rfb rule the rb rule was applied.

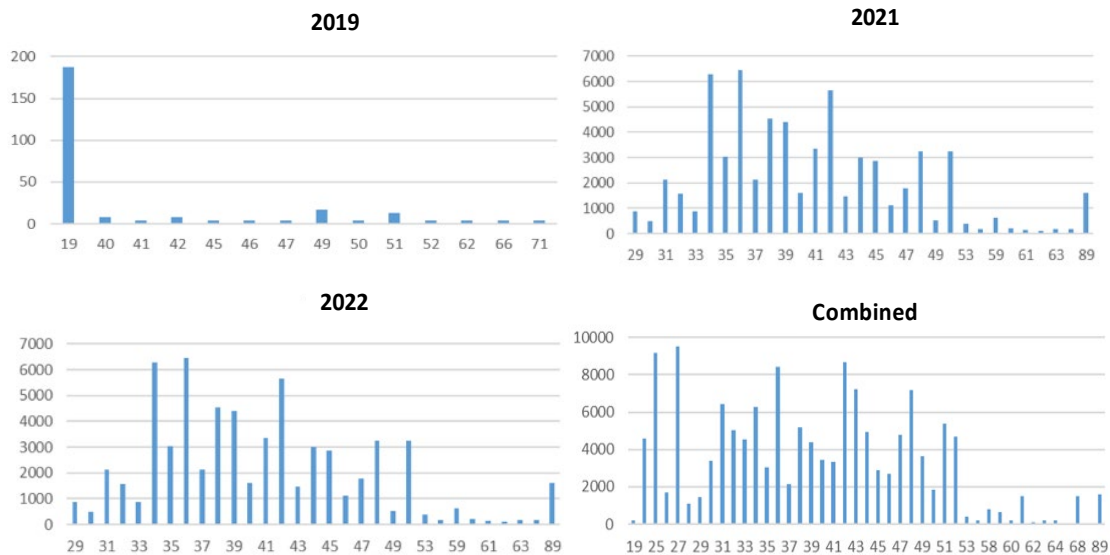


Figure 25.25. Length distribution of landings available for *Galeus melastomus* (sho.27.67).

**Catch Data**

**Landings**

Species specific landings are available from 2005 onwards (Table 25.24). The annual declared quantity of discards is highly variable. Discard information is considered incomplete and is therefore not used in the analysis.

Table 25.24. Landings data used in the assessment. Source: WGEF landings database.

Year	France	Spain	Total
2005		0.10	0.10
2006		2.89	2.89
2007		0.35	0.35
2008	0.06		0.06
2010	0.44		0.44
2011	0.05		0.05
2012	0.02		0.02
2015	0.26		0.26
2016	0.13		0.13
2017	0.07		0.07
2019	0.23		0.23
2020	0.05		0.05
2021	0.20		0.20

### *Discards*

Annual international landings reported as blackmouth dogfish are of a similar magnitude as that which may be observed in a single survey haul, indicating that reported species-specific landings are not reflective of stock abundance and most of the commercial catch would be discarded. However reported discards are also very low and not in line with expected catches. Available discards are not considered to be of sufficient quality to be used in the assessment (Table 25.25).

Table 25.25. Reported Discards of blackmouth dogfish, *Galeus melastomus* in subareas 6 and 7. Source: WGEF Discards database.

Year	Spain	Ireland	Total
2009		15.04	15.04
2010		14.17	14.17
2011		6.75	6.75
2014		0.44	0.44
2015		2.15	2.15
2016		67.24	67.24
2017		0.38	0.38
2018	67.80	12.68	80.47
2019	5.46	13.95	19.41
2020	0.08	14.23	14.32
2021	13.38	155.48	168.86
2022	14.86		14.86

### **Application of the rb rule.**

The rb rule is defined as:  $A_{y+1} = A_y \times r \times b \times m$

Where r is the stock size indicator, b is a biomass safeguard and m is a multiplier, fixed in this case at 0.5 to ensure a precautionary reduction in advice of up to 50% per annum. The input parameters and results are shown on Table 25.26.

a) Biomass trend: r

Stock biomass trend (r) is calculated by taking the mean value of the last two years and dividing by the mean value of the previous three years. In this case:

$$r = \text{mean}(2021-2022) / \text{mean}(2018-2020)$$

$$r = 110.7/95.4 \quad \text{thus, } r = 1.16$$

b) Biomass safeguard: b

$$I_{\text{trigger}} = I_{\text{loss}} * 1.4$$

$$I_{\text{trigger}} = I_{\text{loss}}(2001) * 1.4 \quad \text{thus } I_{\text{trigger}} = 10.8 * 1.4 = 15.1$$

$$b: \text{index relative to trigger value, } \min\{I_{2023}/I_{\text{trigger}}, 1\} \quad 1$$

c) Multiplier: m  $m = 0.5$

Following the rb rule the results are shown on table 25.26.

Table 25.26. *Galeus melastomus* in ICES subareas 6 and 7 (sho.27.67) basis for the catch scenarios.

Previous catch advice $A_y$ (2022, 2023)	NA	
Biomass index		
I: most recent biomass index ( $I_{2022}$ )	93.03	
MSY proxy harvest rate	NA	
Stock biomass trend		
Index A (2021, 2022)	110.7	
Index B (2018, 2019, 2020)	95.4	
r: Index ratio (A/B)	1.16	
Biomass safeguard		
Index trigger value ( $I_{\text{trigger}}$ )	15.2	
b: index relative to trigger value, $\min\{I_{2023}/I_{\text{trigger}}, 1\}$	1	
Precautionary multiplier to maintain biomass above Blim with 95% probability	0.5	
RB calculation $A_{y+1} = A_y \times r \times b \times m$		
Stability clause (+20%/-30% compared to $A_y$ , only applied if $b \geq 1$ )	Applied	0.7
Discard rate	Unquantified	
Catch advice for 2024 and 2025 ( $A_y \times$ stability clause)	Unquantified	
Projected landings corresponding to advice**	Unquantified	
% advice change^	-30%	

“ICES advises that when the precautionary approach is applied, catches in each of the years 2022 and 2023 should be decreased by no less than 36% compared to the average catches in 2018–2020. ICES cannot quantify the corresponding catches or landings.”



This means that this advice can also not be provided in quantifiable amounts. As the stability clause is applied, this means that a further reduction in catches of 30% is advised. ICES cannot quantify the corresponding catches or landings.

### 25.9.8. Black-mouth dogfish (*Galeus melastomus*) in Subarea 8 and Division 9.a (Bay of Biscay and Atlantic Iberian waters)

An assessment of the status of the stock sho.27.89a, black-mouth catshark, (*Galeus melastomus*) in Divisions 8 and 9a was presented at WGEF 2023. An rfb-rule was tried as assessment in 2023, but the length data were not considered reliable for this stock and therefore, the fishing mortality proxy ( $f$ : multiplier for relative mean length in catches ( $L_{mean}/L_{F=M 2022}$ ) was not used for the assessment. Finally, an ICES framework rb-rule for category 3 stocks was applied (Figure 25.26).

The method is defined as:  $A_y \times r \times b \times m$  where  $A_y$  corresponds to the landing average of the last three years,  $r$  to the stock biomass trend,  $b$  to the biomass safeguard,  $m$  to a multiplier related to life history. The stability clause (+20%/-30%) is only applied if the change in the advice  $b \geq 1$ .

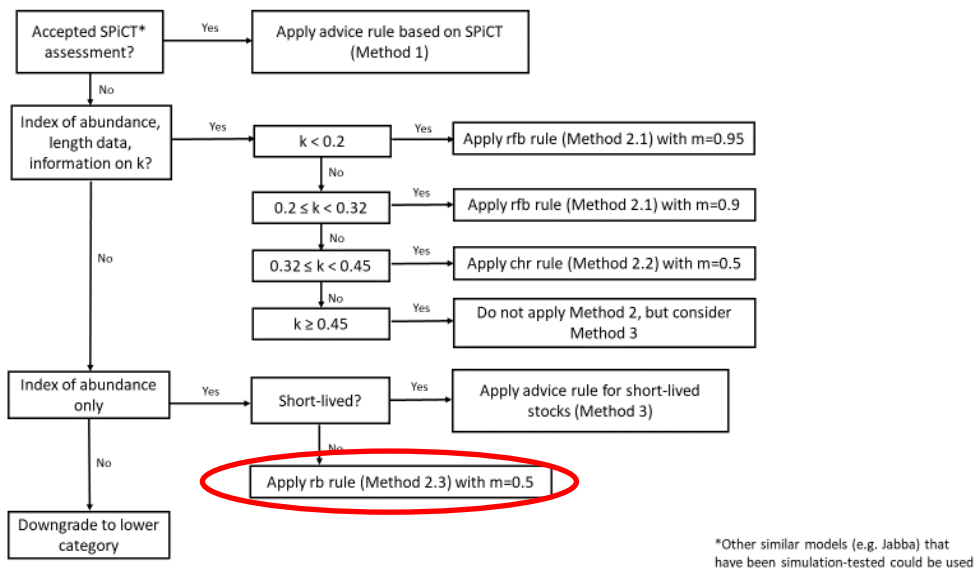


Figure 25.26. The decision tree for applying ICES advice rules to stocks in category 3; stocks with life history information, catch data, and a biomass or abundance index. The left-hand boxes refer to the reliable data and information to be used in the provision of advice;  $k$  refers to the von Bertalanffy growth parameter  $k$  (unit: yr<sup>-1</sup>).

#### Stock indicator

A combined stock biomass index, using the standardized biomass index from the average of the two Spanish surveys SP-GCGFS-WIBTS-Q1 [G7511], SP-GCGFS-WIBTS-Q4 [G4309], as well as EVHOE WIBTS Q4 [G9527] and PT CTS (UWTV [FU 28–29]; [G2913] was considered as index of stock development (Figure 25.27).

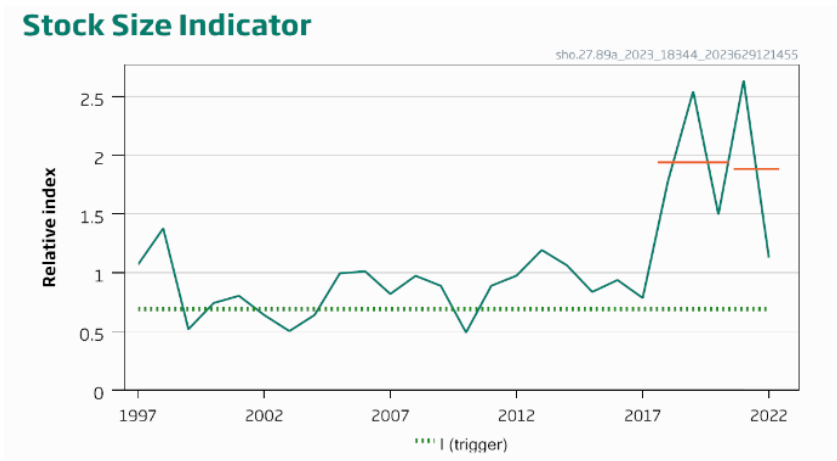


Figure 25.27. *Galeus melastomus* (sho.27.89a). Combined biomass index derived from the three surveys. The horizontal orange lines show the mean stock indicators for 2021- 2022 and 2018–2020. Index ratio = 0.971

**Catch scenarios**

The advice is based on the ratio (r: Index ratio (A/B ) of the mean of the last two index values (index A) and the mean of the three preceding values (index B), multiplied by the landing average of the last three years (Ay); a biomass safeguard (b); and a generic multiplier based on life history (m) (Tables 25.27 and 25.28).

Table 25.27. *Galeus melastomus* (sho.27.89a). Life history parameters used in the rbm-rule assessment.

Linf (cm)*	K**
90.0	0.13

\*<https://fishbase.mnhn.fr/popdyn/PopCharSummary.php?ID=807&Genus-Name=Galeus&SpeciesName=melastomus&fc=703&vStockcode=823&autoctr=17616>

\*\*Baptista et al (2010).

Table 25.28. *Galeus melastomus* (sho.27.89a).. Main parameters used in the rbm-rule assessment

<p>Ay Landing average in last three years, (2020-2022) = 113 ton</p> <p>r: Index ratio (A/B) = 0.971.</p> <p>b multiplier = 1</p> <p>m multiplier = 0.5</p> <p>(I<sub>loss</sub>) (2010) = 0.49</p> <p>I<sub>trigger</sub> = I<sub>loss</sub> × 1.4 = 0.69</p>
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Due to the advice  $A_{y+1}/A_y = 55/113 = -51\%$ , the stability clause was considered and applied to limit the decrease in catch advice to 30%. Following rbm rule, the landings in 2024 and 2025 should not exceed 79 t (Table 25.29).

Table 25.29. *Galeus melastomus* (sho.27.89a) in ICES Division 27.8abd. basis for the catch scenarios.

Landing average in last three years, $A_y$ (2020-2022)	113 tonnes	
Stock biomass trend		
Index A (2021, 2022)	1.88	
Index B (2018, 2019, 2020)	1.94	
r: Index ratio (A/B)	0.971	
Biomass safeguard		
Last index value ( $I_{2022}$ )	1.13	
Index trigger value ( $I_{\text{trigger}} = I_{\text{loss}} \times 1.4$ )	0.69	
b: multiplier for index relative to trigger $\min\{I_{2022}/I_{\text{trigger}}, 1\}$	1	
Precautionary multiplier to maintain biomass above $B_{\text{lim}}$ with 95% probability		
m: multiplier (generic multiplier based on life history)	0.5	
RB calculation: $A_{y+1} = A_y \times r \times b \times m$	55 tonnes	
Stability clause (+20%/-30% compared to $A_y$ , only applied if $b \geq 1$ )	Applied	0.7
Discard rate	Unquantified	
Landing advice for 2024 and 2025 ( $A_y \times$ stability clause)	79 tonnes	
% advice change	-30%	

## 25.10 Quality of the assessments

Although the trawl surveys used in this report were not designed to sample catsharks, *S. canicula* and *G. melastomus* are sampled in large numbers in various surveys. Survey indices are considered to properly track stock abundance trends for these species.

In relation to *G. melastomus*, fisheries-independent data in the Portuguese surveys suggest that this species may have been historically aggregated with *G. atlanticus*, and there may be some problems with misidentification of these two species, especially historically (Moura *et al.*, 2015a WD; Moura *et al.*, 2017b WD). Data from the Portuguese crustacean surveys/*Nephrops* TV Surveys (PT-CTS (UWTV (FU 28–29))) conducted in 2014 showed that *G. melastomus* is more abundant and distributed mainly >500 m deep, and so data from depths  $\geq 500$  m were considered for assessment purposes.

Survey effort on rocky, inshore grounds is limited, and so catch rates for the larger-bodied *S. stellaris* are low in some surveys, as this species favours rocky, inshore habitats.

Commercial data are more problematic due to the widespread use of generic categories (e.g. “dogfish”), especially in earlier years. Although a greater proportion of the data is reported to species or genus level, the quality of these data has not been evaluated. Other issues may constrain the use of these data, for example possible misidentification in areas such as the Celtic Seas where both *S. canicula* and *S. stellaris* occur. Furthermore, historical data may be underestimated as these species may have not been marketed for human consumption, and might therefore not have all been included in official landings, e.g. in those areas where *S. canicula* may be landed for use as bait in pot fisheries. Therefore, landings data are not considered to be accurate and should be viewed as preliminary results.

Catsharks are mainly caught as bycatch and have a moderate market value (including no human consumption market for the smaller fraction) resulting in a high level of discarding. Previous studies have shown that *S. canicula* may have a high survival rate (see Section 25.3.3), and while there are no current studies for *S. stellaris*, it can be assumed that the survival of this shallow-water species may be high. Therefore, discards of Scyliorhinidae should not be considered exclusively as dead removals. However, for *G. melastomus* anecdotal information suggests survival will be lower. Further studies should be considered if more accurate information on the level of discarding is to be inferred for the two latter species.

Portuguese surveys ((PtGFS-WIBTS-Q4 and PT-CTS UWTW (FU 28–29)) were not conducted in 2019 and in 2020 but the effect in the stock size indicators of syc.27.8c9a and sho.27.89a is thought to be minimal (see Section 25.6; WD05 – Moura *et al.*, 2021).

Although discussions during WSKATE highlighted the importance of using DATRAS datasets instead of national databases, there are remaining discrepancies in species mapping on historical data within UK(E&W)-BTS-Q3 (in 7.afg) survey series on DATRAS (e.g. *Scyliorhinus stellaris*). Therefore, to make calculations similar across sharks and skate species (with the latter shown in Silva and Ellis, 2020 WD), survey indices presented in 2021 relate to national data (Silva and Ellis, 2021 WD10).

In 2021, EVHOE-WIBTS-Q4 survey indices were updated following WSKATE methodology using data available on DATRAS (ICES, 2021), contrary to previous advice where calculations were based on national data.

### 25.11 Reference points

No reference points have been proposed for these stocks.

### 25.12 Conservation considerations

Both *S. canicula* and *G. melastomus* are listed as Least Concern, *S. stellaris* previously listed as near threaten is now included in the category of vulnerable (Finucci *et al.*, 2021a) and *G. atlanticus* is listed as Near Threatened (Finucci *et al.*, 2021b) on the IUCN Red List (IUCN, 2021) and in the Red List of European marine fish (Nieto *et al.*, 2015).

*S. canicula*, *S. stellaris* and *G. melastomus* are listed as Least Concern on the Irish Red List of Cartilaginous Fish (Clarke *et al.*, 2016).

### 25.13 Management considerations

Catsharks are generally viewed as relatively productive in comparison to other elasmobranchs (e.g. McCully Phillips *et al.*, 2015). Given this, and that they have a low commercial value and are bycatch species, catsharks are typically of lower management interest in comparison to other elasmobranchs.

Landings data are highly uncertain, and further efforts are required to construct a meaningful time-series. Discarding is known to occur for most of these Scyliorhinidae species and is known to be very high and variable between fleets. Therefore, further efforts are needed to best estimate discard rates.

Over the past two decades, biomass indicators of *S. canicula* and *S. stellaris* have been increasing in almost all surveys. As one of the more productive demersal elasmobranchs that is often discarded (with a high discard survival) and is known to scavenge on discards, it is unclear as to whether or not the increasing biomass of *S. canicula* is a sign of healthy ecosystems.

Discard survival of *Scyliorhinus* spp. is considered high, but estimates for discard survival for *Galeus* spp. are currently unavailable.

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## 25.15 Tables and Figures





Total	159	159	169	186	158	141	133	141	960	838	892	100	119	109	957	702	781	778
	7	8	1	3	6	5	0	8				2	3	3				

**Table 25.1d. Catsharks (Scyliorhinidae) in the Northeast Atlantic. ICES estimates of landings (t) of lesser-spotted dogfish *Scyliorhinus canicula* in divisions 8.c and 9.a (Atlantic Iberian waters).**

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
France	1	1	1	1	0		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Spain	297	333	327	272	229	336	364	555	577	464	417	398	448	484	449	853	1001	632
Portugal	568	591	595	546	535	522	551	544	520	521	554	589	619	530	588	555	493	451
Total	866	925	923	819	765	858	915	1099	1097	985	971	987	1067	1014	1037	1408	1495	1082

**Table 25.1e. Catsharks (Scyliorhinidae) in the Northeast Atlantic. ICES estimates of landings (t) of greater spotted dogfish *Scyliorhinus stellaris* in subareas 6 and 7 (Celtic Seas).**

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Belgium									18	27	37	39	49	41	61	51	34	45
France	212	174	203	213	235	218	363	217	214	245	282	402	561	460	517	477	634	652
Ireland								8	16	13	27	3		1	20	10	9	0
Total	212	174	203	213	235	218	363	225	248	285	345							2

**Table 25.1f. Catsharks (Scyliorhinidae) in the Northeast Atlantic. ICES estimates of landings (t) black-mouth dogfish *Galeus melastomus* in subareas 6 and 7 (Celtic Seas).**

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
France	.	.	.				0.1	0	0.4	0.05	0.02	0		0.26	0.13	0.1	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.2	0
Spain	9	1	.	0.1	2.9	0.4							0					0.0			0
Total	9	1	0	0.1	2.9	0.4	0.1	0	0.4	0.05	0.02	0	0	0.26	0.13	0.1	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.2	0

**Table 25.1g. Catsharks (Scyliorhinidae) in the Northeast Atlantic. ICES estimates of landings (t) of black-mouth dogfish *Galeus melastomus* in Subarea 8 and Division 9.a (Bay of Biscay and Atlantic Iberian waters).**

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
France	1	1	2	2	3	0	0	1	0	1				0	0			0
Portugal	37	28	24	12	16	7	2	2	1	21	25	26	34	31	35	42	40	23
Spain	53	68	103	103	75	24		8	15	54	123	141	124	119	65	140	31	60

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
UK							1											
Total	91	97	130	116	93	32	3	11	16	75	148	167	158	151	100	183	71	84

**Table 25.2a. Catsharks (Scyliorhinidae) in the Northeast Atlantic. Discard estimates (t) of *Scyliorhinus canicula* by country in Subarea 4 and divisions 3.a and 7.d (syc.27.3a47d) Estimates may not be available for some countries, fleets and years.**

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Belgium									517	614	412	587	510	471
Denmark	2	3	9	59	15	8	13	8	6	41	21	10	9	12
France			3709	7378	3452	3777	4415	251	400	782	320	194	315	136
Germany														0
Netherlands			115	417	121	265	368	344	352	509	462	377	723	634
Sweden										1	2			1
UK	151	1127	146	472	351	681	39	615		36	7	656	445	813
Total	153	1131	3979	8325	3940	4732	4835	1219	1275	1982	1224	1826	2003	2067

**Table 25.2b. Catsharks (Scyliorhinidae) in the Northeast Atlantic. Discard estimates (t) of *Scyliorhinus canicula* by country (syc.27.67a-ce-k). Estimates may not be available for some countries, fleets and years.**

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Belgium									737	430	1250	388	1003	488
France			29	4	88	80	67	3774	2312	1847	1490	466	1134	2278
Ireland	1226	2482	970	2045	1906	3201	2614	5013	1144	1953	2039	772	842	966
Spain										336	451		382	736
UK	1102	820	639	687	853	3482	3352	2942	1521	10754	5799	4091	4661	42956
Total	2328	3302	1638	2737	2847	6763	6033	11730	5715	15319	11028	5717	8022	47423

**Table 25.2c. Catsharks (Scyliorhinidae) in the Northeast Atlantic. Discard estimates (t) of *Scyliorhinus canicula* by country in divisions 8.a-b and 8.d (syc.27.8abd). Estimates may not be available for some countries, fleets and years.**

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Belgium							91	52	71	71		37
France	3342	4835	2497	4432	8616	3397	6102	5445	4024	2450	1327	690
Spain								744	1048	1197	851	544
Total	3342	4835	2497	4432	8616	3397	6193	6240	5143	3717	2179	1272

**Table 25.2d. Catsharks (Scyliorhinidae) in the Northeast Atlantic. Discard estimates (t) of *Scyliorhinus canicula* by country in divisions 8.c and 9.a (syc.27.8c9a). Estimates may not be available for some countries, fleets and years.**

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Portugal									0	0	67	72		76
Spain	954	665	1213	849	1506	2127	1864	1131	699	686	562	245	654	465
Total	954	665	1213	849	1506	2127	1864	1131	699	686	629	181	654	541

**Table 25.2e. Catsharks (Scyliorhinidae) in the Northeast Atlantic. Discard estimates (t) of *Scyliorhinus stellaris* by country in subareas 6 and 7 (syt.27.67). Estimates may not be available for some countries, fleets and years.**

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
									67	94	88	16	12	406
France			23	49	17	154	26	26	32	30	20	89	13	23
Ireland	8	35	64	206	121	77	111	169	10	16	34	81		85
UK	47	22	35	37	30	13	35	11	5	55	16		1	7
Total	55	57	123	292	168	244	171	205	113	196	159	185	26	521

**Table 25.2f. Catsharks (Scyliorhinidae) in the Northeast Atlantic. Discards estimates (t) of black-mouth dogfish *Galeus melastomus* in subareas 6 and 7 (sho.27.67).**

	2009	2010	2011	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Ireland	15	14	7	0	2	67	0	13	14	14	155	
Spain								68	5	0	13	15
Total	15	14	7	0	2	67	0	80	19	14	169	15

**Table 25.2g. Catsharks (Scyliorhinidae) in the Northeast Atlantic. Discards estimates (t) of black-mouth dogfish *Galeus melastomus* in Subarea 8 and Division 9.a (sho.27.89a). Estimates may not be available for some countries, fleets and years.**

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
France		5				
Portugal	40	31	91	54	73	57
Spain		242	466	35	193	272
Total	40	278	557	89	266	330

**Table 25.3 Black-mouthed dogfish in subareas 6 and 7. Assessment summary, biomass index from the Spanish Porcupine (SP-PORC-WIBTS-Q3) trawl survey (in kg tow<sup>-1</sup>).**

Year	kg tow <sup>-1</sup>
2001	5.40
2002	7.16
2003	11.33
2004	18.52
2005	22.74
2006	14.59
2007	17.91
2008	19.46
2009	24.31
2010	29.91
2011	26.04
2012	59.03
2013	43.76
2014	51.09
2015	62.88
2016	54.14
2017	38.49
2018	61.35
2019	50.83
2020	30.90
2021	64.17

## 26 Common skate

### 26.1 Available data relating to skates of the genus *Dipturus*

This section updates the work undertaken previously to address the ToR from 2021 “Evaluate available data at species-specific level within the common skate-complex (*Dipturus* spp.) stock units in order to further increase our understanding of each individual species and their current status”.

Given that identification issues relating to the common skate complex may also extend to long-nosed skate *Dipturus oxyrinchus* and Norwegian skate *D. nidarosiensis*, data relating to these species have also been considered where available.

### 26.2 Background

#### 26.2.1.1 History of the common skate complex

Flapper skate *Dipturus intermedius* (Parnell, 1837) was, as *Raia intermedia*, described originally by Parnell (1837), from specimens caught in the Firth of Forth, on the Scottish east coast. A more detailed description was given in a subsequent account of the fishes of the Firth of Forth (Parnell, 1838). Parnell (1838) considered flapper skate to be “the connecting link” between *Raia batis* [= *Dipturus batis*] and ‘*Raia oxyrhynchus*’, though it should be noted that, based on his description of *R. oxyrhynchus*, Parnell (1838) was discussing white skate *Rostroraja alba* rather than long-nosed skate *Dipturus oxyrinchus*.

Parnell (1838) highlighted the following distinguishing features:

*Dipturus intermedius*: “... the upper surface of the body being perfectly smooth, without granulation, and of a dark olive colour spotted with white; in the anterior part of each orbit being furnished with a strong spine pointing towards the tail; in the dorsal fins being more remote from each other, and in the anterior margins of the pectorals rather more concave, giving the snout a sharper appearance”.

*Dipturus batis*: “... the upper surface of the body is rough to the touch, of a uniform dusky grey without spots; the orbits without spines; the dorsals nearly approximate, and the anterior margins of the pectorals nearly straight”.

In a revision of the European skates, Clark (1926) synonymised flapper skate with the common skate, and this perception continued in the scientific literature and regional field guides (e.g. Stehmann and Bürkel, 1984) for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and early 21<sup>st</sup> century, over which time data for the two species would have been confounded, including survey data, biological investigations (e.g. Heintz, 1962; Du Buit, 1976) and landings data (e.g. Silva *et al.*, 2012).

Iglésias *et al.* (2010), after undertaking genetic and morphological studies of the large skates being landed in France, confirmed that what was known as ‘common skate’ was indeed a complex, with this paper suggesting the two species be known as blue skate *Dipturus* cf. *flossada* (Risso, 1826) and flapper skate *Dipturus* cf. *intermedia* (Parnell, 1837).

Iglésias *et al.* (2010) also provided morphometric data and described other morphological features that could help separate the two species, although it should be noted that some of these features are not apparent in juvenile stages. In terms of morphometrics, Iglésias *et al.* (2010) observed that, proportionally, *Dipturus intermedius* had a longer preorbital length; eyes larger; distance from the anterior margin of the orbit to the posterior end of the spiracle is longer; narrower inter-orbital distance; longer inter-spiracular distance; longer inter-dorsal space; and longer

snout. The distinguishing morphological features and contrasting life-history parameter, as reported by Iglésias *et al.* (2010), are summarised in Table 26.1.

A subsequent study by Griffiths *et al.* (2010) confirmed the genetic differences within the common skate complex, and provided initial geographical information, with what would equate with flapper skate occurring in the shelf seas west of Ireland, west of Scotland and off Shetland, and what would equate with common blue skate occurring on the Rockall Bank, west of Ireland and in the Celtic Sea. The two species, therefore, have a degree of spatial overlap.

Subsequent taxonomic accounts (e.g. Ebert and Stehmann, 2013<sup>1</sup>; Weigmann, 2016) recognised that the common skate complex comprised two species. However, given that '*batis*' was a Linnean name, this part of the nomenclature was retained, with the scientific name for flapper skate based on the original description by Parnell (1837).

The nomenclature of the common skate complex was stabilised by Last *et al.* (2016), using the names common blue skate *Dipturus batis* (L., 1758) and flapper skate *Dipturus intermedius* (Parnell, 1837). Following this taxonomic revision, an FAO code was introduced for flapper skate (DRJ) which allowed for separation from common blue skate (RJB), although earlier data reported under the latter code would clearly relate to both species.

### 26.2.1.2 Stock boundaries and review on the species distribution

ICES had previously been requested by the EU to provide further information on the distributions of the two species, which was through a Special Request (ICES, 2012). Whilst some of the current locations of the individual species are becoming better documented, there is still uncertainty in their broader distributions, especially in northern areas (Subarea 2), Icelandic waters (Division 5.a), the Mid-Atlantic Ridge (Division 12), Azores (Division 10) and southern geographical limits in the Biscay-Iberian area (Divisions 8–9).

At the present time, ICES provide three advice sheets (Category 6.3) for the common skate complex at the ecoregion level: rjb.27.3a4, rjb.27.67a-ce-k and rjb.27.89a. Only landings data are presented and no assessments are undertaken. Where deemed appropriate, the landings data may include information for all four species from the genus *Dipturus* known to occur in European waters: *D. batis*, *D. intermedius*, *D. nidarosiensis* and *D. oxyrinchus*.

Whilst tagging data are limited, available data do not indicate large-scale movements (e.g. Sutcliffe, 1994; Fitzmaurice *et al.*, 2003; Bird *et al.*, 2020), with Fitzmaurice *et al.* (2003) reporting the longest minimum distance travelled being 120 miles. Recent genetic analyses could help define population structure (Delaval *et al.*, 2022).

#### Common skate complex

The information and distributional data in the available IUCN Red List assessment for common skate (Dulvy *et al.*, 2006) related to the species complex and thus were updated for common blue skate *Dipturus batis* and flapper skate *Dipturus intermedius*, in 2021 (Ellis *et al.* 2021a, 2021b). However, the limits of the distributions of both species remain unclear. Speciation and validation of the distributional data for all species from the genus *Dipturus* are required, given that many data sources have confounded the two species from the complex, as well as potential confusion with long-nosed skate *Dipturus oxyrinchus* and Norwegian skate *Dipturus nidarosiensis*. Misidentification with other species may occur in other areas, such as spinytail ray *Bathyraja spinicauda*

<sup>1</sup> Ebert and Stehmann (2013) also recognised an as yet undescribed *Dipturus* sp. from the deeper waters of the NE Atlantic, that is characterised by having notably long and pointed anterior pelvic fin lobes.

in the Barents Sea, give that this species also attains a large size (170–180 cm) and has a ventral surface with a grey margin (Ebert and Stehmann, 2013).

Whilst “*Dipturus batis*” has nominally been reported from more northerly waters of the ICES area, including the Norwegian Sea and Barents Sea (Andriyashev, 1954; Dolgov *et al.*, 2005a, 2005b; Williams *et al.*, 2008), published species-specific data following the recent taxonomic revision are more limited. Moreover, common skate complex was not included in the recent atlas of Barents Sea fishes (Wienerroither *et al.*, 2013). The probable incorrect identifications of the common skate complex in northern Norwegian waters were also highlighted by Lynghammar *et al.* (2014).

Earlier accounts generally indicates that “*Dipturus batis*” occurred in the Mediterranean Sea, however recent studies have provided limited information regarding whether the complex occurs there (Capapé *et al.*, 2006; Cariani *et al.*, 2017; Serena *et al.*, 2020). There seem to no published data that confirms whether either *Dipturus batis* or *Dipturus intermedius* occur in the area. Whilst some recent papers from Mediterranean samples have considered *D. batis* (e.g. Turan, 2008; Benmeslem *et al.*, 2019), the accuracy of the species identification is uncertain and the former study likely relates to *D. oxyrinchus*. In terms of potential historical occurrence, the re-examination of any relevant museum specimens could usefully be undertaken. With increased uncertainty regarding the contemporary occurrence of the ‘common skate complex’ in the Mediterranean, an improved appraisal of historical information is required, especially since the earlier proposed nomenclature for blue skate (*Dipturus cf. flossada*) was based on a description from the Mediterranean coast of France (Risso, 1926; Table 26.2).

### **Flapper skate *Dipturus intermedius***

*Dipturus intermedius* is most frequent around the western and eastern coasts of Scotland, as has been supported by the increasing number of scientific studies from these areas (Wearmouth and Sims, 2009; Neat *et al.*, 2015; Benjamins *et al.*, 2018a, 2018b, 2021; Bache-Jeffreys *et al.*, 2021; Lavender *et al.*, 2021; Phillips *et al.*, 2021; Régnier *et al.*, 2021; Thorburn *et al.*, 2021; Dodd *et al.*, 2022; Garbett *et al.* 2023).

The occurrence of *D. intermedius* in Norwegian waters have also been confirmed (Lynghammar *et al.* 2014; Vienthe 2023 WD).

Flapper skate is also present along the west coast of Ireland and in the Celtic Sea (Barreau *et al.*, 2016, Garbett *et al.*, 2023) where the distribution overlaps with the more abundant common blue skate (Bache-Jeffreys *et al.*, 2021). Recent observations were recorded in the Bay of Biscay near the Rochebonne Bank (Barreau *et al.*, 2016).

There have also been nominal records of “*Raja batis*” or “*Dipturus batis*” from the Mid-Atlantic Ridge (e.g. Hareide and Garnes, 2001) and Azores. In terms of the Azores, Santos *et al.* (1997) had stated previously that “*The occurrence of this species in the region needs further documentation*”, with subsequent studies also referring to the complex (e.g. Menezes *et al.*, 2006; Rosa *et al.*, 2006; Santos *et al.*, 2020). Garbett *et al.* (2023) confirmed the presence of *D. intermedius* from the Azores by genetic analyses.

Species Distribution Models have indicated that the distribution of *Dipturus intermedius* (in the waters around Scotland) are, among other factors, influenced by distance from shore and depth (Pinto *et al.*, 2016). This study reported that *D. intermedius* appeared to favour waters of 100–400 m that were also relatively close to land, including sea lochs and around islands. In relation to water temperature, Frost *et al.* (2020) found that flapper skate occur over a broader temperature range. However, it should be recognised that this study was based primarily on data from



the Rockall Bank, Hebridean Shelf and Celtic Sea, and inclusion of other parts of the species' ranges, such as deeper habitat, could usefully be considered in future studies.

### **Common blue skate *Dipturus batis***

Whilst *Dipturus batis* is the more abundant species in the Celtic Sea (Bendall *et al.*, 2012; Barreau *et al.*, 2016; Brown-Vuillemin *et al.*, 2020), there have also been studies on this species from Scottish waters, Rockall and the Faroe Islands (e.g. Beard, 1890; Frost *et al.*, 2020; Bache-Jeffrey *et al.*, 2021; Delaval *et al.*, 2022) and as far north as Iceland (Pálsson & Jakobsdóttir, 2018).

Specimens were also identified from photographs from the Irish Sea (Moore, 2023) and Western Channel Sea (Barreau pers. com.) and analyses of a DST tag on a female indicated movements up to the eastern Channel (Bendall *et al.*, 2017). This species assumed to inhabit offshore water was also identified in 2023 in the Iroise Sea (Division 7.h) closer from the coast (APECS pers. com. confirmed by pictures).

The southern limit seems to be the Bay of Biscay, with confirmed presence in the northern part of Subarea 8 (Barreau *et al.*, 2016).

Delaval *et al.* (2022) demonstrated a significant genomic discontinuities between sites inhabited by the species. This result support the need for new studies in order to refine the stock boundaries in the future.

### **Long-nosed skate *Dipturus oxyrinchus***

Long-nosed skate occurs from Norwegian waters to the Mediterranean Sea, with the latter supporting most of the published biological studies on the species (Yigin & Ismen, 2010; Kadri *et al.*, 2015; Mulas *et al.*, 2015; Bellodi *et al.*, 2017; Melis *et al.*, 2018, Garbett *et al.*, 2023). It is also noteworthy that genetic studies suggest that *Dipturus oxyrinchus* from the Mediterranean Sea and Atlantic are genetically distinct (Griffiths *et al.*, 2011).

This species can occur from 90 to 900 m depth, but the main distribution is in waters of 200 to 500 m and it is found rarely on the shelf (Mulas *et al.*, 2015).

### **Norwegian skate *Dipturus nidarosiensis***

Norwegian skate occurs from the Norwegian Sea to the Mediterranean Sea (Cannas *et al.*, 2010; Follesa *et al.*, 2012; Ramírez-Amaro *et al.*, 2017; Carbonara *et al.*, 2019 and 2021; Geraci *et al.*, 2019). In the Atlantic, the species is present at depths over 500 m all along the slope from Norway to the north of Spain. In the Mediterranean Sea, it has been observed around Sardinia and in the Adriatic Sea and a morphological trait distinction was made between those two areas. The species is considered a deepwater skate, as no records have been authenticated from the shelf. Whilst there was a record of this species in the Celtic Sea given by Warnes and Jones (1995), the location and size of the specimen would be consistent with that of juvenile flapper skate (see below), which was not recognised as a valid species at the time.

## **26.2.1 Synopsis of Icelandic data**

This Section was based on the results presented at a recent ICES Annual Science Conference by Pálsson & Jakobsdóttir (2018) in a poster entitled “*The Flapper or the Blue? D. batis complex in Icelandic waters*”. The data presented in this study included the length-distribution from surveys (Figure 26.1), with the majority of samples <160 cm L<sub>T</sub>, which was in accordance with the likely

length-frequency distribution of *Dipturus batis*. The estimated lengths-at-maturity (Figure 26.2) were 115 cm (males; n = 294) and 119 cm (females; n = 340), and these values were also consistent with the earlier estimates for *D. batis* given by Iglésias *et al.* (2010). Laboratory examination of some retained specimens also indicated that they matched the descriptions provided by Iglésias *et al.* (2010) for common blue skate.

Consequently, available information indicates that the common skate complex in Icelandic waters (Division 5.a) includes *D. batis* only, and that the species is distributed mainly along the southern coasts of Iceland (Figure 26.3).

### 26.2.2 Synopsis of Norwegian data

Lynghammar *et al.* (2014) reported on the confirmed presence of one individual of *Dipturus intermedius* from the area (65 kg female caught at 58.633°N, 3.917°E in February 2009; Lynghammar, pers. comm.). There have also been some subsequent records of *D. intermedius* from Norwegian waters, including west off Bud, off Florø, near Vatlandsvåg, in the Flekkefjord and off the coasts of southern Norway; Lynghammar, pers. comm.). These records confirm the presence of *Dipturus intermedius* in Norwegian waters of Division 2.a, Subarea 4 and Division 3.a. Two other species of the genus *Dipturus* were observed along the coast of Norway: *D. nidarosiensis* and *D. oxyrinchus* (Lynghammar *et al.*, 2014).

### 26.2.3 Synopsis of data from Danish landings

In Denmark, rays and skates are more often landed as “wings”. This presentation makes species identification difficult. Between 2021–2022, genetic samples were collected at the auction to identify the skate community landed in the Danish harbours (Vienthe, WD 2023). Analyses revealed that no *Dipturus batis* were landed as wings within this period, this suggests that the landings usually declared as *D. batis* in Denmark could be misidentifications. Within the study two of the wings sampled were genetically identified as *D. intermedius*.

### 26.2.4 Synopsis of data from CEFAS surveys

#### 26.2.4.1 Data available and methods

Ellis and Silva (2021, WD10) summarised those data relating to *Dipturus* that are held on the CEFAS' Fishing Survey System (FSS) database, from both historic and recent surveys, as well as additional data from recent fishery-dependent surveys (2014–2017). Available data relating to the spatial distribution, length and sex composition, and biological parameters from this WD are provided below.

Data relating to the genus *Dipturus* were extracted from the FSS database (08/06/2021), including data for *Dipturus batis*, *Dipturus intermedius*, *Dipturus oxyrinchus* and *Dipturus nidarosiensis* (Table 26.3). These data relate to all records available from east of the Mid-Atlantic Ridge and related to data collected over the period 1901–2021, including lengths and biological information (sex, maturity, wing width) for some of the records. This study analysis was conducted using R software (R Core Team, 2020). These data were largely taken as they were recorded with this study as a preliminary overview of the data currently hold and, therefore, further QA/QC procedures should be undertaken if more detailed analyses are required.

Records were summarised according to how catch was processed (e.g. weighed and measured) to account for differences in historical data compared to recent data. Data for the common skate complex (SKT) only relates to the records where specimens were not identified and/or allocated to a specific species. Although, only recently has FSS been able to accommodate these two species

separately (SKG and SKF) when recording the catch, there was a brief recent period where although catch records were recorded to the common skate-complex, when collecting additional information on individual weight and maturity, the identification to species-specific was described on a comments field within the database, and therefore a retrospective re-allocation of these individuals to the particular species was possible (these amendments still need to be made to the original data held on FSS and also on DATRAS).

Spatial distributions are not shown as such, due to changes in spatial coverage changing over the study period, therefore, only maps of presence (positive hauls) for each species were produced. The hauling positions were used instead of shoot positions as the latter may require further investigation on some outliers (in historical data). Length-frequency distributions were produced for each species, by sex when available, and these were separated by either time period or survey type, depending on the species and quantity of data available.

Length-weight distributions were calculated for total length ( $L_T$ , measured to the cm below) and total weight ( $W_T$ , g), using the exponential relationship ( $W_T = a \times L_T^b$ ), with conversion factors obtained using a linear regression through natural logarithmic transformation. No outliers were removed from these relationships for this study.

Additionally, the linear relationship between  $L_T$  and wing width ( $D_w$ , measured to the cm or 0.5 cm below) was also calculated by species where data were available. One record was deemed unsuitable, with potential for correction pending further investigations.

#### 26.2.4.2 Results and discussion

There were 1599 records of *Dipturus* held on FSS (Table 26.4), noting that this refers to station records with accompanying data for the various species. These data, which included fish that had been measured, weighed, counted or observed (noting that data collection on historical surveys was more variable), can be used to examine geographical distribution, in terms of presence only.

The survey coverage has varied over time, with some historical surveys extending into northern areas, whilst recent CEFAS surveys have generally been confined to the North Sea and Celtic Seas ecoregions (Subareas 4 and 7). Consequently, these data cannot be used in isolation to examine temporal changes in species distributions.

##### Spatial distributions

The distributions of all species shown will not be representative of the wider range and it should be noted that survey hauls with no records of any of the species are not shown here. Furthermore, given the longer-term taxonomic confusion in these species, outlier records should be interpreted with extreme caution.

The available distributional data, by time period, for both members of the common skate complex indicate that they are distributed widely around the British Isles (Figure 26.4). More recent data, which have been separated between the two species (Figure 26.5) show that *D. batis* is recorded relatively frequently in the Celtic Sea and western English Channel, with occasional specimens in the Irish Sea, North Sea and Irish Sea. *Dipturus intermedius* was recorded in the northern North Sea and in the Celtic Sea. It should be noted that the surveys used in this study do not include those waters west of either Scotland or Ireland.

Data for both *Dipturus oxyrinchus* and *D. nidarosiensis* were more limited (Figure 26.6). It should also be noted that it is possible that *Dipturus intermedius* may have been misidentified as one of either of these species, if specimens were simply being viewed as being different from *Dipturus batis*. For example, juvenile *D. intermedius* have a much darker ventral surface than *D. batis*, and so the reported presence of *D. nidarosiensis* in the Celtic Sea could relate to juvenile *D. intermedius*

(noting that the lengths of these two specimens were 29 and 37 cm). Indeed, it has not been possible to authenticate any of the nominal records relating to *D. nidarosiensis*. In terms of *D. oxyrinchus*, recent, authenticated captures have been made along the western slope of the Norwegian Deep, with some of the other records, especially those from shallower areas, potentially questionable.

### Length-frequency

Length data were available for 3950 individual *Dipturus* (Table 26.5), with the majority of these (61.9%) coming from dedicated surveys on a commercial gillnetter, with various otter trawl surveys in the south-west (DCRDC, Q1SWOTTER, Q4SWIBTS and WCGFS) and beam trawl surveys in the southwest (Q1SWBEAM) accounting for 9.0% and 5.3% of measured individuals, respectively. North Sea surveys (NSGFS, IBTS3E and IBTS4E) accounted for only 1.2%, with various historic surveys (HISTORIC and HISTORWEST, including research vessels and chartered fishing vessels) accounting for 22.5%.

The overall length-range reported at the complex level (SKT; Figure 26.7) was 10–217 cm. However, the smaller individuals recorded are probably misidentified (or from confusion of the use of the generic term ‘skate’ in earlier logbooks), as these sizes would be below the length-at-hatching. More recent data collected just on-board RV CEFAS Endeavour (2003–present; SKT, SKF and SKG) indicated that the smallest individuals were 18 cm.

The length-frequency distribution of specimens identified as *Dipturus batis* ranged from 18–136 cm (scientific trawl surveys) and 29–149 cm (chartered surveys on a commercial gillnetter). Scientific trawl surveys generally caught proportionally smaller *D. batis*, generally <120 cm, whilst the commercial netters were more selective for larger individuals, with one peak at ca. 70–110 cm and a main peak at 110–140 cm (Figure 26.8). Data were more limited for *D. intermedius*, which were recorded over a length range of 34–195 cm (Figure 26.9).

### Biological parameters

Data relating to the length-weight relationship, including a summary of earlier published data, are summarised (Table 26.6) with data analysed presented in Figure 26.10. Available data on the relationships between total length and disc width, or wing width (Figure 26.11) indicate no obvious difference between *D. batis* and *D. intermedius*, though more data are certainly required to better examine this. Similarly, maturity data are also limited (Figure 26.12), though it should be noted that on-going tag-and-release protocols on CEFAS trawl surveys means that the collection of maturity data for females is particularly limited.

Biological studies on the life-history parameters for both species are limited, with earlier studies potentially confounding the two species (e.g. Du Buit, 1976; Fahy, 1991), and so further biological data collection is required, particularly in relation to sampling of dead bycatch.

## 26.2.5 Synopsis of French data

### 26.2.5.1 IFREMER

*D. batis* and *D. intermedius* are now frequently caught in the Celtic Sea during the EVHOE survey. The distinction between the two species in IFREMER data began in 2018, although species identification has been made on board by scientists from MNHN for previous years. This will ultimately make the derivation of stock size indices for *D. batis* since 2009 possible.

Sample sizes from the onboard observation programme (DCF) are generally too low to derive estimates of discarded *Dipturus* at the scale of the stock. However, the proportion of skippers reporting discards of *D. batis* and *D. intermedius* has been increasing.

### 26.2.5.2 Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle (MNHN)

This section is based on some of the results presented by Barreau and Iglésias (2021 WD12). Between 2006 and 2016, the French National Museum of Natural History (MNHN) has collected data on the common skate complex, including data from fish auctions, opportunistically from fishers and during surveys onboard commercial fishing vessels, mainly in the Celtic Sea. Most data were collected between 2013 and 2016 within a dedicated program “POCHETEAUX”. Dead individuals have been dissected when possible. These studies have also provided data for other *Dipturus* spp., but these data are not shown here.

#### Species distributions (Figure 26.13)

Only one trip took place off Northwest Scotland, with this trip onboard a vessel specialized in deep-water fishing. Data from this trip showed a higher proportion of *D. intermedius* compared to *D. batis*. In contrast, the other trips were undertaken on the continental shelf of the Celtic Sea, with a higher proportion of *D. batis*. The southernmost individual of *D. intermedius* observed was caught by a fishing boat near the Rochebonne Bank in the Bay of Biscay in May 2014. This specimen was an adult female of 193.4 cm length. Several specimens of *D. batis* were collected in the northern part of the Bay of Biscay. They were reported by professional fishermen or found in auctions in 2014 and 2015 and related to immature individuals (54.6–110.5 cm).

#### Depth distribution (Figure 26.14)

Common blue skate were recorded during fishing trips at sea over a depth range of 108–630 m (Barreau *et al.*, 2016), but was observed to be more abundant in shelf seas as depths of around 120 m. In contrast, *Dipturus intermedius* had a larger depth range, being observed at depths of 114–1000 m (Barreau *et al.*, 2016). Both species occur on soft (sandy-muddy) bottoms.

#### Length-frequency distribution (Figure 26.15)

Data on length are represented in 10 cm sizes classes. *Dipturus batis* showed a typical size distribution for a skate population with the presence of two peaks. The first one represents the young individuals, while the second one is due to the accumulation of mature individuals in a larger size class as growth slows down once maturity is attained. The observed length-frequency distribution of *D. intermedius* was more erratic, due to the more restricted sample size. For both species, the larger individuals were mainly female, though the overall sex ratio is close to 1:1.

#### Length-weight relationships

Data on the relationships between total length and gutted weight were collected by sex and species during the POCHEATEAU project (Figure 26.16, Table 26.6). Meaningful data relating to total weight were only available for *Dipturus batis* caught in the Celtic Sea (Figure 26.17, Table 26.6) as the number of *D. intermedius* was too low.

#### Length-disc width relationship

Tails of skates are often cut or damaged, and so the relationship between total length ( $L_T$ ) and disc width ( $D_W$ ) allows the total length of damaged specimens to be estimated. There are also some historical studies or sampling datasets where the disc width rather than the total length was measured. Total length-disc width relationships (mm) were calculated for both species (Figure 26.18) and were defined by the following relationships:

$$\textit{Dipturus batis} \quad D_W = 0.7075 L_T + 9.3838 \quad (n = 1374, r^2 = 0.997)$$

$$\textit{Dipturus intermedius} \quad D_W = 0.7836 L_T - 38.255 \quad (n = 115, r^2 = 0.998)$$

### Length-at-maturity

Data from Iglésias *et al.* (2010) estimated the length at 50% maturity ( $L_{50}$ ) at 115.0 cm (male) and 122.9 cm (female) for *D. batis* and 185.5 cm (male) and 197.5 cm (female) for *D. intermedius*. The age at 50% maturity was tentatively suggested as 11 years and 19–20 years for *D. batis* and *D. intermedius*, respectively. More recent studies for *D. batis* were used to estimate the length at 50% maturity, using the package “sizeMat” and the function “gonad\_mature” on R software (<https://cran.r-project.org/web/packages/sizeMat/index.html>). The length at 50% maturity ( $L_{50}$ ) was estimated at ca. 115 cm for males (Figure 26.19). Two estimates of  $L_{50}$  were calculated for female, one based on dissected specimens, and another based on the assumption that all females <90 cm were immature and that female caught alive but not dissected were mature if a flaccid cloaca was observed.  $L_{50}$  results of these two approaches were 117.5 cm and 119 cm respectively.

### 26.2.5.3 POPOC Project

The POPOC project is a French project focusing on *D. batis* in the northern Bay of Biscay and Celtic Sea conducted between November 2019 and June 2021 (2022 WD05). Data on catches (numbers caught, length distribution and sex, at the scale of the fishing operation) were obtained using self-sampling on board French otter trawl vessels which are part of the Producers Organisation “Les Pêcheurs de Bretagne” (The Fishermen from Brittany). Vessels originated from two ports located in south-west Brittany: Le Guilvinec and Saint-Guénolé. In addition, an exemption has been obtained to land samples of large female *D. batis*. These are then examined in order to estimate ovarian fecundity.

Data from the POPOC and POCHEATEAUX project in combination with samples collected during the EVHOE and other scientific trawl surveys as well as the French onboard observation programme (Obsmer) were used to provide insight in the spatial distribution using presence/absence maps of the species.

#### Spatial distribution

During international scientific trawl surveys, distinction of the two species is variable between surveys and did not start in the same year, therefore data for common skate complex have been merged. For the surveys considered here, the species complex has been observed from the northern part of the Bay of Biscay to north of Shetland. These species have not been observed in the southern North Sea since 2013 (Figure 26.20). This increase is particularly noticeable in the Celtic Sea (IE-IGFS and EVHOE). In this area, as well as on the Rockall Bank, *D. batis* dominates the catch of the common skate complex in 2019, a year for which the two species were separated in the data (Figure 26.21)

The temporal coverage associated with Obsmer data allows the observation of a gradual spatial extension of the distribution area of *D. batis* in the Celtic Sea. Densities derived for the southern part of the Celtic Sea and northwestern Bay of Biscay tended to increase since 2009 (Figure 26.22). The comparison with densities derived from data collected during the POCHEATEAU project is rendered difficult by the smaller sample size in this latter project, but both data sets indicate a temporally stable area of greater density in the central part of the Celtic Sea, west of the Isles of Scilly. The location of this area is confirmed by the self-sampling data collected during the POPOC project (Figure 26.23).

#### Biomass series from EVHOE

The approximated series of common blue skate biomass from the EVHOE survey indicates a recent increase of the index starting in 2018, after a period of lower stable and relatively uncertain biomass (Figure 26.24).

From the interviews conducted with five skippers, a perceived recent increase in biomass of common blue skate was reported, especially in the southern part of the Celtic Sea. All fishers identified 2017 as a turning point in the time series which seems consistent with the increase observed between 2016 and 2018 in the EVHOE index.

### 26.2.6 Synopsis of Spanish survey data for the Porcupine Bank

Three species of the genus *Dipturus* were reported by Ruiz-Pico *et al.* (2023 WD): *D. batis*, *D. intermedius* and *D. nidarosiensis*. Some of these data (pre-2011) are presented here at the genus-level. Figures and results have been updated based on the new working document.

The overall abundance of *Dipturus* spp. increased compared to 2021 to reach the highest abundance of the time-series. The overall biomass is higher compared to the recent previous years (Figure 26.25), with the mean biomass index from the last two years above that of the previous five years (Figure 26.26).

Species-specific data were available for more recent years, with the biomass and abundance of *D. batis* increasing largely in 2022 at the highest value across the series. This increase could be explained by the large individuals caught. The abundance and biomass of *D. nidarosiensis* was similar to earlier values while three small specimens of *D. intermedius* were caught in 2022 (Figure 26.27).

During the 2022 Porcupine Bank survey, *Dipturus nidarosiensis* was reported from some of the deeper parts of the survey area to the south and east of Porcupine Bank (Figure 26.28). *Dipturus batis* and *D. intermedius* were reported at shallower depths close to the Bank (Figure 26.29 and Figure 26.30).

In 2022, 11 specimens of *D. nidarosiensis* were recorded falling within the 29–185 cm length range (Figure 26.31), whilst 50 specimens of *D. batis* (26–126 cm) were recorded (Figure 26.32). Since 2011, the maximum size recorded for *D. intermedius* has been about 140 cm, which corresponds to immature individuals. This year the individual caught measured 35, 74 and 98 cm (Figure 26.33).

Available data confirm that both members of the common skate complex occur on and around the Porcupine Bank, with Norwegian skate also occurring in deeper waters. *Dipturus batis* was the main species of the complex occurring in this area.

### 26.2.7 Synopsis of Portuguese data

This section was based on the results presented by Serra-Pereira *et al.* (2021 WD08). This WD summarized the available information for *Dipturus* spp. from mainland Portugal (Division 9.a), including data from the DCF commercial sampling and from surveys, to inform on landings, spatial distribution, and length ranges for *Dipturus oxyrinchus*. The data presented reinforces the current perception that *D. oxyrinchus* is the main *Dipturus* species occurring in Division 9.a, with some anecdotal observations relating to *D. nidarosiensis*.

Since 2016, Portuguese data for *Dipturus oxyrinchus* (Division 9.a) have been included in the 'Other skates and rays in Subarea 8 and Division 9.a (Bay of Biscay and Atlantic Iberian waters)' stock. No misidentifications with other *Dipturus* spp. have been recorded by the DCF sampling programme of Portuguese landings, so these data are not presented with the common skate *Dipturus batis*-complex (rjb.27.89a).

Misidentifications and/or coding errors in landings data, as observed in other areas, occur in Division 9.a, with Rajidae being commonly landed under incorrect commercial denominations. To address this, IPMA developed a statistical procedure to estimate species-specific landings

during the DCF skate pilot study (2011–2013; Figueiredo *et al.*, 2020). The output from this procedure is the basis for the annual reported ICES landing estimates from Portugal, since 2008, including those for *D. oxyrinchus*. No other *Dipturus* species have been identified by DCF in landing ports over this time.

The estimated landings of *D. oxyrinchus* from Division 9.a (2008–2020) are presented in Figure 26.34 by fleet segment. Landings from the polyvalent fleet accounted for about 80% (56–99%) of the total landings. For the polyvalent fleet, landings were mostly recorded from the ‘Centro’ and ‘Lisboa e vale do Tejo’ regions, more specifically in the landing ports of Peniche and Sesimbra, respectively (Figure 26.35). The same was observed for the trawl landings, although those in the ‘Centro’ were less representative.

Length data have been collected during the DCF sampling programme. Due to the low number of individuals measured in some years, the length frequency distribution was combined for the whole time-period (2008–2020) (Figure 26.36). The lengths recorded ranged from 48 to 158 cm, and the overall length-frequency distribution was similar between the two fleets.

*Dipturus oxyrinchus* is often caught during the Portuguese crustacean trawl survey/*Nephrops* Survey Offshore Portugal (NepS (FU 28–29)), which covers the Portuguese southwestern and southern coasts, along eight sectors (Figure 26.37). This survey has operated since 1997, but was not conducted in 2004, 2010, 2012, 2019 or 2020. More details on the survey characteristics were described in WSKKATE (see Rodríguez-Cabello *et al.*, 2020 WD).

*Dipturus oxyrinchus* was found at depths of 43–776 m, but was caught more commonly in the southwest (south off Cabo Espichel) at depths of 350–600 m deep, and in the southern region at 400–700 m depth (Figure 26.37– Figure 26.39). The occurrence and spatial distribution of the species varied over the years (Figure 26.38). Lower catches were observed in 2000, 2005, 2008 and the absence in 1999 may be influenced by the use of a net with different characteristics from the standard protocol (i.e., CAM net with 20 mm mesh size).

The length distribution of *D. oxyrinchus* has been variable over the time-series, mainly due it being a rarely recorded species with a wide size range, from 18–160 cm  $L_T$  (Figure 26.40). The mean length of the overall time-series was 57 cm, with some years catching more juveniles (e.g. 2016–2018), while in other catching larger individuals (e.g. 2002, 2011, 2012, 2015; Figure 26.41).

During the NepS (FU 28–29) surveys time series, *Dipturus nidarosiensis* was also caught but in very few numbers, with only three individuals identified between 1997 and 2018 (2014: 68.5 cm male, 755 m depth; 2014: 165 cm female, 657 m depth; and 2016: 47.7 cm female, 104 m depth).

## 26.2.8 Analyses of DATRAS data

This section was initially based on some of the results presented by Barreau and Iglésias (2021 WD12) but overall results have been recalculated with new data download from DATRAS which could explained the differences in number from the WD.

Exchange format data were downloaded from DATRAS for the years 2010–2022. Until 2022, the number of individuals recorded under *D. batis* (related to the species complex) has decreased in part of the survey to be better ascribed to either flapper or common blue skate. In recent years, while some surveys were still using *D. flossada* for common blue skate, some already started to use *D. batis* (Last *et al.* 2016). However, a radical change occurred in 2022 with no more individual recorded as *Dipturus flossada*. Now, records of common blue skate are only ascribed to *D. batis* following the new nomenclature based on Last *et al.* (2016) (Table 26.7, Figure 26.42). Recent records of *D. batis* may now be considered as common blue skate. It is to be noted that the scientific name used in DATRAS for flapper skate was *D. intermedia*, but has now become *D. intermedius* from 2022, following the official nomenclature.



The spatial distributions of the two species are now better known from around the British Isles, with flapper skate mainly around the coasts of Scotland, whilst the common blue skate is observed mostly in the Celtic Sea and on the Rockall Bank as also confirmed by the available data used here (Figure 26.43).

Available DATRAS data on the depth distribution of the *D. batis* complex were examined for 2010–2022. *D. batis* was present from 23 to 928 m depth, however those results includes mainly data on the complex (Figure 26.44). Common blue skate, *D. batis* (*D. cf. flossada*), was recorded at depths of 37–701 m but was more abundant in shelf seas at depths <200 m. *Dipturus intermedius* had a broader depth range (17–882 m) and a slightly shallower median depth.

In order to see if some of the surveys could be relevant to describe temporal trends in the stock, the catch rate in number per hour was calculated for each survey within the last 10 years (Figure 26.45). These preliminary results should not be used to draw conclusions on actual stock trends, as potential changes in gear and survey design have not been taken into account. They are only informative results on the evolution of the catch per species per survey and to identify which surveys could usefully be subject to closer examination.

*D. batis* has been observed mainly in Beam Trawl Surveys since 2013, with records decreasing in the SWC-IBTS/ SCOWCGFS (where improved speciation has occurred since 2012) and increases in 2022 due to the use of *D. batis* for common blue skate.

Common blue skate *D. batis* (= *D. cf. floassada*) was recorded mainly on Rockall (SCOROC survey) with the highest catch rates, which increased during the period, as well as IE-IAMS, IE-IGFS and SWC-IBTS/ SCOWCGFS surveys to end up to zero with the use of the scientific name *D. batis*. EVHOE trend is highly decreasing in 2020 and 2021 as the common blue skate is now recorded as *D. batis* and so appears in the top graph.

Flapper skate *Dipturus intermedius* was observed with a slight increase during the IE-IGFS and SWC-IBTS/ SCOWCGFS. The number of specimens slightly decreased during the IE-IAMS.

Whilst no specimen are reported on DATRAS during EVHOE for 2022, an observer from MNHN present on board recorded four *D. intermedius*. The reasons for records not appearing into DATRAS are unknown (Barreau, pers. com.).

It is to be noticed that data on DATRAS for SP-PORC do not reflect the results presented into Ruiz-Pico *et al.* (2023 WD).

Length and sex data were recorded for most of the individuals caught during research vessel surveys (to the cm below). The observed *D. intermedius* size distribution seems coherent with the expected shape described in Iglésias *et al.* (2010), with a high number of relatively small individual and the appearance of a small mode at larger size corresponding to the accumulation of the mature individuals into the larger length classes (Figure 26.46). However, the length-frequency distribution of *D. batis* (= *D. cf. flossada*) seems incorrect, with several individuals >150 cm. This suggests that misidentifications (or coding/reporting errors) are present in some data sets.

### 26.2.9 Summary and future work

There is increased interest in the status of both species, and especially *D. intermedius* (demonstrated by the recent studies published), in European seas (e.g. Garbett *et al.*, 2021). The previous IUCN assessment for the species complex (Dulvy *et al.*, 2006) considered a decline in geographic extent among the criteria used. However, given the separation of the two species and increased uncertainty with regards the historical distributions of the two species, more rigorous appraisal of historical information and examination of museum samples are required to inform on the past overall distributions of the species.

In terms of historical studies, ichthyological accounts for the period approximately from 1837/1838 (when *D. intermedius* was described) until 1926 (when it was synonymised with *Dipturus batis*), may provide some relevant information. For example, Murie (1903) reported skate (as *Raia batis*) from the Outer Thames area but noted that flapper skate (as *R. macrorhynchus*) had not been reported from that area. Similarly, Herdman and Dawson (1902) confirmed that common blue skate (as *Raia batis*) was in the Irish Sea and, in relation to flapper skate (as *R. macrorhynchus*), noted that it had been reported by fishers from the area but that the authors had not seen any specimens of skate that they considered distinct from common blue skate. Day (1880–1884) noted that flapper skate (as *R. macrorhynchus*) had also been observed at Plymouth and from Dublin Bay, but that data were limited. Such information would suggest that *D. batis* was the main species of the complex occurring in the Irish Sea (Division 7.a) and potentially the only species of the complex occurring in the southern North Sea (Division 4.c). Collation of other relevant accounts could potentially provide more information on the distributions of the two species.

Additionally, given that some parasites of elasmobranchs, particularly cestodes, can show a high degree of host-specificity, a critical review of published parasitological studies (e.g. Rees & Llewellyn, 1941; Williams, 1959; Manger, 1972; Kennedy and Williams, 1989; Benmeslem *et al.*, 2019) could also usefully be considered.

Survey data are becoming increasingly available for each species within the common skate complex. However, they must be handled with care, as the accepted scientific name of common blue skate *Dipturus batis* (and also the accepted FAO code) can be confused with historical data, field identification guides produced prior to 2010 do not separate the two species. Even if identification on trawl surveys is improving, consistent identification is still required. Concerning the potential for confusion regarding the name of common blue skate, it would be useful if the scientists in charge on surveys could ensure that more detailed comments confirming the occurrence of each of the species, and that reporting of *D. batis* indeed relates to common blue skate *D. batis*, rather than relating to species-complex. If the exact species is not known, data should be reported at the genus level (i.e. *Dipturus* spp., Aphia ID = 105762). Based on the 2022 change and the disappearance of the name *D. flossada* in DATRAS, data recorded as *D. batis* from now on could be considered as common blue skate records. Detailed work should now be undertaken to be able to identify the year surveys started to switch from *D. batis* as a complex to *D. flossada* as the common blue skate, assuming that identification was accurate, in order to reconstruct real time series of the catch. This future work could define the year from which DATRAS data users will be aware that distinction was properly done between the two species.

Present knowledge on the distribution of *D. intermedius* and *D. batis* in their main area of presence, as well as the improvements in the data collected on surveys, could be used in the short-term to medium-term to define better the likely biological stock units for both species (*D. batis* and *D. intermedius*) separately, and potentially providing data on stock status. Reconstructing catch data, however, may be more problematic.

## 26.2.10 References

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**Table 26.1. Distinguishing features of common blue skate *Dipturus batis* and flapper skate *Dipturus intermedius*. Adapted from Iglésias *et al.* (2010), with more recent data added where relevant (\*).**

Feature	Common blue skate	Flapper skate
Eye (iris colour)	Pale yellow	Dark olive-green
Eye-spots on pectoral fin	<i>“Blotch on wing with ocellus with dark centre surrounded by pale ring”</i>	<i>“Blotch of grouped pale spots”</i>
Lateral thorns on tail	Lateral thorns perpendicular	Lateral thorns project anteriorly (towards head)
Dentition	Teeth relatively narrower	Teeth relatively broader
Maximum length	143.2 (to at least 149 cm*)	228.8 cm
Length-at-maturity (female)	122.9 cm	197.5 cm
Length-at-maturity (male)	115 cm	185.5 cm

**Table 26.2. Original description of *Raia flossada* Risso, 1826**

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*Cette espèce, la plus remarquable de nos bords par sa grandeur, présente un corps épais, bombé au milieu, d'un gris cendré, parsemé de taches irrégulières blanches et noirâtres, couvert de petite aspérités qui le rendant âpre au toucher; tout le dessous est blanc, tacheté de points noirs; le museau est prolongé en pointe arrondie; les yeux sont proéminents, ovales oblongs, et ont l'iris blanchâtre, avec la prunelle bleue; les narines sont grandes, arquées; la bouche a beaucoup d'ampleur, et ses mâchoires sont munies dans leur milieu de onze rangées de dents coniques, aiguës et crochues, et seulement de chaque côté de sept rangées de dents un peu obtuses; les ouvertures branchiales sont linéaires; les nageoires ventrales sinueuses, à dix-huit rayons chacune; la queue est courte, épaisse, courbée, terminée au sommet, qui est tronqué, par deux nageoires oblongues; elle est bombée en dessus, aplatie en dessous, et munie de chaque côté de quarante-deux aiguillons crochus; la chair de cette raie est blanche et d'un goût fade. La femelle est aussi grosse que le mâle. Long. 1,200, enverg. 0,900. Séj. Grandes profondeurs. App. Avril, mai.*

[This species, the most remarkable of our borders by its size, has a thick body, rounded in the middle, of an ash grey, dotted with white and blackish irregular spots, covered with small denticles which make it harsh to the touch; all below is white, speckled with black dots; the snout is extended in a rounded point; the eyes are prominent, oblong oval, and have a whitish iris, with blue centre; the nostrils are large, arched; the mouth is very full, and its jaws are provided in their middle with eleven rows of conical, sharp, hooked teeth, and only on each side with seven rows of somewhat obtuse teeth; the gill openings are linear; sinuous ventral fins, eighteen rays each; the tail is short, thick, curved, terminating at the top, which is truncated, by two oblong fins; it is rounded above, flattened below, and provided on each side with forty-two hooked spines; the flesh of this ray is white and tasteless. The female is as big as the male. Length: 120 cm, width: 90 cm. Habitat: Great depths. Appearance: April May.]



**Table 26.3. Taxonomic units of the genus *Dipturus* occurring in the North-east Atlantic, including taxa considered in the present analyses. In the subsequent two tables, the FSS species codes have been used, as these better separate the two species from the complex. Information on the undescribed *Dipturus* sp. is provided in Ebert and Stehmann (2013).**

Common name	Scientific name	Code (FSS)	Code (FAO)	AphiaID
Common skate complex	<i>Dipturus batis</i> -complex	SKT	RJB	-
Common blue skate	<i>Dipturus batis</i>	SKG	RJB	105869
Flapper skate	<i>Dipturus intermedius</i>	SKF	DRJ	711846
Long-nosed skate	<i>Dipturus oxyrinchus</i>	LNS	RJO	105872
Norwegian skate	<i>Dipturus nidarosiensis</i>	RNS	JAD	105871
Undescribed <i>Dipturus</i> sp.	<i>Dipturus</i> sp.	-	-	-
Unidentified <i>Dipturus</i> spp.	<i>Dipturus</i> spp.	-	-	105762

**Table 26.4. Summary of catch records for *Dipturus* spp. held on CEFAS' database in relation to process code (CO = counted only; MO = measured only; OB = observed; WC = weighed and counted; WM = weighed and measured; WO = weighed only) and survey series for the years 1901–2021. These data refer to station records and not the numbers of individual animals caught (see below). Surveys with no records of either of the case study species not included. Current trawl survey monitoring programmes indicated\*. See Table 26.3 for list of species codes, including those used on FSS (shown here) and the corresponding FAO codes.**

Survey series	Process code	LNS	RNS	SKF	SKG	SKT	Total
ARCTIC	CO					40	40
	OB					15	15
	WO					2	2
DCRDC	WM					24	24
ELASMOS <sup>[1]</sup>	MO			16	158		174
HISTORIC	CO	4	2			354	360
	MO					277	277
	OB	15				61	76
	WC					32	32
	WM					16	16
	WO					11	11
HISTORWEST	CO	2			1	72	75
	MO					99	99
	OB					3	3
	WC					1	1
	WO					2	2
IBTS3E* <sup>[2]</sup>	MO					1	1
	WM	2		6	1	13	22
IBTS4E	WM					2	2
MEMFISH	WM					1	1
NSGFS	OB	1				2	3
	WM	6				10	16
Q1SWBEAM* <sup>[3]</sup>	OB					1	1
	WM			1	65	111	177
Q1SWOTTER	WM			5	63	2	70

Survey series	Process code	LNS	RNS	SKF	SKG	SKT	Total
Q4SWIBTS	WM					21	21
WCGFS	WM	6	2			68	76
YFS	MO					2	2
Total		36	4	28	288	1243	1599

<sup>[1]</sup> Data collected on chartered commercial fishing vessel

<sup>[2]</sup> This survey relates to NS-IBTS-Q3

<sup>[3]</sup> This survey may also be referred to as 'Q1SWECOS', 'BTS-UK-Q1' or 'UK-Q1SWBeam' in other ICES-related documents.

**Table 26.5. Summary of number of measured *Dipturus* spp. held on CEFAS' database by survey series (1901–2021). Current trawl survey monitoring programmes indicated\*. See Table 26.3 for list of species codes, including those used on FSS (shown here) and the corresponding FAO codes.**

Survey series	LNS	RNS	SKF	SKG	SKT	Total
ELASMOS	–	–	30	2416	–	2446
HISTORIC	–	–	–	–	692	692
*Q1SWBEAM	–	–	1	85	125	211
Q1SWOTTER	–	–	7	195	3	205
HISTORWEST	–	–	–	–	195	195
WCGFS	7	2	–	–	83	92
DCRDC	–	–	–	–	31	31
*IBTS3E	2	–	10	1	16	29
Q4SWIBTS	–	–	–	–	27	27
NSGFS	7	–	–	–	10	17
IBTS4E	–	–	–	–	2	2
YFS	–	–	–	–	2	2
MEMFISH	–	–	–	–	1	1
ARCTIC	–	–	–	–	–	0
Total	16	2	48	2697	1187	3950

**Table 26.6. Length-weight parameters for members of the common skate complex, including earlier published studies by sex (M: Male; F: Female; C: Sexes combined).**

Species	Sex	N	L <sub>T</sub> (cm)	Weight (g)	a	B	r <sup>2</sup>	Source
<b>Total weight (W<sub>T</sub>)</b>								
<i>Dipturus batis</i> -complex	C	8	18–49 D <sub>w</sub>	88–1886	0.0108	3.0787	–	Coull <i>et al.</i> (1988) <sup>[5]</sup>
	C	32	52–130	700–15960	0.0010	3.391	0.986	Rosa <i>et al.</i> (2006) <sup>[3]</sup>
	F	32	19–135	–	0.0026	3.222	0.99	McCully <i>et al.</i> (2012)
	M	30	20–118	–	0.0041	3.123	0.95	
	C	46	19–131	36–13940	0.0038	3.1201	0.996	Silva <i>et al.</i> (2013)
	C	37	9.5–210.5 <sup>[2]</sup>	–	0.00740	2.953	0.984	Wilhelms (2013)
	C <sup>[1]</sup>	140	18–200	26–80000 <sup>[4]</sup>	0.0032	3.1679	0.980	This study
<i>Dipturus batis</i>	C	334	18–136	24–15770	0.003	3.1723	0.996	This study
	F		167	-	0.0024	3.2034	0.996	Barreau <i>et al.</i> (2016)
	M		196	-	0.0025	3.192	0.997	
<i>Dipturus intermedius</i>	C	19	34–170	170–33280	0.0017	3.2781	0.998	This study
<b>Gutted weight (W<sub>T</sub>)</b>								
<i>Dipturus batis</i>	F	175	–	–	0.0026	3.1555	0.996	Barreau <i>et al.</i> (2016)
	M	197	–	–	0.0025	3.1718	0.997	
<i>Dipturus intermedius</i>	F	45	–	–	0.0011	3.3236	0.995	
	M	56	–	–	0.0006	3.4453	0.986	

<sup>[1]</sup> Includes only data where specimens were not identified to species-specific level.

<sup>[2]</sup> Minimum size given (9.5 cm) is less than the length-at-hatching.

<sup>[3]</sup> Data from the Azores, and so there is potential uncertainty in species.

<sup>[4]</sup> Maximum weight may be underestimated, as the Electronic Data Capture (EDC) system originally had a maximum weight of 80 kg.

<sup>[5]</sup> Values based on disc width (D<sub>w</sub>) and not total length.

**Table 26.7. Number of individual *Dipturus* spp. collected during Research Vessels surveys between 2010 and 2021, as reported on DATRAS. Data for the various species names used derived from the ScientificName\_WoRMS.**

- No survey

Species	Survey	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Total	
<i>Dipturus</i> spp.	NS-IBTS	2	2	1	0	1	2	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	11	
	SP-PORC	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	7	
<i>Dipturus batis</i> complex	BTS	3	1	4	3	10	24	18	56	26	31	1	20	30	197	
	BTS-VIII	-	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	
	EVHOE	1	4	6	16	11	20	25	-	5	0	104	129	74	321	
	IE-IAMS	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	0	0	7	1	0	97	8	
	IE-IGFS	20	14	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	22	34	
	NIGFS	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	2	
	NS-IBTS	14	24	14	7	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	61	
	PT-IBTS	0	0	-	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-	-	4	0	4
	ROCKALL/SCOROC	-	0	40	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	74	40
	SP-NORTH	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
	SP-PORC	6	5	5	15	0	30	8	6	39	0	0	0	32	0	146
SWC-IBTS/SCOWCGFS	82	60	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	12	142	
<i>Dipturus batis</i> (= <i>D. cf. flossada</i> )	EVHOE	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-	84	84	0	0	0	168	
	IE-IAMS	-	-	-	-	-	-	87	35	52	93	66	77	0	410	
	IE-IGFS	5	2	5	13	32	34	47	11	25	53	34	47	0	308	
	NS-IBTS	0	0	0	6	3	4	2	2	8	6	11	9	0	51	
	ROCKALL/SCOROC	-	12	0	29	63	34	67	61	85	98	61	134	0	644	

Species	Survey	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Total	
<i>Dipturus intermedius</i>	SWC-IBTS/SCOWCGFS	0	2	6	0	21	17	26	14	17	10	24	20	0	157	
	BTS	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	
	EVHOE	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-	3	4	0	0	0	7	
	IE-IAMS	-	-	-	-	-	-	185	193	205	277	46	134	119	990	
	IE-IGFS	8	20	33	24	38	20	22	50	63	37	19	46	78	380	
	NS-IBTS	0	0	22	27	10	7	16	19	17	26	19	33	30	196	
	ROCKALL/SCOROC	-	20	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	20	
	SWC-IBTS/SCOWCGFS	0	81	234	124	158	97	131	151	94	151	116	83	62	1420	
<i>Dipturus oxyrinchus</i>	IE-IAMS	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	0	0	0	0	3	1	3	
	IE-IGFS	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	8	0	10	
	NS-IBTS	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	3	
	PT-IBTS	0	0	-	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	-	-	3	26	5
	ROCKALL/SCOROC	-	8	4	3	5	8	0	6	3	2	2	10	13	51	
	SP-ARSA	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	51	0	0	-	0	51	
	SP-NORTH	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	
<i>Dipturus nidarosiensis</i>	IE-IAMS	-	-	-	-	-	-	8	4	0	3	0	0	12	15	
	ROCKALL/SCOROC	-	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	
	SP-NORTH	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	3	
	SP-PORC	2	1	6	4	0	16	5	6	5	0	0	18	0	63	

- No survey or truncated survey

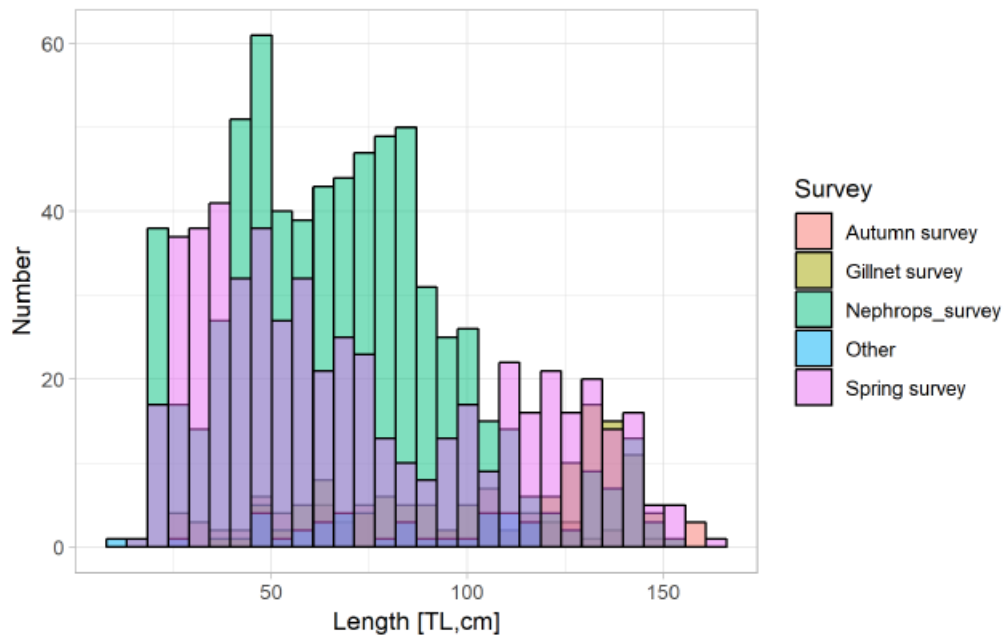


Figure 26.1. Length-frequency of 'common skate' recorded in various Icelandic surveys. The near absence of large individuals would be indicative of *Dipturus batis* being the main species present.

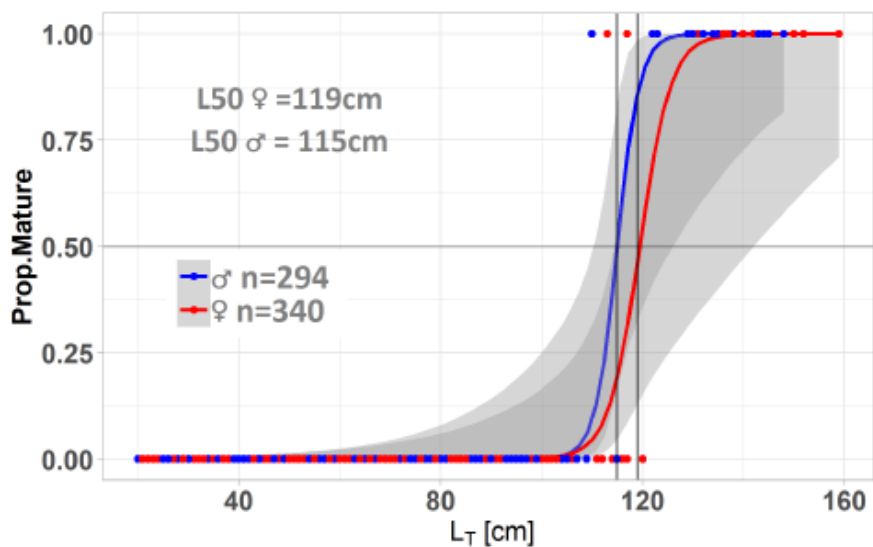
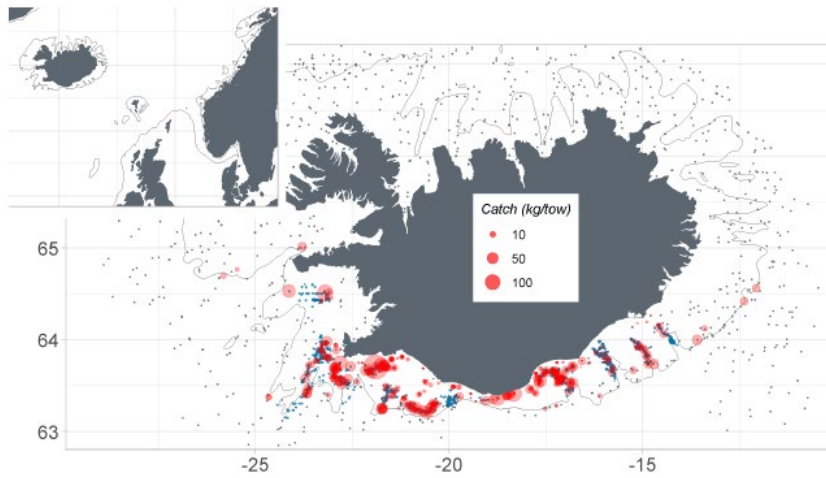
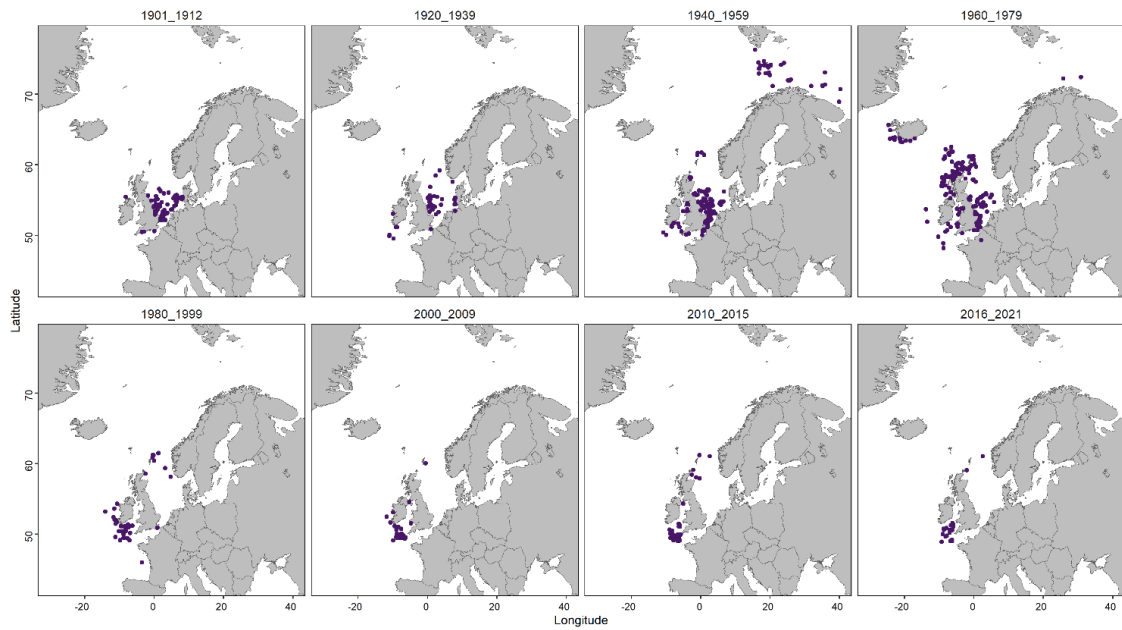


Figure 26.2. Length-at-maturity of 'common skate' recorded in Icelandic surveys. The estimated lengths-at-maturity are consistent with those values provided by Iglésias *et al.* (2010) for *Dipturus cf. flossada*, thus being indicative of *Dipturus batis*.



**Figure 26.3.** Distribution of common skate complex (presumed to be *D. batis*) in Icelandic waters. Grey points: Stations sampled in spring and autumn bottom trawl surveys each year. Red circles indicate the occurrence and catch rates of *D. batis*, with blue circles using data from a *Nephrops* survey (2002–2018).



**Figure 26.4.** Recorded presence of common skate-complex by time period in scientific trawl surveys. Note: Latitude and longitude used from hauling positions. Only shown records where specimens were not identified and/or allocated to particular species. Hauls with no records are not shown, and so broadscale changes in distribution over time are not indicated.

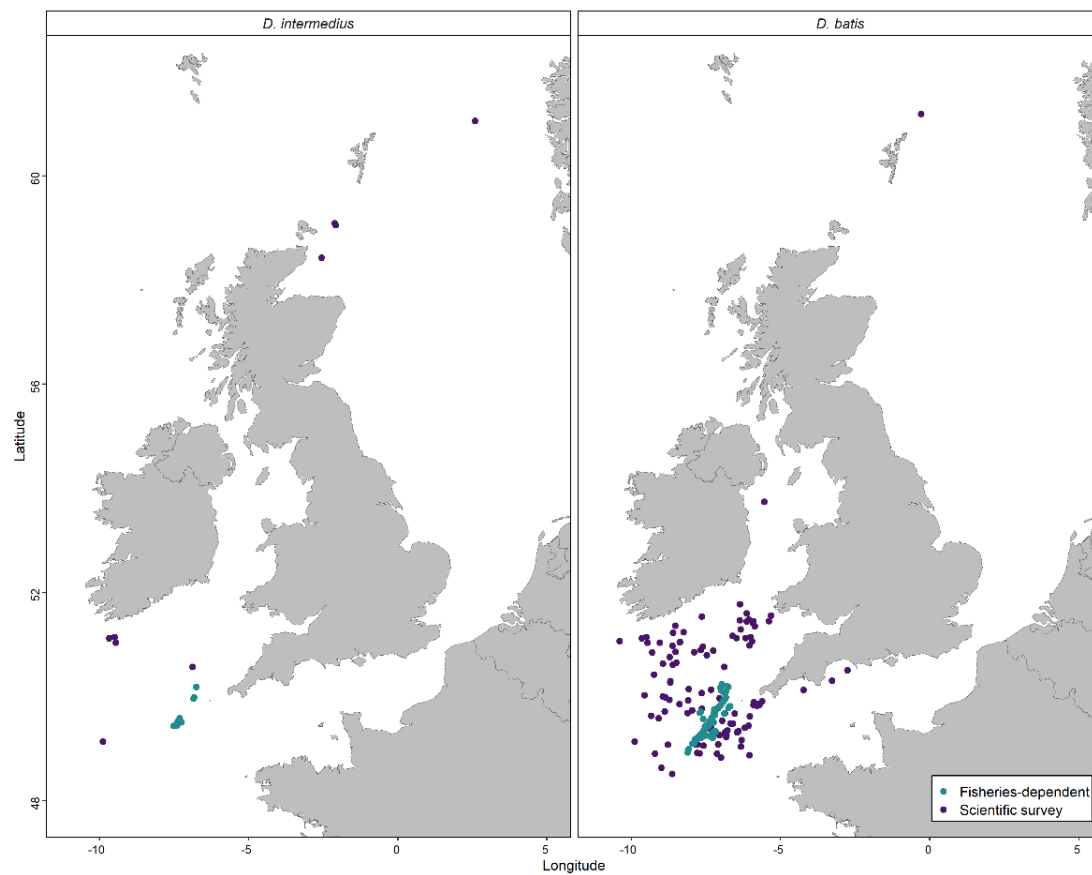
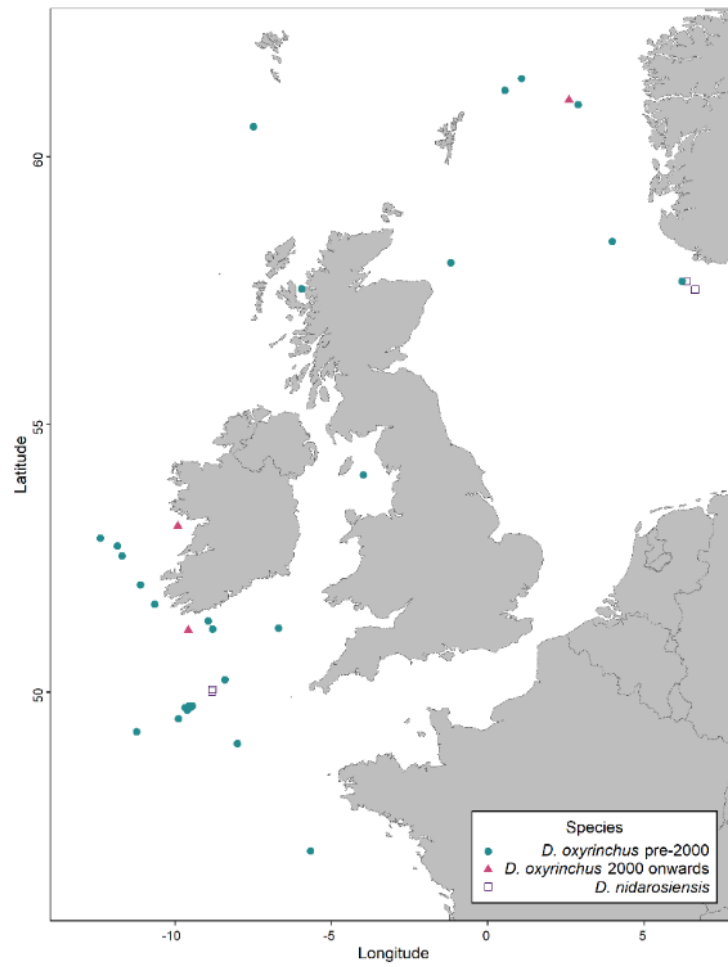


Figure 26.5. Recorded presence of common blue skate *D. batis* and flapper skate *D. intermedius* by survey. Note: Latitude and longitude used from hauling positions.





**Figure 26.6. Recorded presence of long-nosed skate *D. oxyrinchus* (pre-2000 and 2000 onwards) and Norwegian skate *D. nidarosiensis*. Note: Latitude and longitude used from hauling positions. These two species have only occurred on scientific surveys (fisheries-independent). Note: Given that most of these records were recorded prior to the revised separation of the common skate complex, these data may include misidentified flapper skate. Hence, these data should be interpreted with caution.**

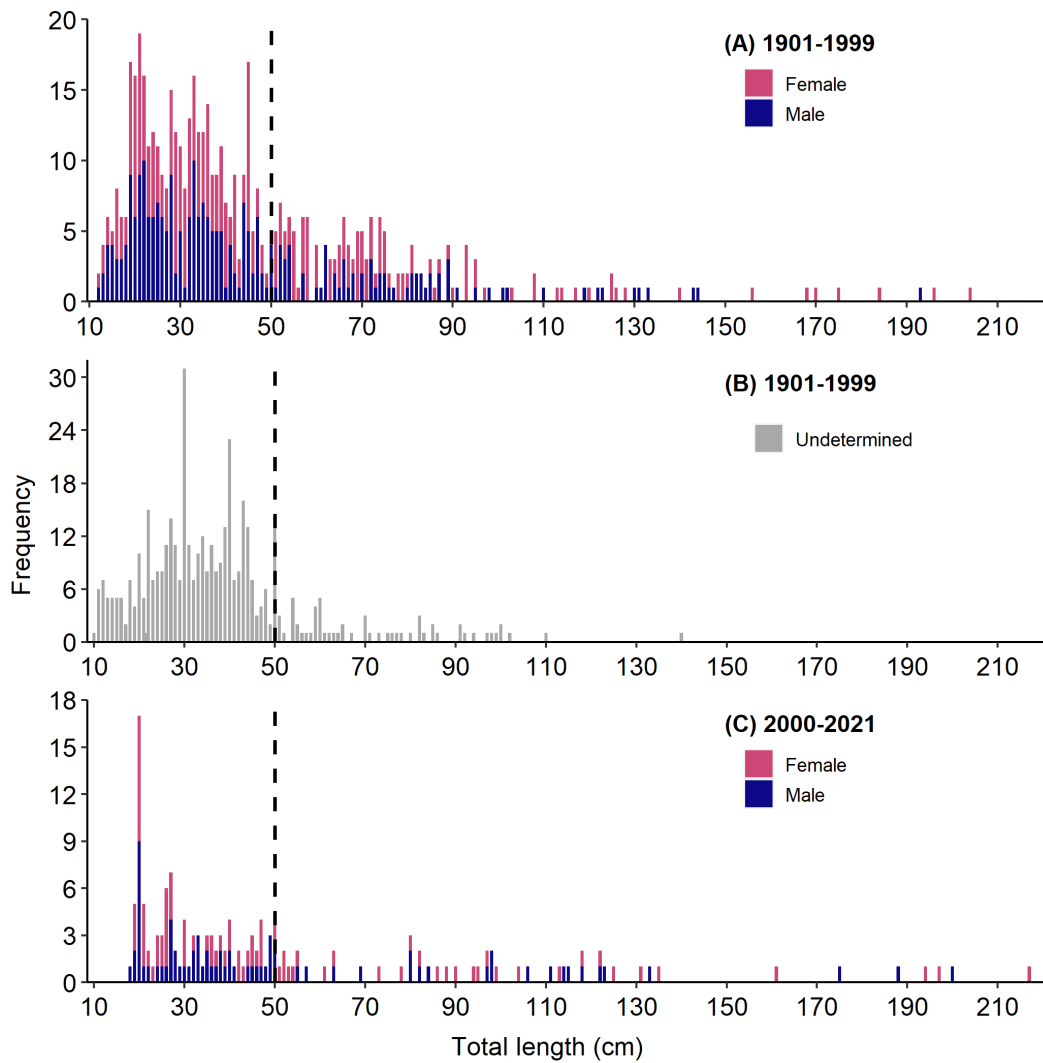


Figure 26.7. Length frequency distribution for common skate-complex *Dipturus batis*-complex by sex for (A) 1901–1999 (Females, n = 291, 12–204 cm L<sub>T</sub>; Males n = 258, 12–193 cm L<sub>T</sub>), (B) 1901–1999 (Undetermined, n = 425, 10–140 cm L<sub>T</sub>) and (C) 2000–2021 (Females, n = 83, 19–217 cm L<sub>T</sub>; Males, n = 74, 18–200 cm L<sub>T</sub>). Note: Dashed line represents length assumed for ‘exploitable biomass’ at 50 cm L<sub>T</sub>. Data for common-skate complex only considered records where specimens were not identified and/or allocated to species-specific, these were only reported during scientific surveys. Different y-axis to avoid data to be skewed.

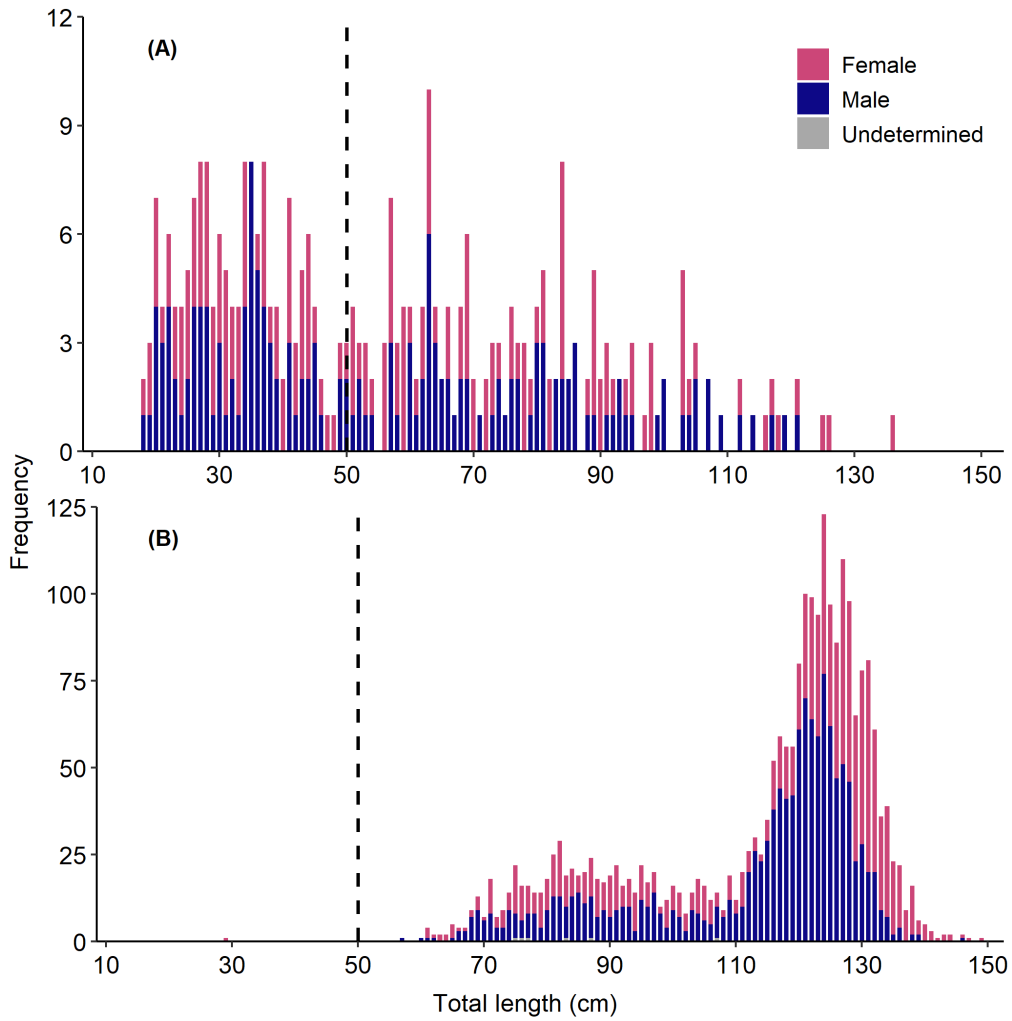
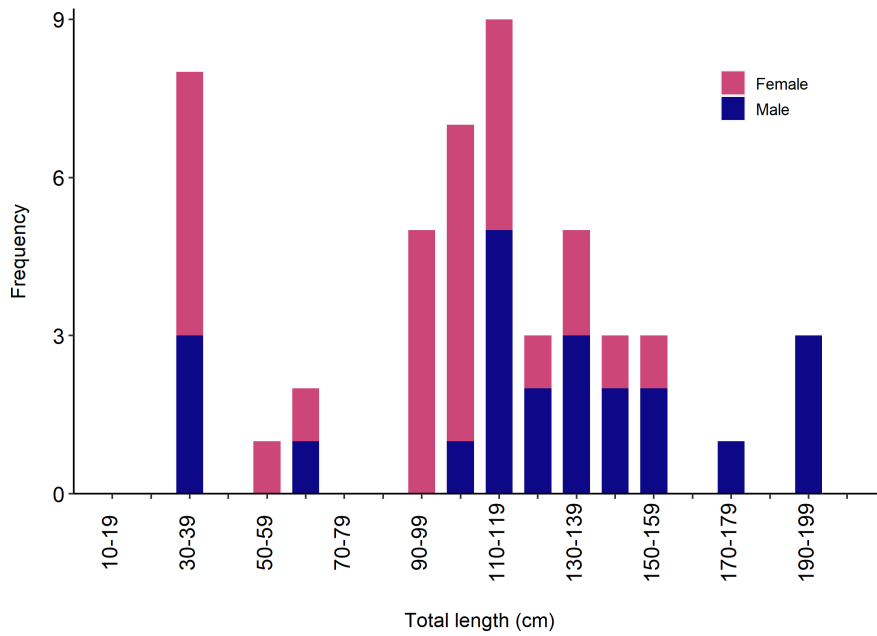
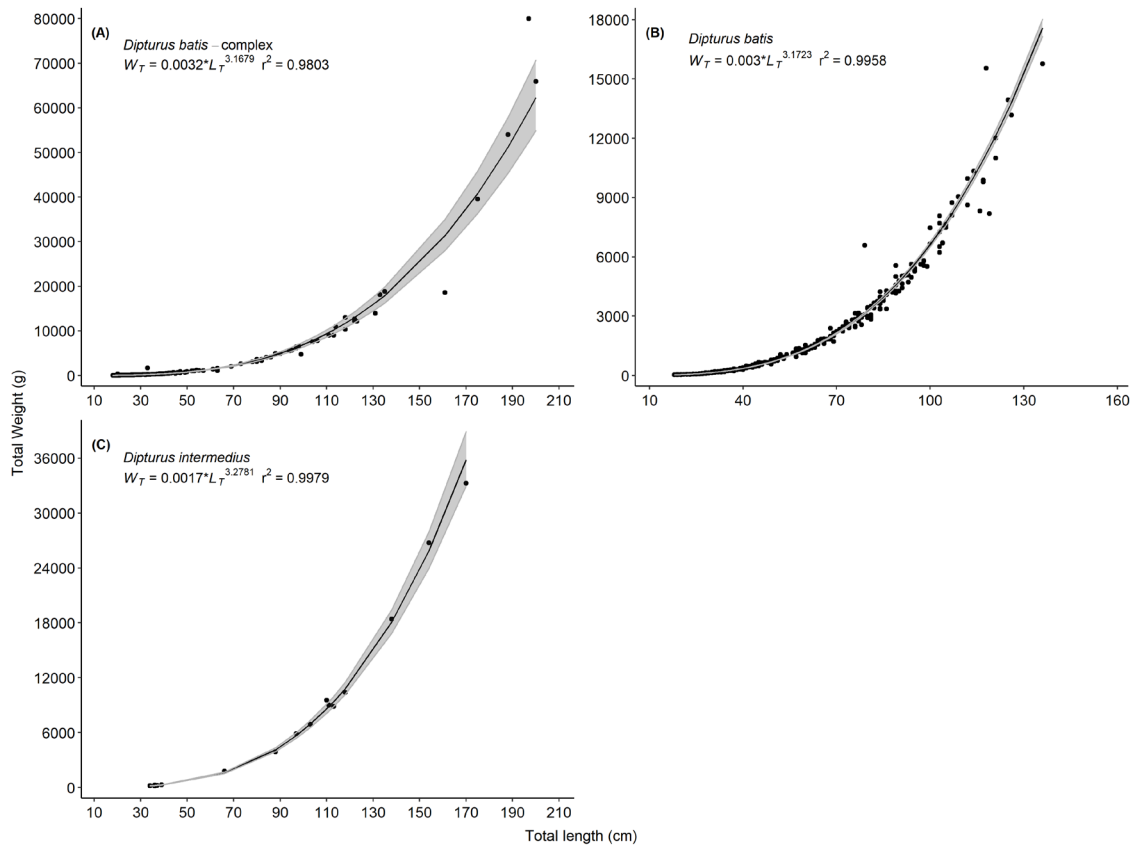


Figure 26.8. Length frequency distribution for common blue skate *D. batis* by sex and survey (A) scientific survey (Females,  $n = 174$ , 18–136 cm  $L_T$ ; Males,  $n = 161$ , 18–121 cm  $L_T$ ) and (B) fisheries-dependent survey (Females,  $n = 1,113$ , 29–149 cm  $L_T$ ; Males,  $n = 1,297$ , 57–146 cm  $L_T$ ; Undetermined,  $n = 6$ , 75–107 cm  $L_T$ ). Note: Dashed line represents length assumed for ‘exploitable biomass’ at 50 cm  $L_T$ . Different y-axis to avoid data to be skewed.



**Figure 26.9.** Length frequency distribution for flapper skate *D. intermedius* by sex (Females:  $n = 27$ , 34–154 cm  $L_T$ ; Males:  $n = 23$ , 34–195 cm  $L_T$ ). Note: Data aggregated across surveys due to limited available records and in 10 cm bins.



**Figure 26.10.** Relationships between total weight ( $W_T$ , g) and total length ( $L_T$ , cm) across years and surveys for (A) common skate-complex ( $n = 140$ ), (B) common blue skate *D. batis* ( $n = 334$ ) and (C) flapper skate *D. intermedius* ( $n = 19$ ). Note: Data for common-skate complex only considered records where specimens were not identified and/or allocated to species-specific (A). Different axes used to avoid data being skewed. See also Table 26.6.

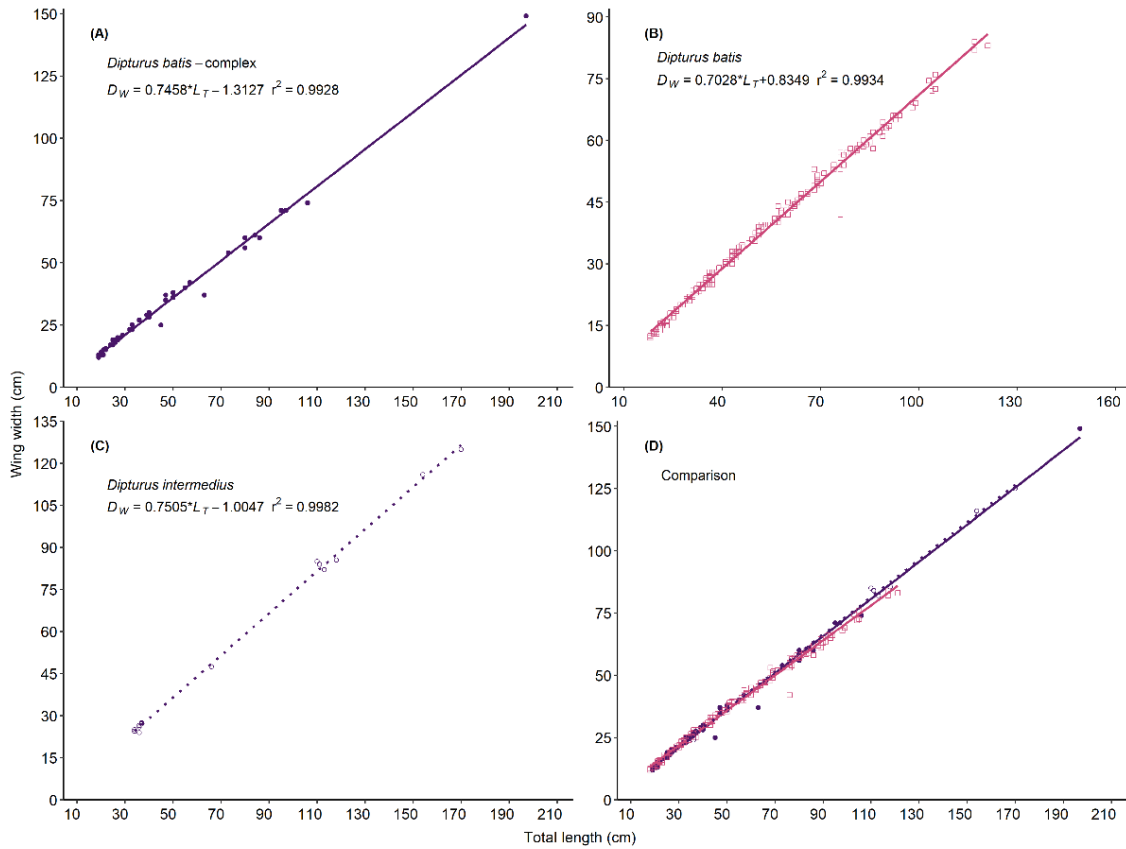


Figure 26.11. Total length ( $L_T$ , cm) to wing width ( $D_W$ , cm) across years and surveys for (A) common skate-complex ( $n = 53$ ), (B) common blue skate *D. batis* ( $n = 204$ ), (C) flapper skate *D. intermedius* ( $n = 14$ ) and (D) comparison of relationships. Note: Data for common-skate complex only considered records where specimens were not identified and/or allocated to species-specific (A). Different axis to avoid data to be skewed.

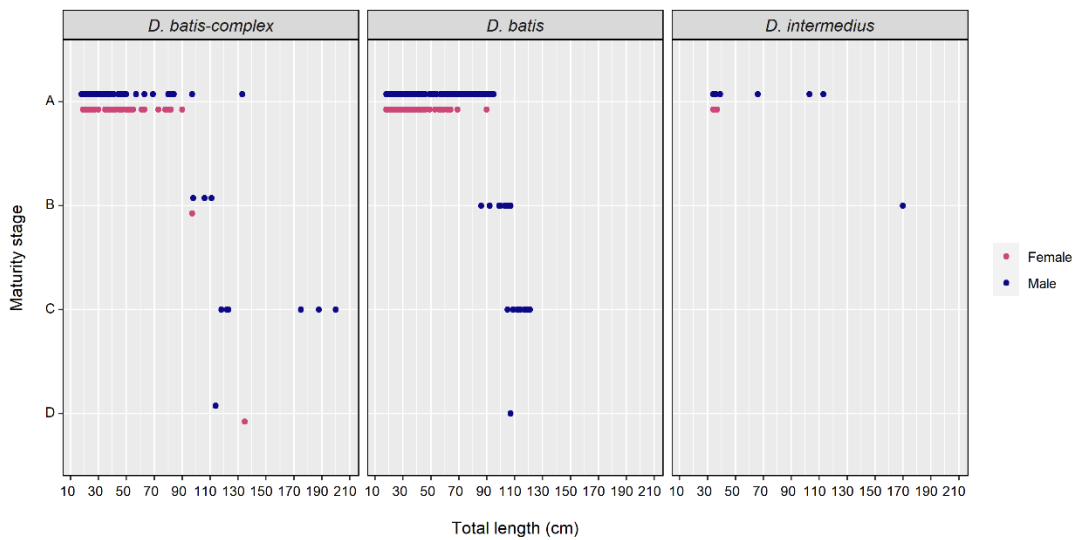


Figure 26.12. Maturity stage by sex and total length ( $L_T$ ) (A) common skate-complex *D. batis-complex* ( $n = 53$ ), (B) common blue skate *D. batis* ( $n = 204$ ) and (C) flapper skate *D. intermedius* ( $n = 14$ ). Note: Data for common-skate complex only considered records where specimens were not identified and/or allocated to a specific species. Maturity stages: A (Immature), B (Maturing), C (Mature) and D (Active). Other species not shown as limited data but describe in text.

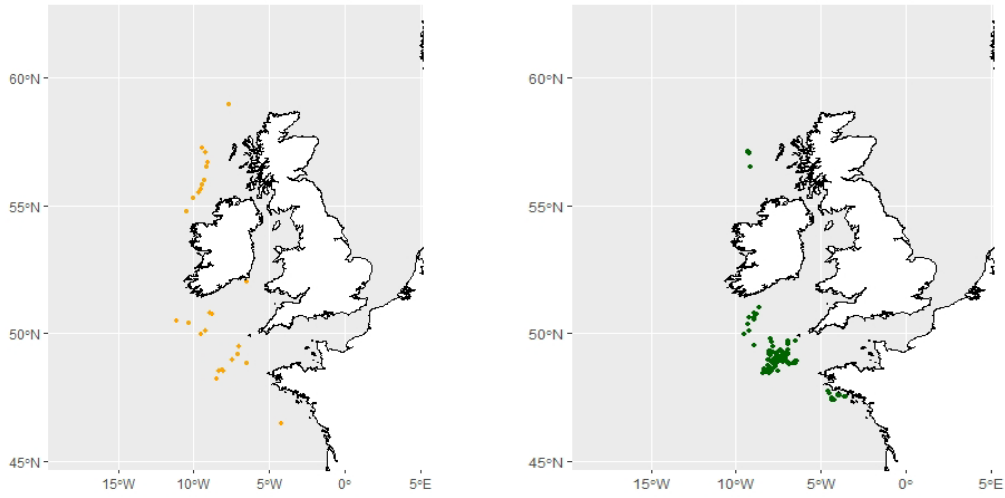


Figure 26.13. Observed occurrence (2006–2016) of flapper skate *Dipturus intermedius* (left, orange circles; n = 95) and common blue skate *Dipturus batis* (right, green circles; n = 1378).

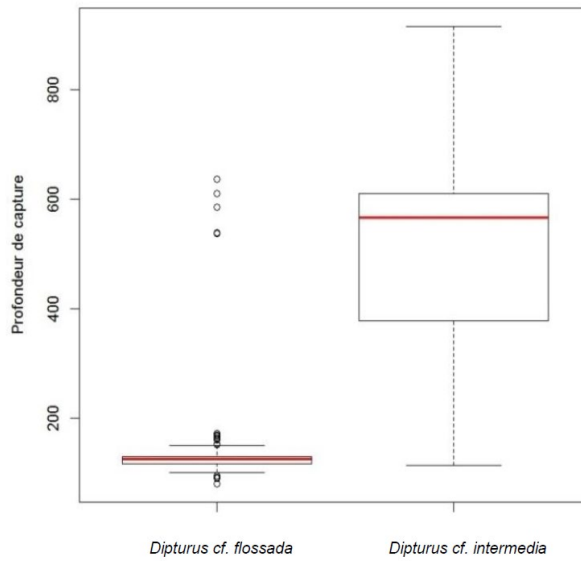


Figure 26.14. Boxplot on depth of capture for *Dipturus batis* (here labelled as “*D. cf. flossada*”; n = 1332) and *D. intermedius* (here labelled as “*D. cf. intermedia*”; n = 64) recorded during onboard fishing vessels observation program “POCHETEAU” including one trip on the edge of the North-west Scotland shelf (2007) and six trips (2013–2015) on the continental shelf of the Celtic Sea. Red line is the median depth of catch. Source: Barreau *et al.* (2016).

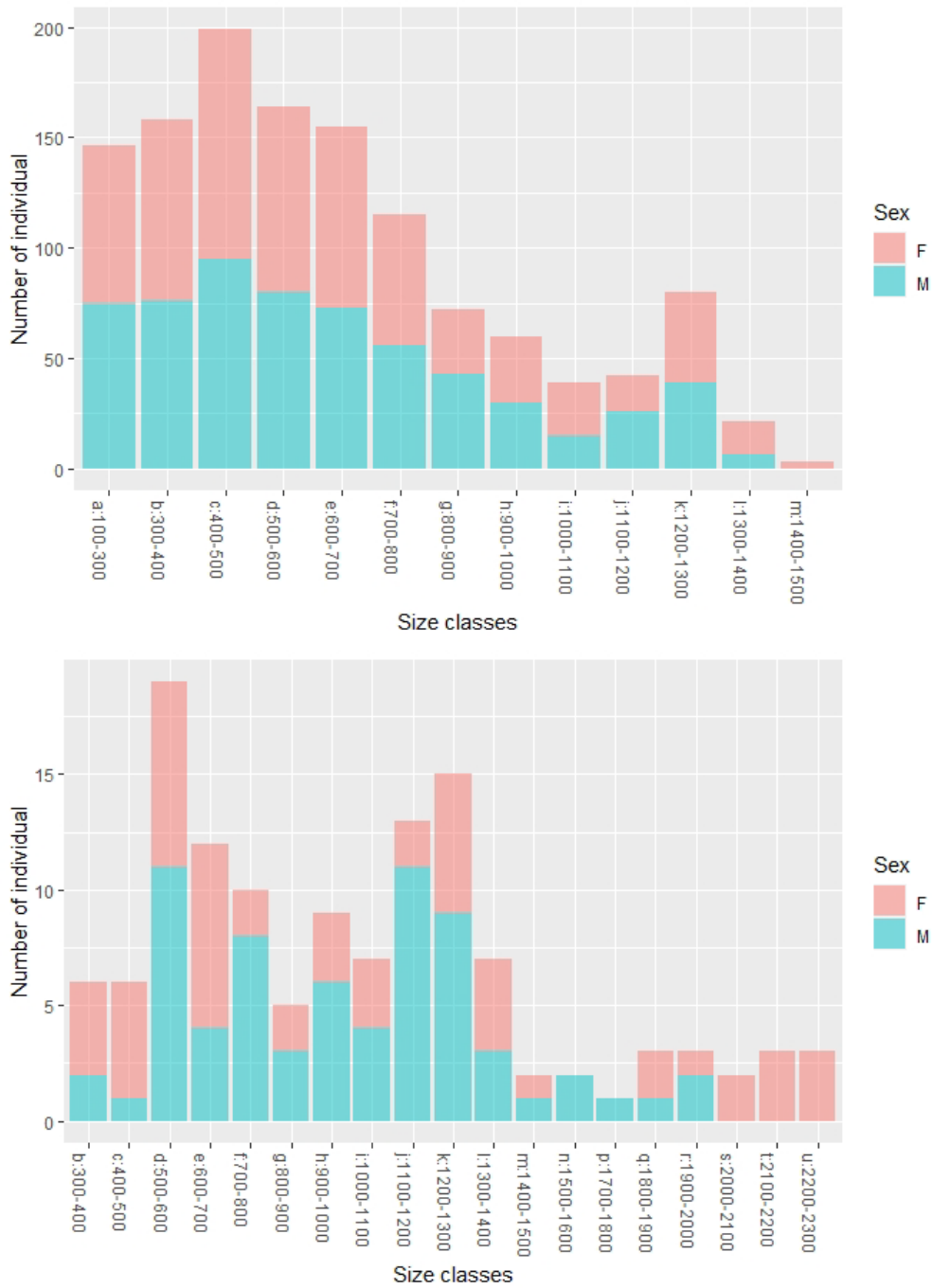


Figure 26.15. Length-frequency distributions (in 10 cm size classes) by sex (red: female; blue: male) of common blue skate *Dipturus batis* (top; n = 1254) and flapper skate *D. intermedius* (bottom; n = 128) observed during the Pocheteau project (2013–2015). Source: Barreau *et al.* (2016).

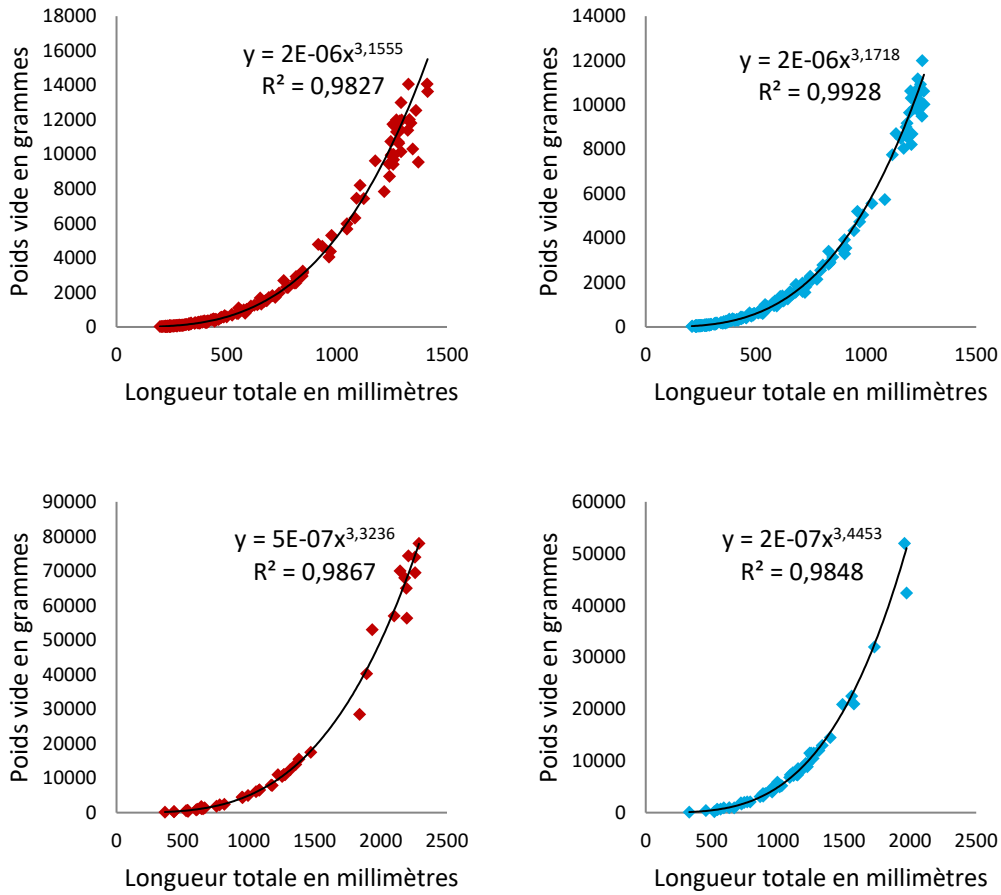


Figure 26.16. Length-gutted weight relationships per sex based for common blue skate *Dipturus batis* (top left: female, n = 175; top right: male, n = 197) and flapper skate *Dipturus intermedius* (bottom left: female, n = 45; bottom right: male, n = 56). Source: Barreau *et al.* (2016). See also Table 26.6.

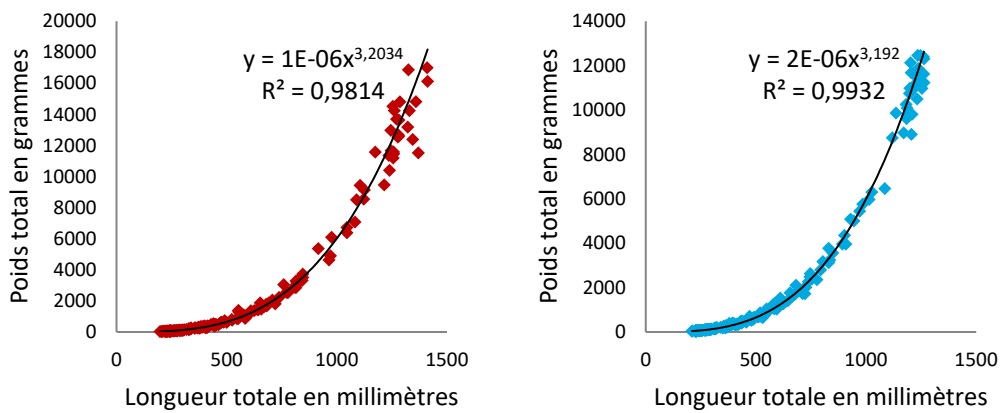
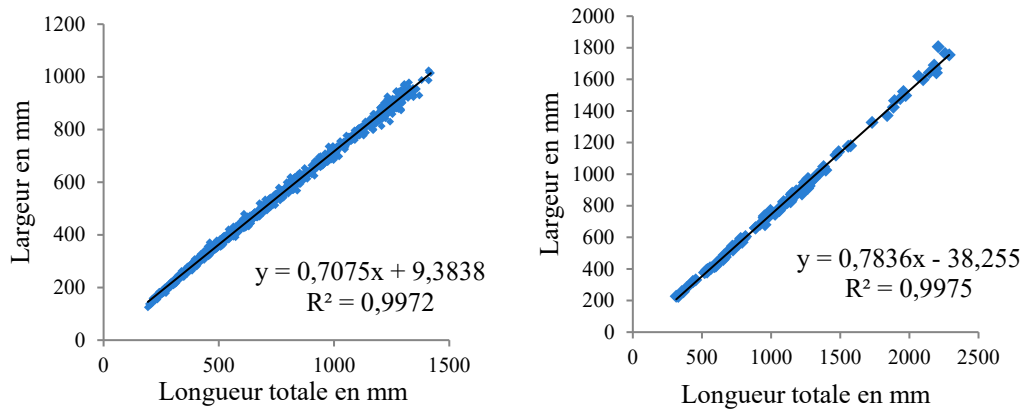
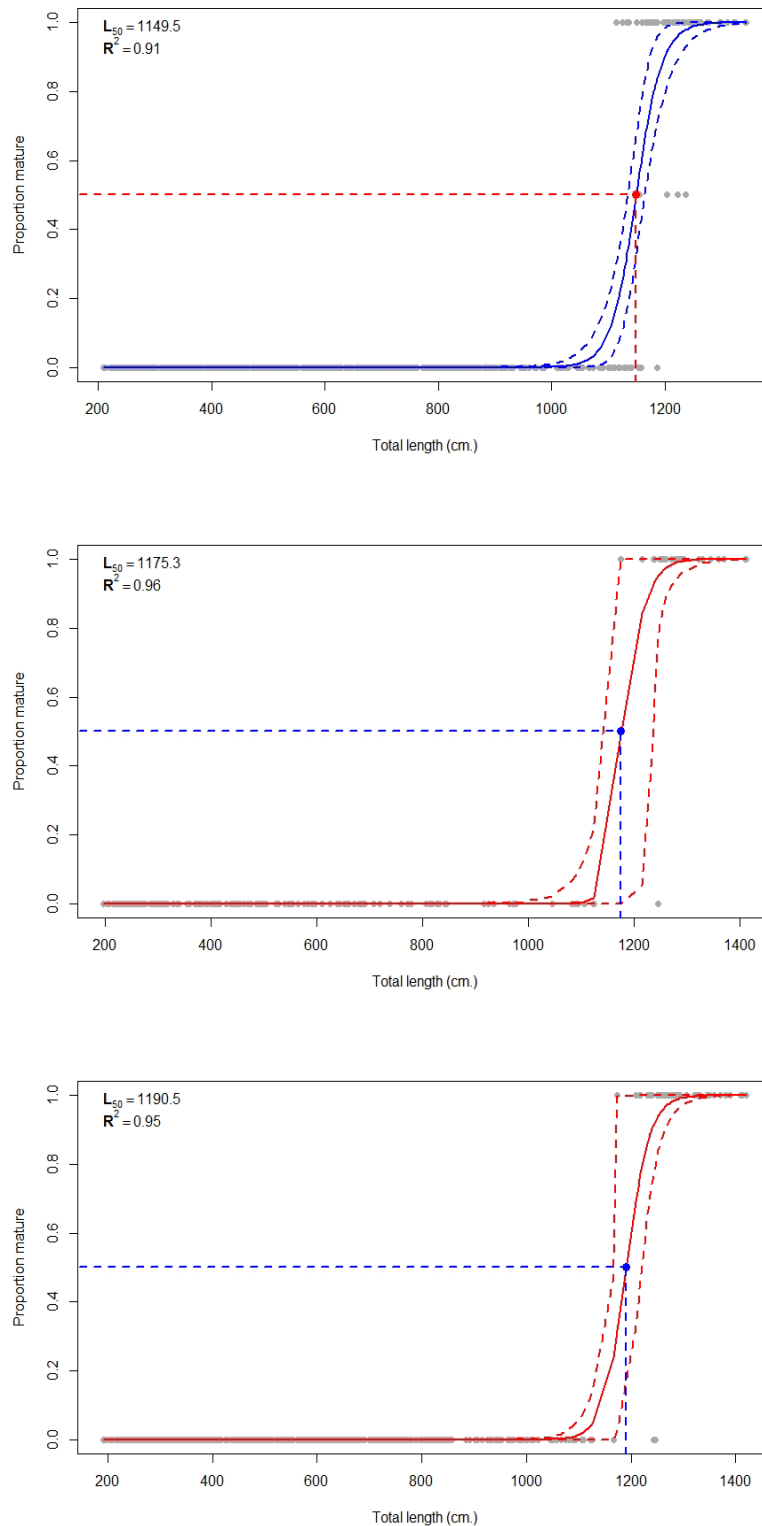


Figure 26.17. Length-total weight relationship per sex for common blue skate *Dipturus batis* (left: female, n = 167; right: male, n = 196). Source: Barreau *et al.* (2016). See also Table 26.6.





**Figure 26.18.** Relationship between disc width (largeur, mm) and total length (longueur total, mm), as defined by  $y = ax + b$  for common blue skate *D. batis* (left, n = 1374) and flapper skate *D. intermedius* (right, n = 115). Source: Barreau *et al.* (2016).



**Figure 26.19.** Maturity ogives for common blue skate *Dipturus batis* for males (top;  $n = 756$ ;  $L_{50} = 114.95$  cm), females (centre;  $n = 184$ ;  $L_{50} = 117.53$  cm, based on dissected specimens) and females (bottom;  $n = 694$ ;  $L_{50} = 119.05$  cm, based on the assumption that all females  $<90$  cm are immature and that female caught alive but not dissected were mature if a flaccid cloaca was observed).

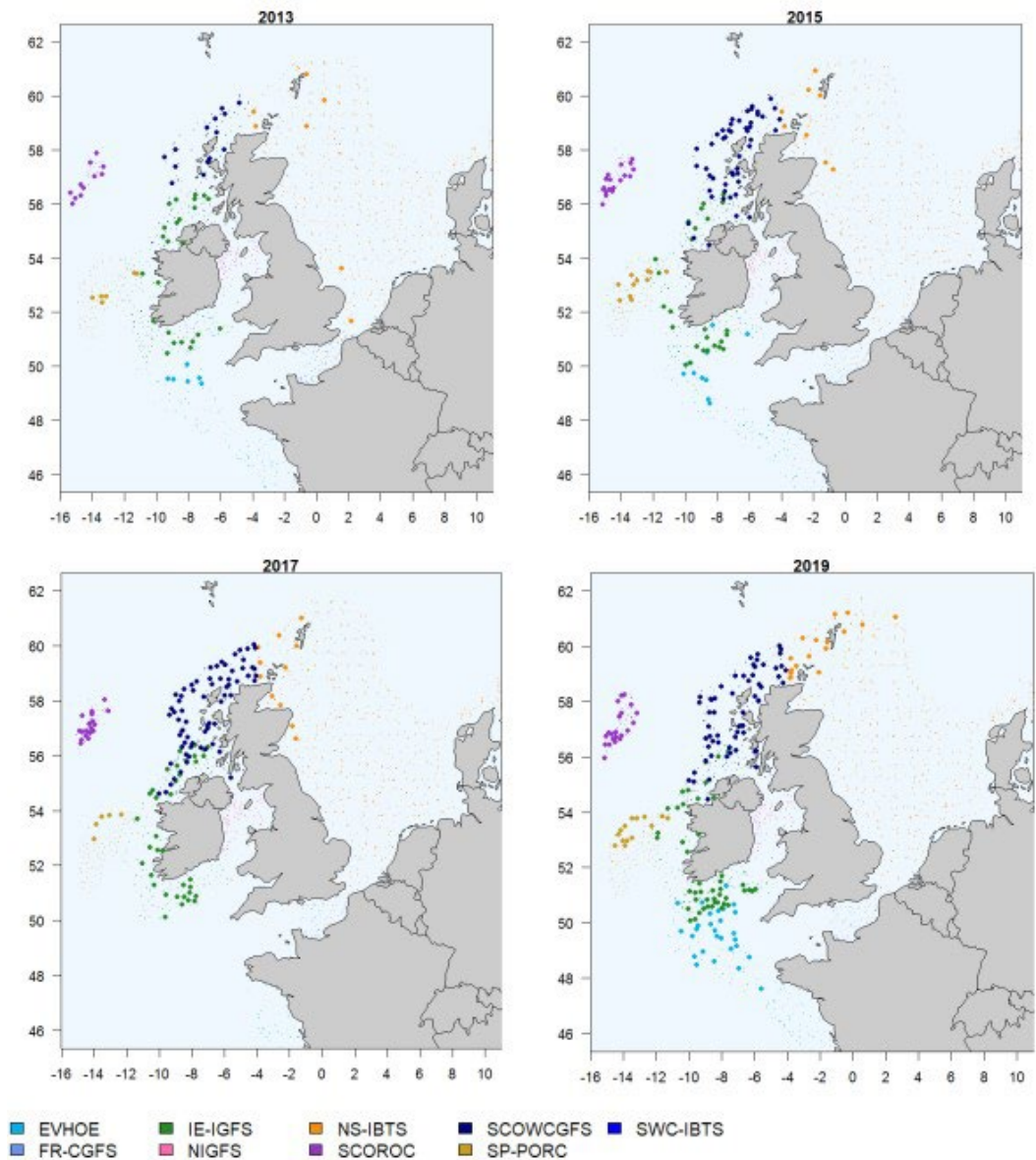


Figure 26.20 Presence-absence of the common blue skate complex (*D. batis* and *D. intermedius*) in IBTS surveys (Source: DATRAS) for odd-numbered years between 2013 and 2019. Circles indicates stations where at least one of the species is present while dots signals stations where they were not observed. Each colour corresponds to a particular survey. In 2017, EVHOE-WIBTS-Q4 (light blue) did not cover the Celtic Sea.

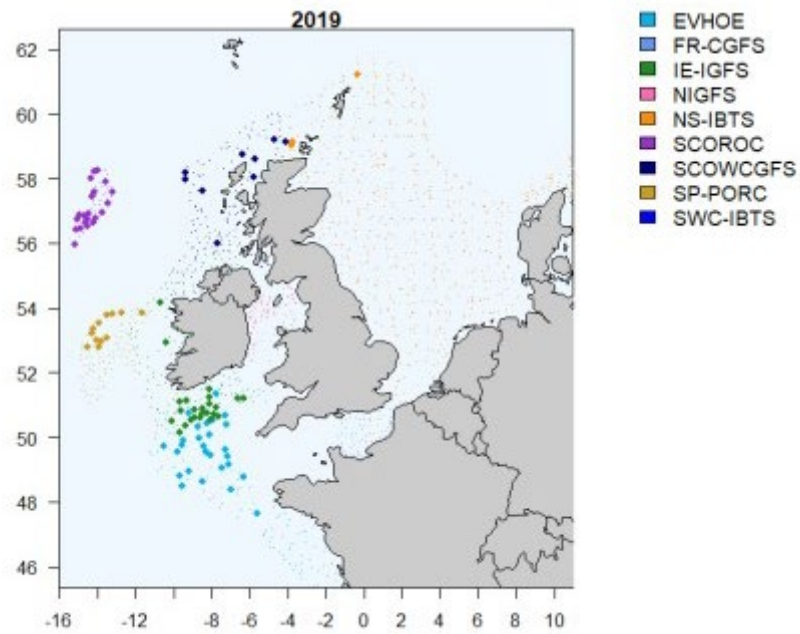


Figure 26.21 Presence-absence of common blue skate complex (*D. batis*) in IBTS surveys (source: DATRAS) in 2019 Circles indicates stations where the species is present while dots signals stations where they it not observed. Each colour corresponds to a particular survey.

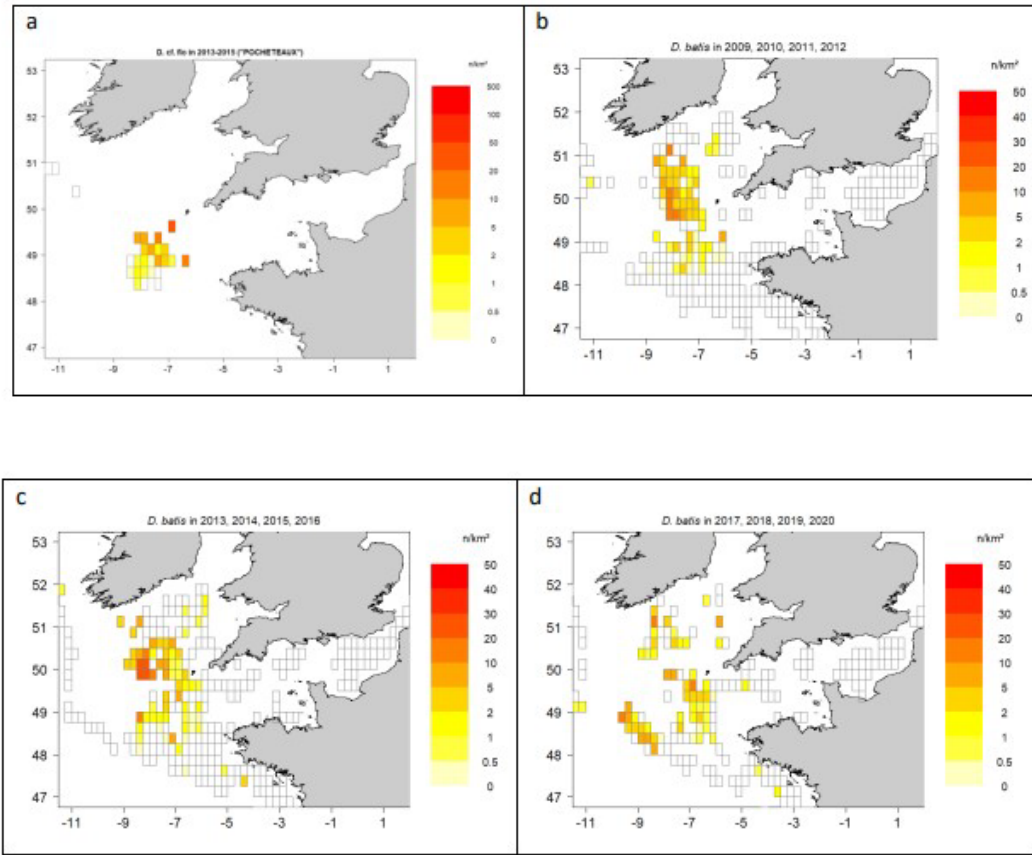


Figure 26.22 Distribution of densities of *D. batis* in the Celtic Sea in numbers by km<sup>2</sup>, from Obsmer data (b to d) for periods of 4 years in 0.25° lat x 0.25° lon cells, and compared to densities derived from data collected during the POCHETEAUX project (a). Average densities are calculated from otter trawl data. Only cells with a minimum of 3 observed fishing operations are represented.

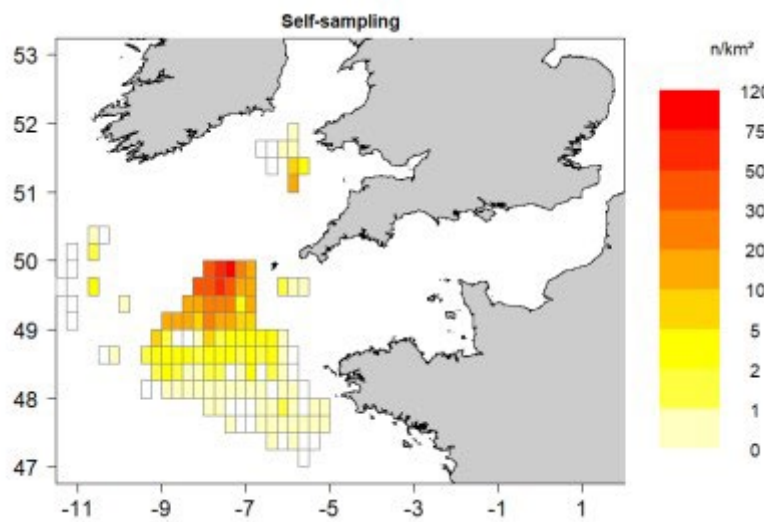


Figure 26.23 Distribution of densities of *D. batis* in the Celtic Sea in numbers by km<sup>2</sup>, from self-sampling data collected between October 2019 and April 2022 in 0.25° lat x 0.25° lon cells.

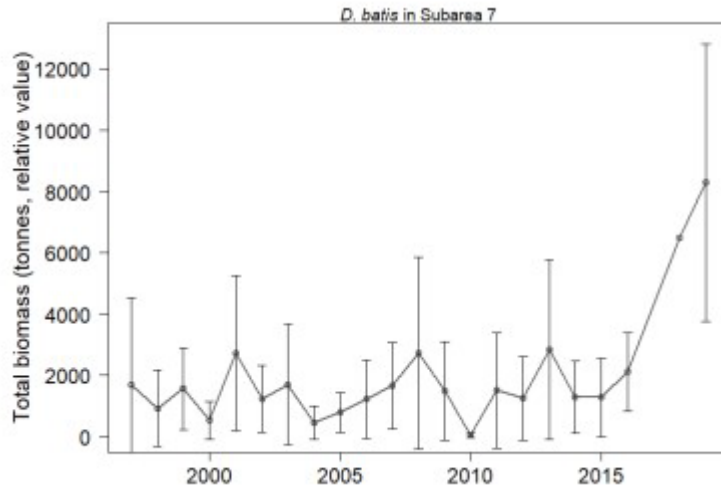


Figure 26.24 Approximated time series of biomass of *D. batis* in Subarea 7 from the EVHOE survey, with 95% confidence intervals. No confidence interval was calculated for year 2018, for which data include a mixture of individuals identified at the level of the species and other individuals described as belonging to the common skate complex.

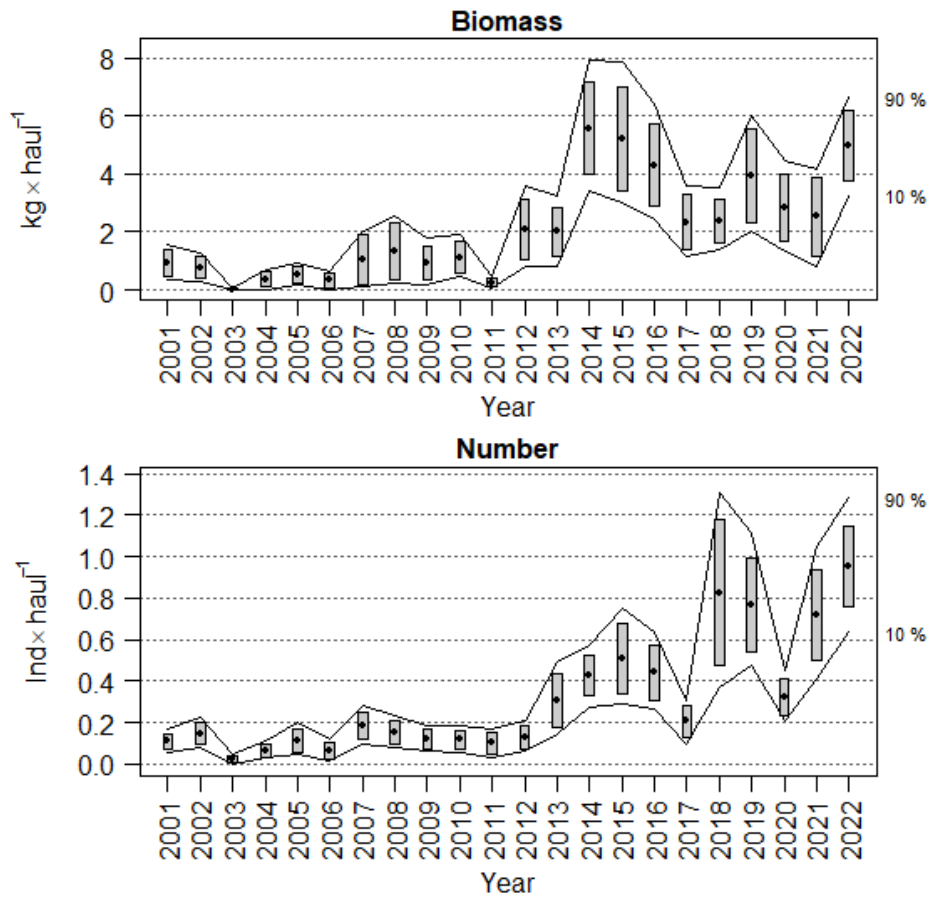


Figure 26.25 Temporal changes (2001-2022) in the biomass and abundance indices of *Dipturus spp.* during the Porcupine Bank survey. Boxes mark parametric standard error of the stratified biomass index. Lines mark bootstrap confidence intervals ( $\alpha = 0.80$ , bootstrap iterations = 1000).

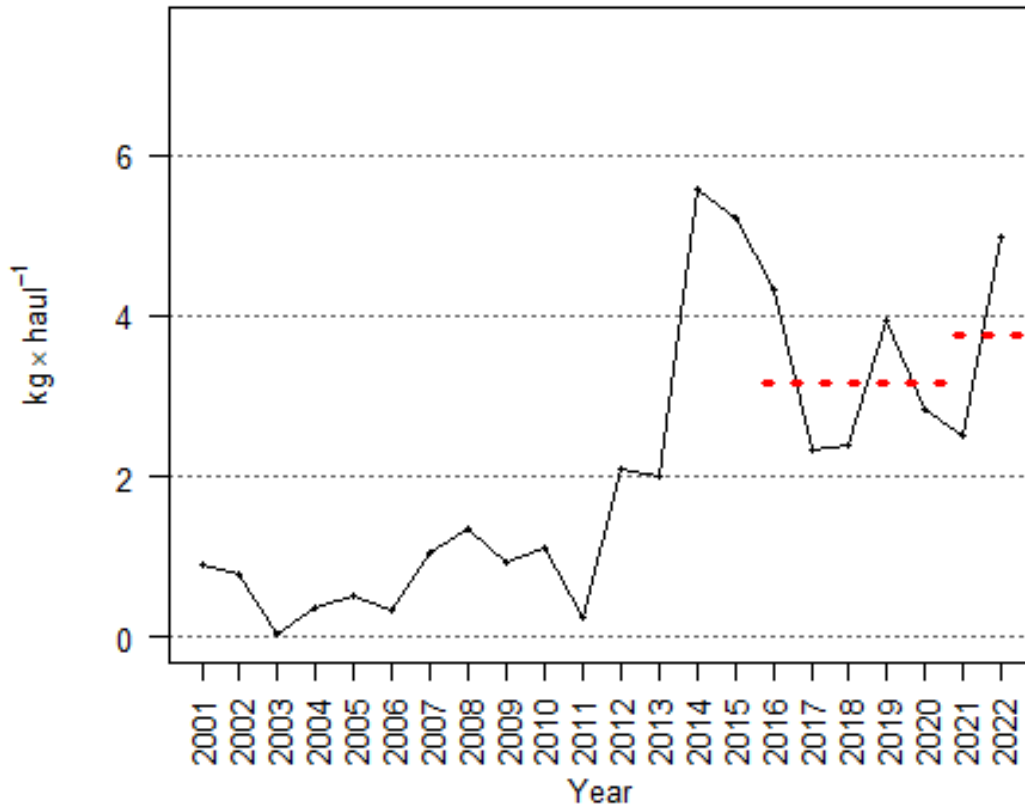
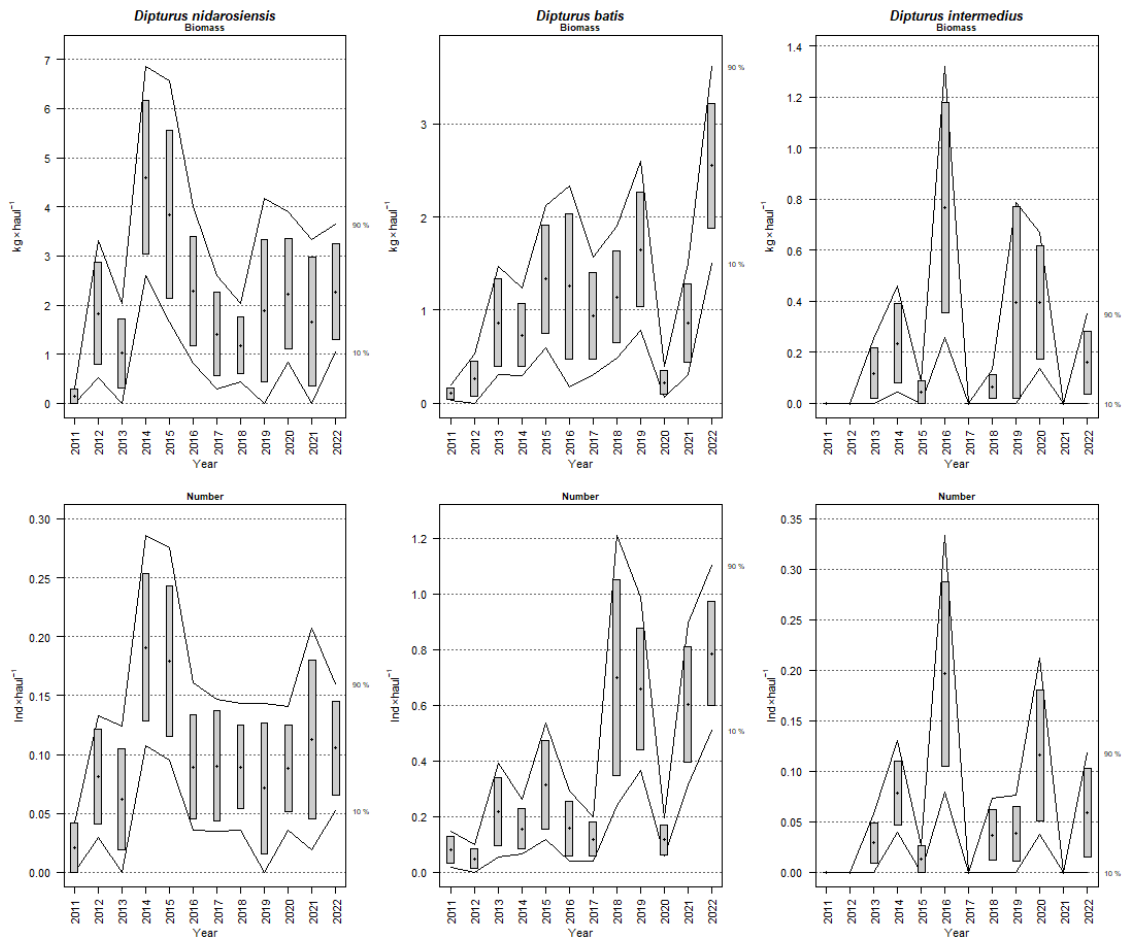


Figure 26.26 Temporal change in the biomass index for *Dipturus spp.*, as recorded during the Porcupine Bank survey (2011–2022). Dotted lines compare the mean stratified biomass in the last two years with five previous years.



**Figure 26.27** Temporal changes in the biomass and abundance indices of *Dipturus nidarosiensis* (2011–2021), *D. batis* (2011–2021) and *D. intermedius* (2010–2020) as recorded in the Porcupine Bank survey (species-specific data available). Boxes mark parametric standard error of the stratified biomass index. Lines mark bootstrap confidence intervals ( $\alpha = 0.80$ , bootstrap iterations = 1000).



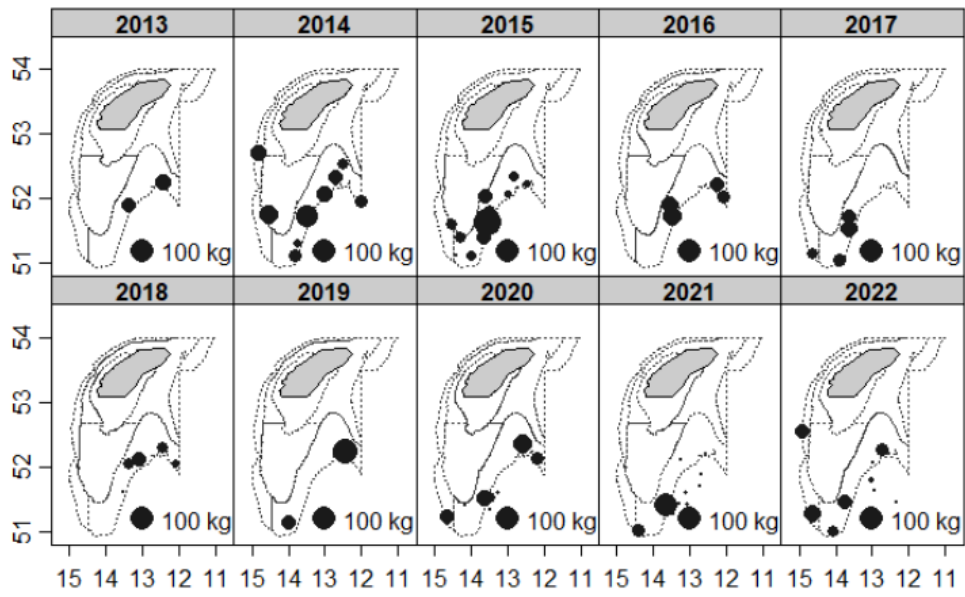


Figure 26.28 Geographic distribution and catch rates ( $\text{kg}\cdot\text{haul}^{-1}$ ) of *D. nidarosiensis* during Spanish surveys on the Porcupine Bank (2012–2022).

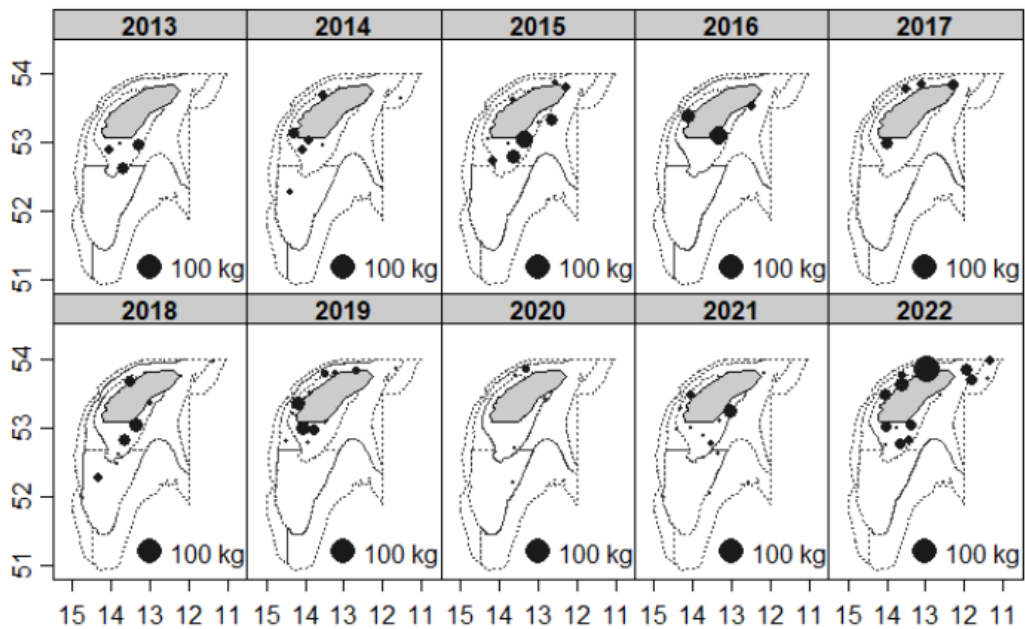


Figure 26.29 Geographic distribution and catch rates ( $\text{kg}\cdot\text{haul}^{-1}$ ) *Dipturus batis* during Spanish surveys on the Porcupine Bank (2012–2022).

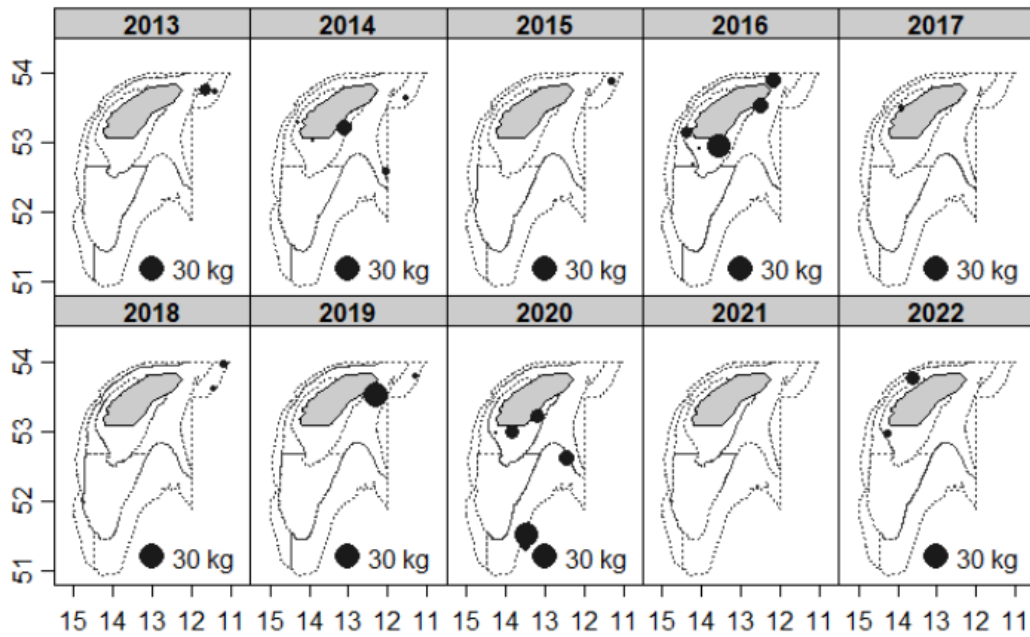


Figure 26.30 Geographic distribution and catch rates (kg.haul<sup>-1</sup>) of *Dipturus intermedius* during Spanish surveys on the Porcupine Bank (2011–2022).

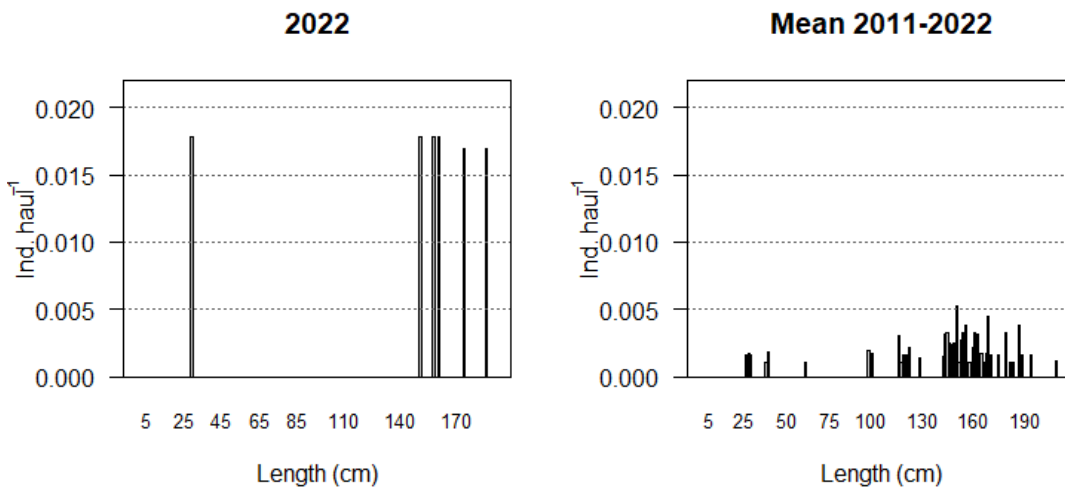


Figure 26.31 Stratified length distributions of *D. nidarosiensis* during Spanish surveys on the Porcupine Bank (2012–2022).

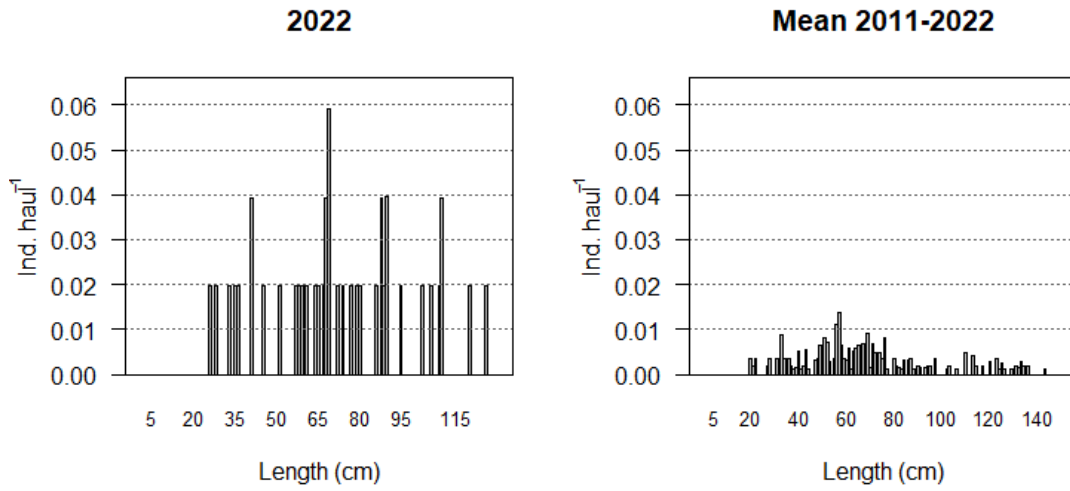


Figure 26.32 Stratified length distributions of *Dipturus batis* during Spanish surveys on the Porcupine Bank (2012–2022).

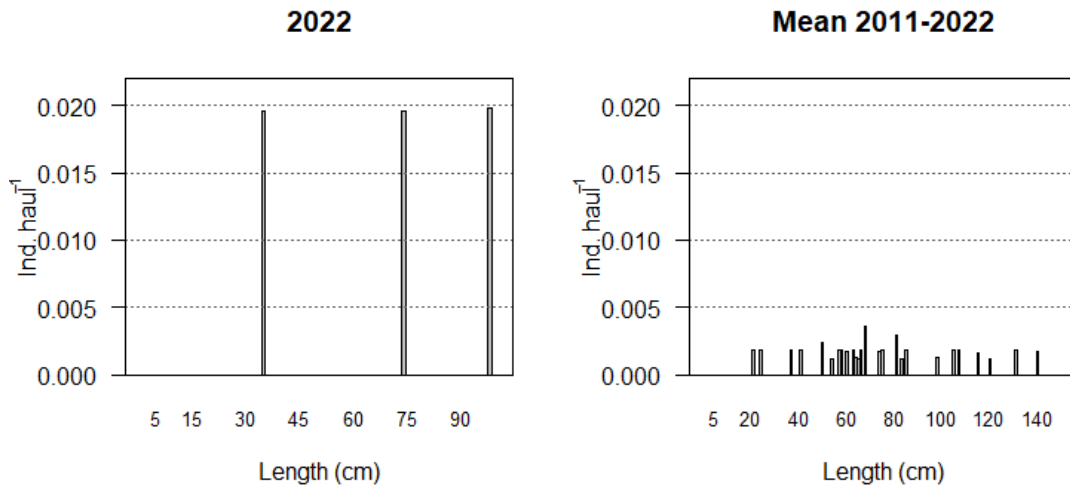


Figure 26.33. Stratified length distributions of *D. intermedius* during Spanish surveys on the Porcupine Bank (2011–2022).

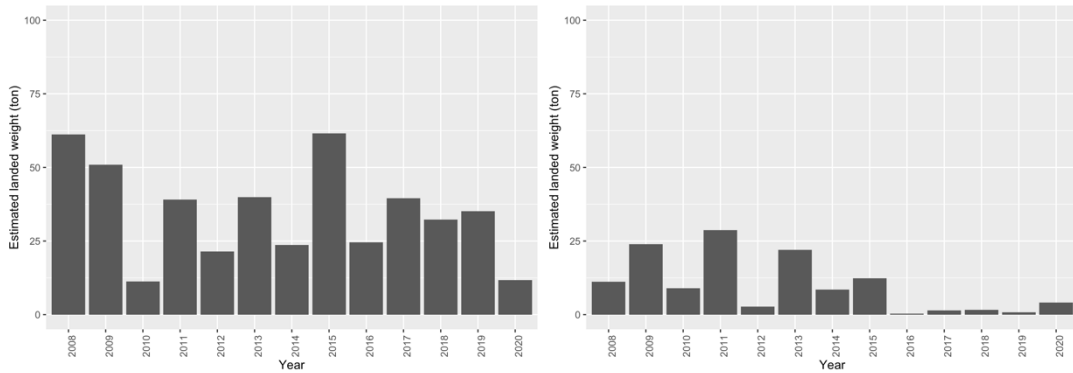


Figure 26.34. Estimated Portuguese landings of *Dipturus oxyrinchus* from Division 9.a by fleet segment: polyvalent (left) and trawl (right).

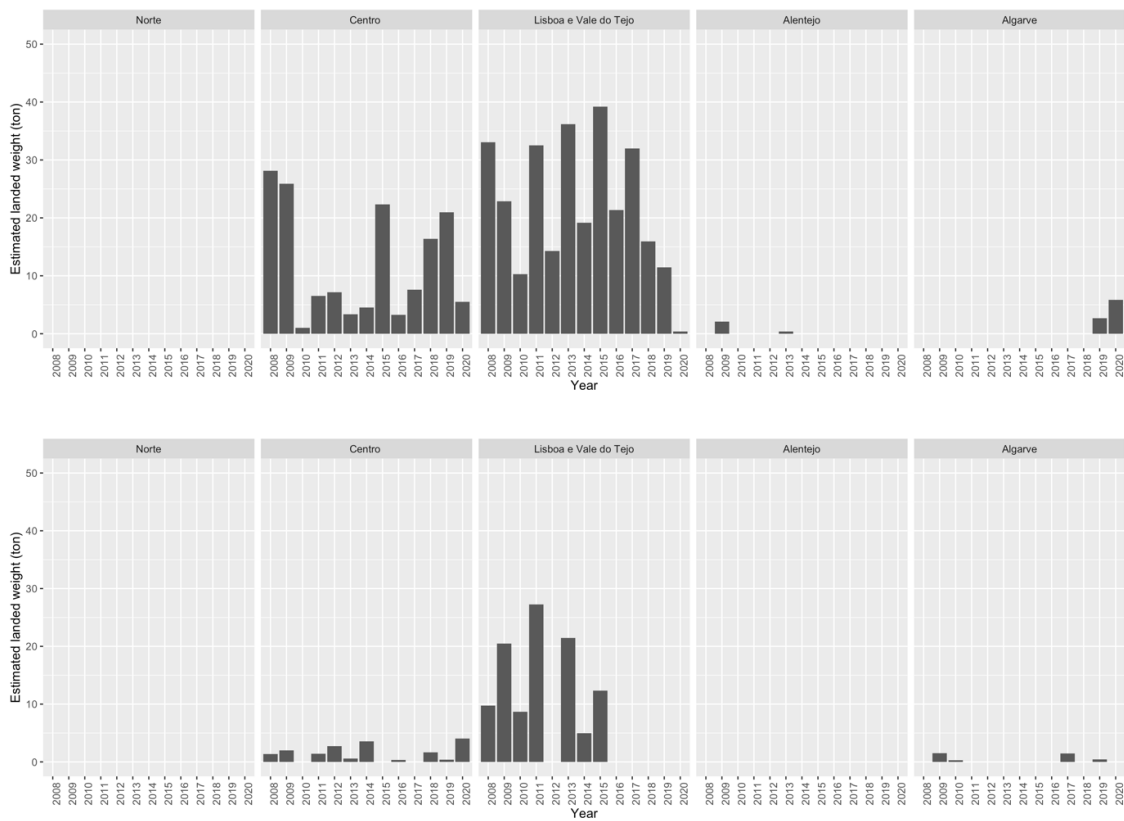


Figure 26.35. Estimated Portuguese landings of *Dipturus oxyrinchus* from Division 9.a by fleet segment (polyvalent: top; trawl: bottom) and region (from north to south).

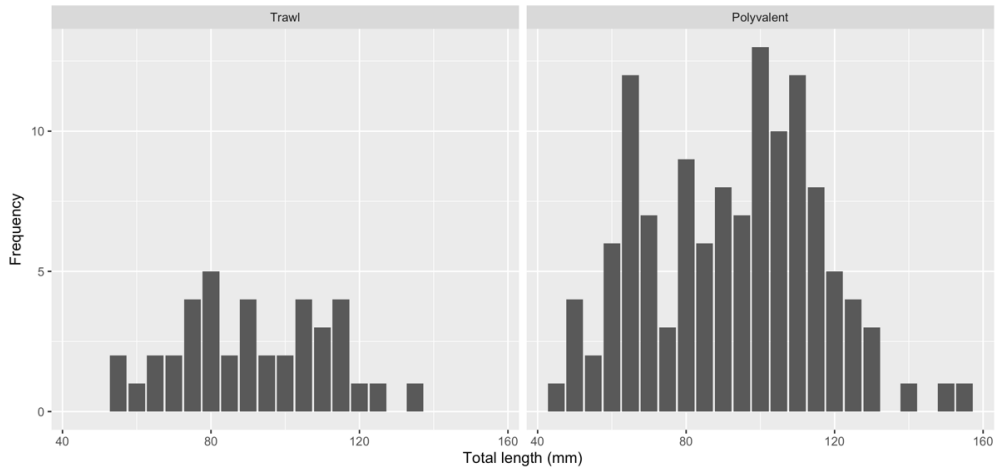


Figure 26.36. Length-frequency distribution of *Dipturus oxyrinchus* sampled in Portuguese landings from Division 9.a (2008–2020) by fleet segment (left: trawl, n = 112; right: polyvalent, n = 401). Data was not raised to the total estimated catch of the fleet.

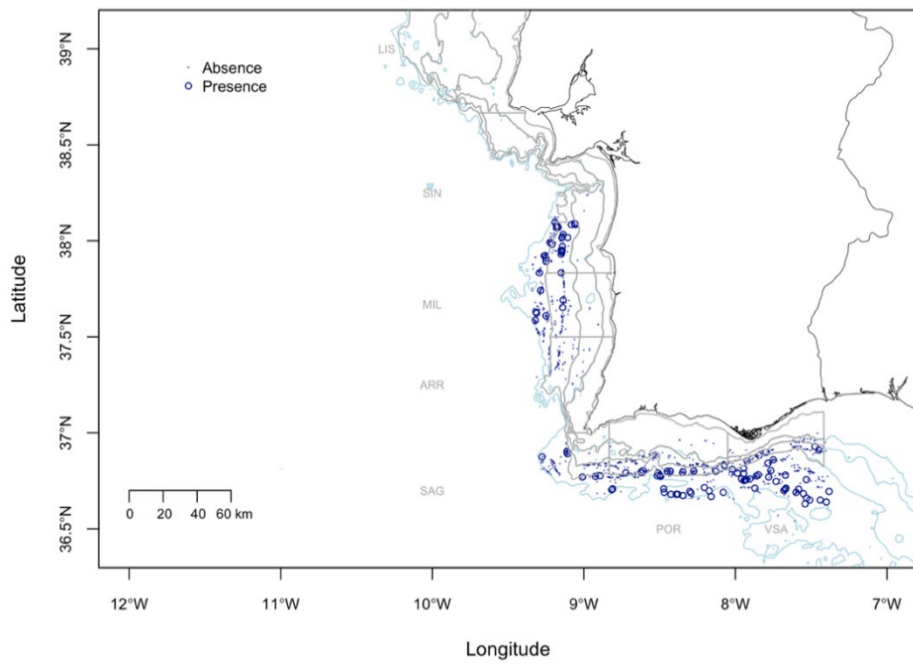


Figure 26.37. Presence/absence distribution of *Dipturus oxyrinchus* sampled in Neps (FU 28–29) from 1997 to 2018.

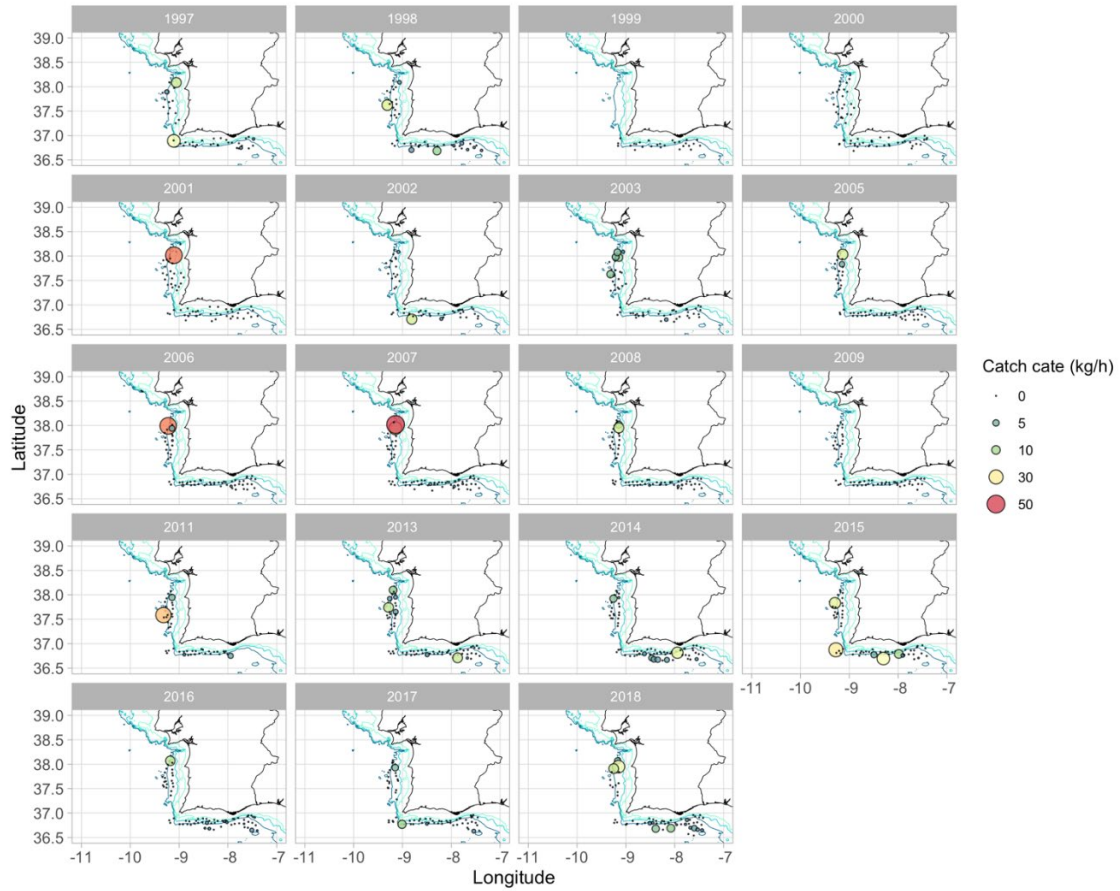


Figure 26.38. Catch distribution ( $n \cdot h^{-1}$ ) of *Dipturus oxyrinchus* sampled in NepS (FU 28–29) by year, from 1997 to 2018.

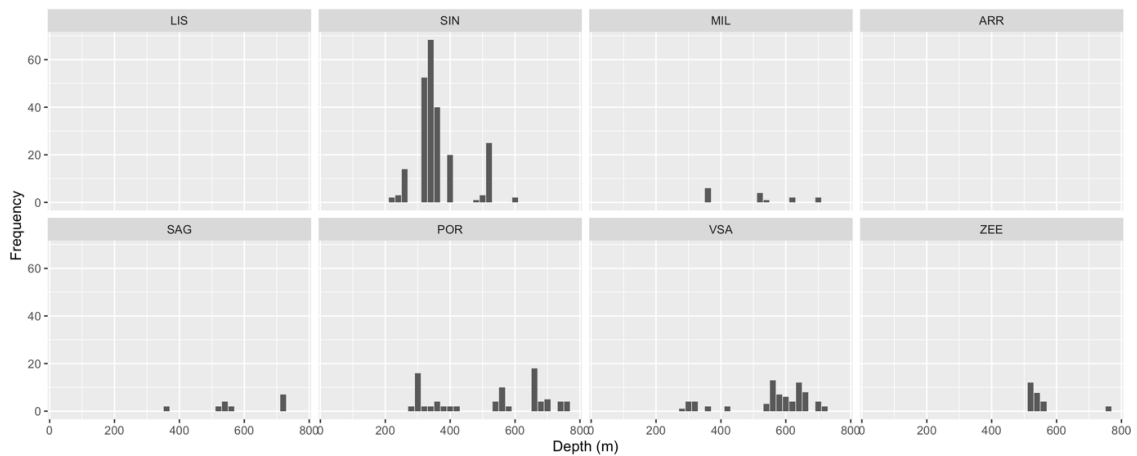


Figure 26.39. Bathymetric range of *Dipturus oxyrinchus* sampled in NepS (FU 28–29) from 1997 to 2018, by sector.

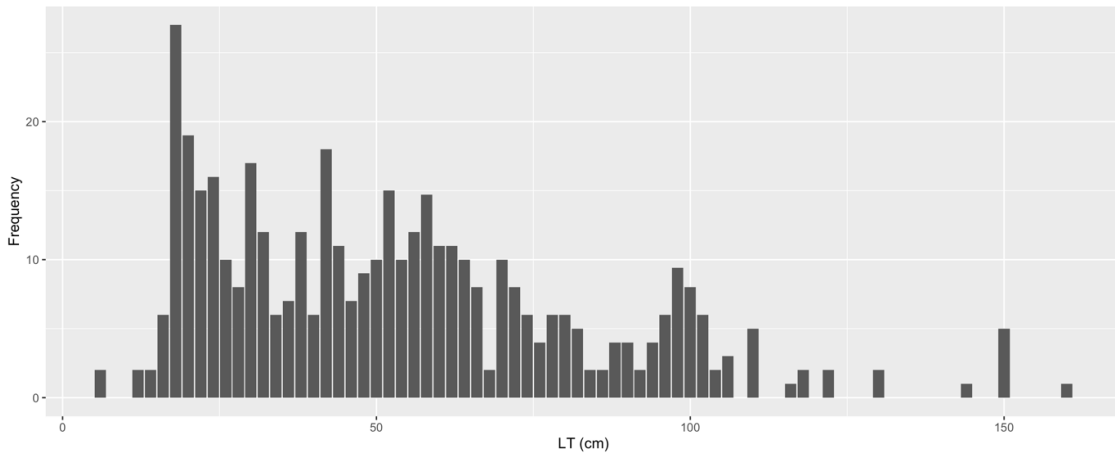


Figure 26.40. Length-frequency distribution of *Dipturus oxyrinchus* during NepS (FU 28–29) for the period 1997–2018.

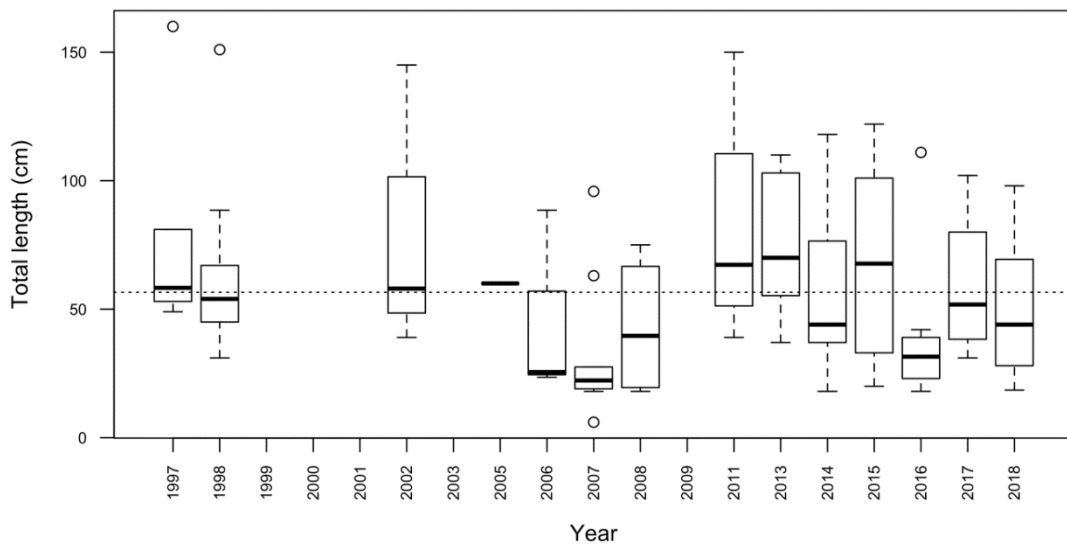
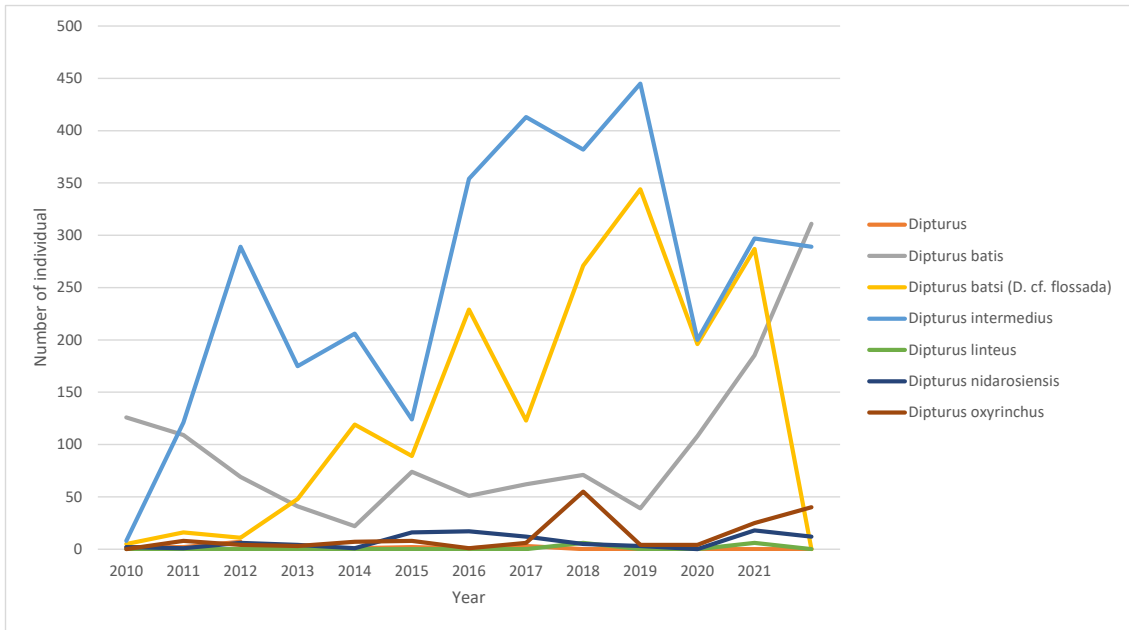
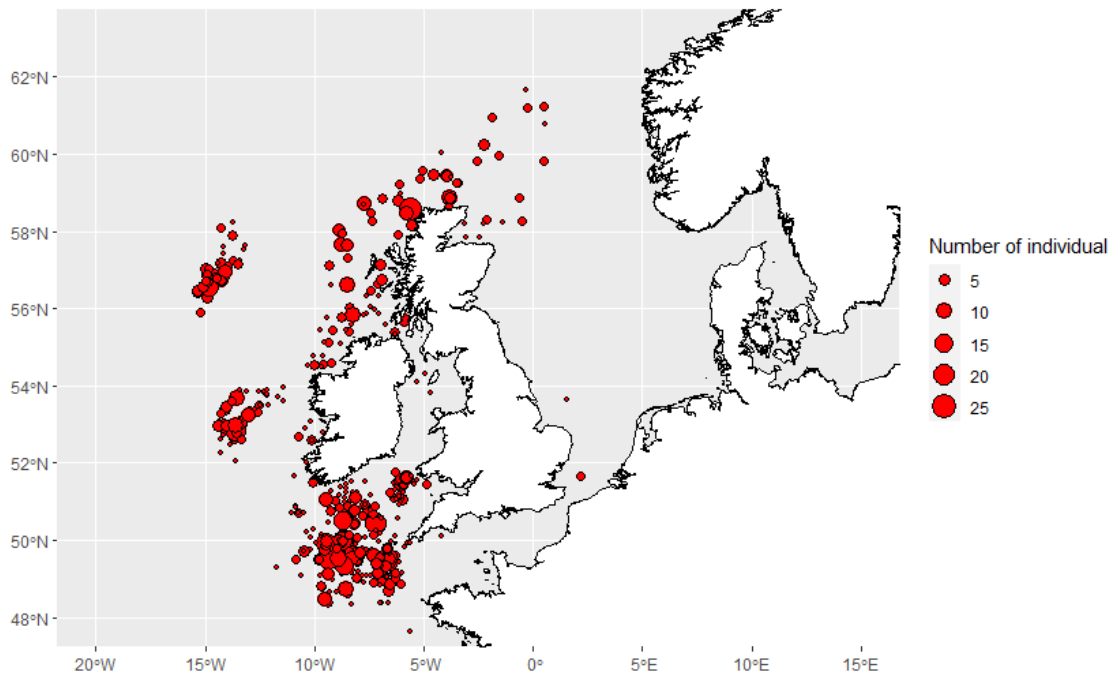


Figure 26.41. Total length variation of *Dipturus oxyrinchus*, by year on NepS (FU 28–29) (dashed line represents the mean annual length for 1997–2018).



**Figure 26.42. Number of individual *Dipturus* records per species (2010–2022) from those research surveys available on DATRAS.**





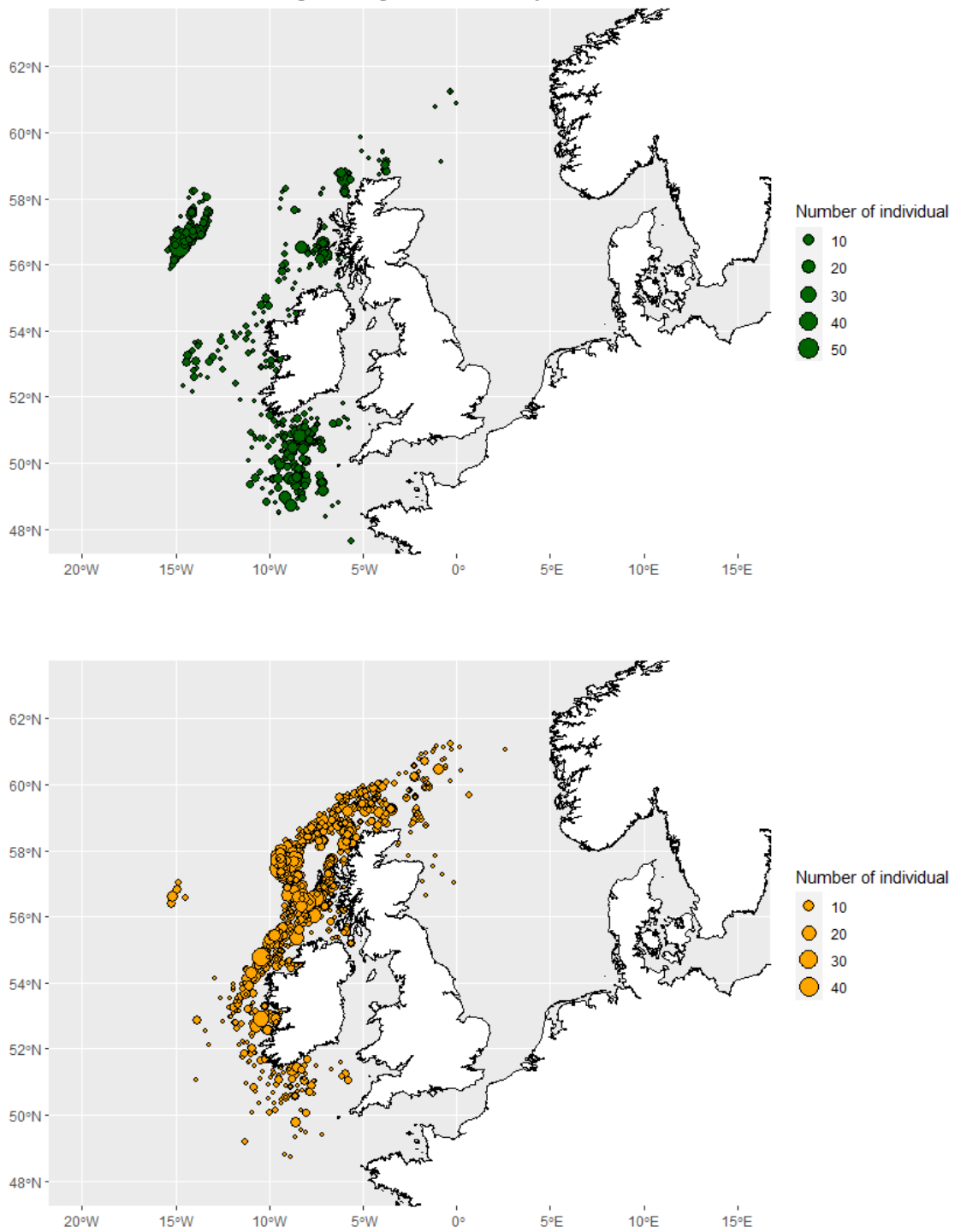
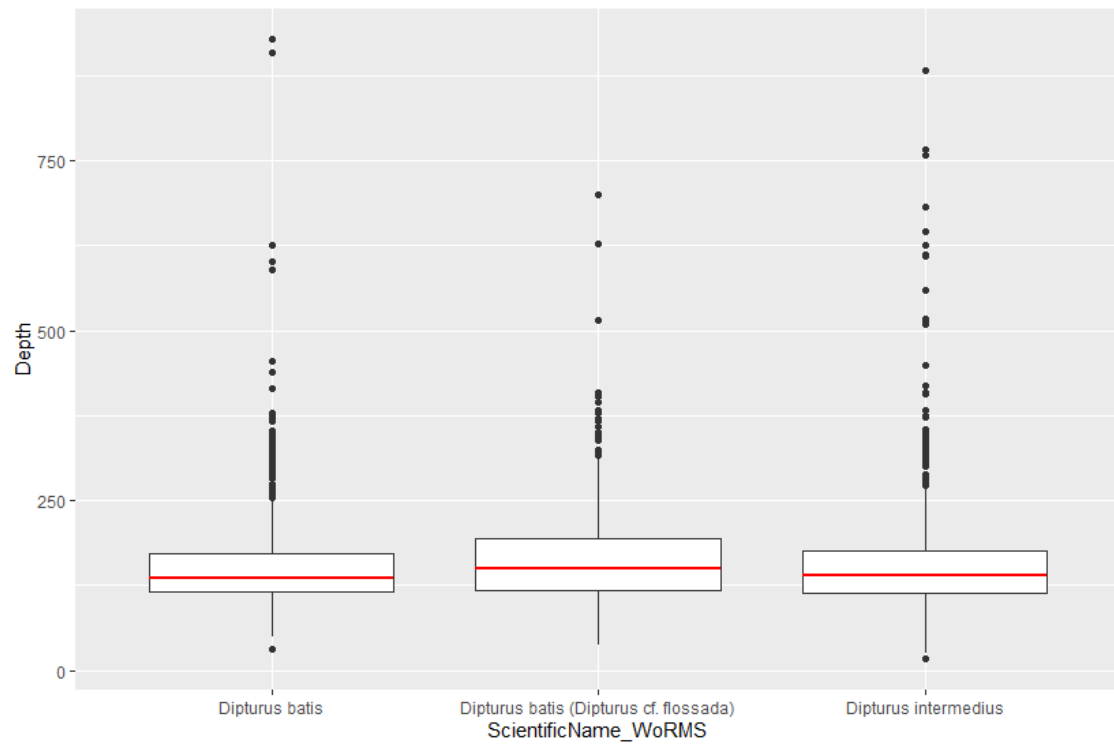
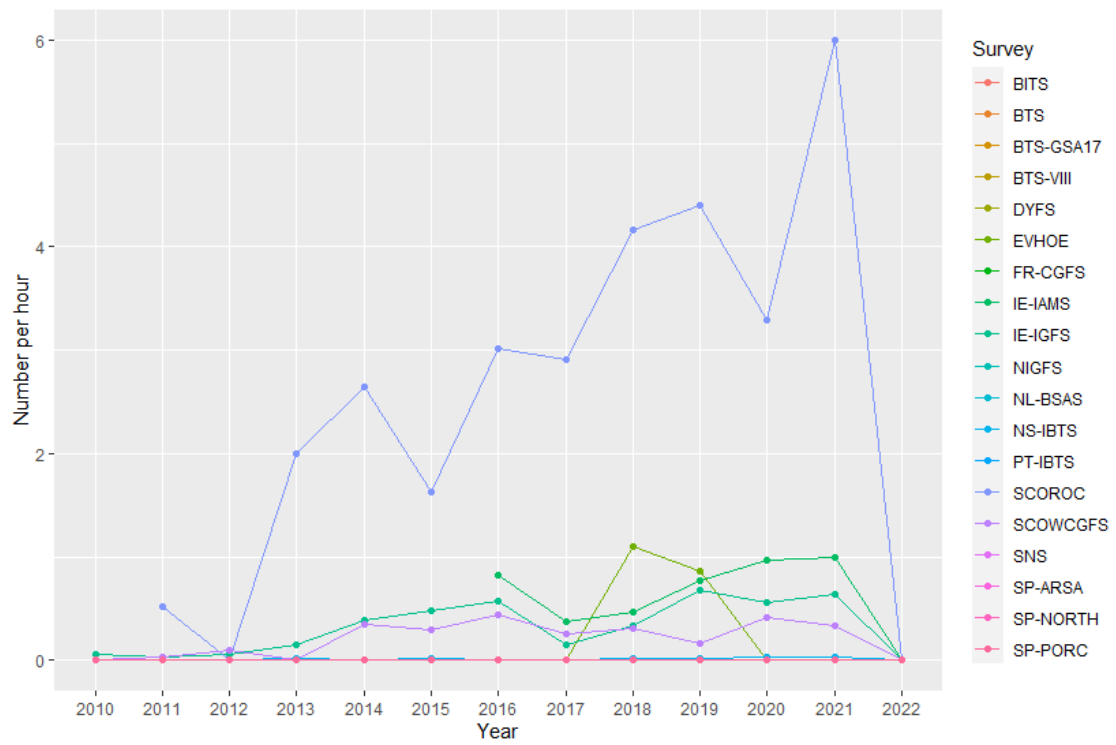
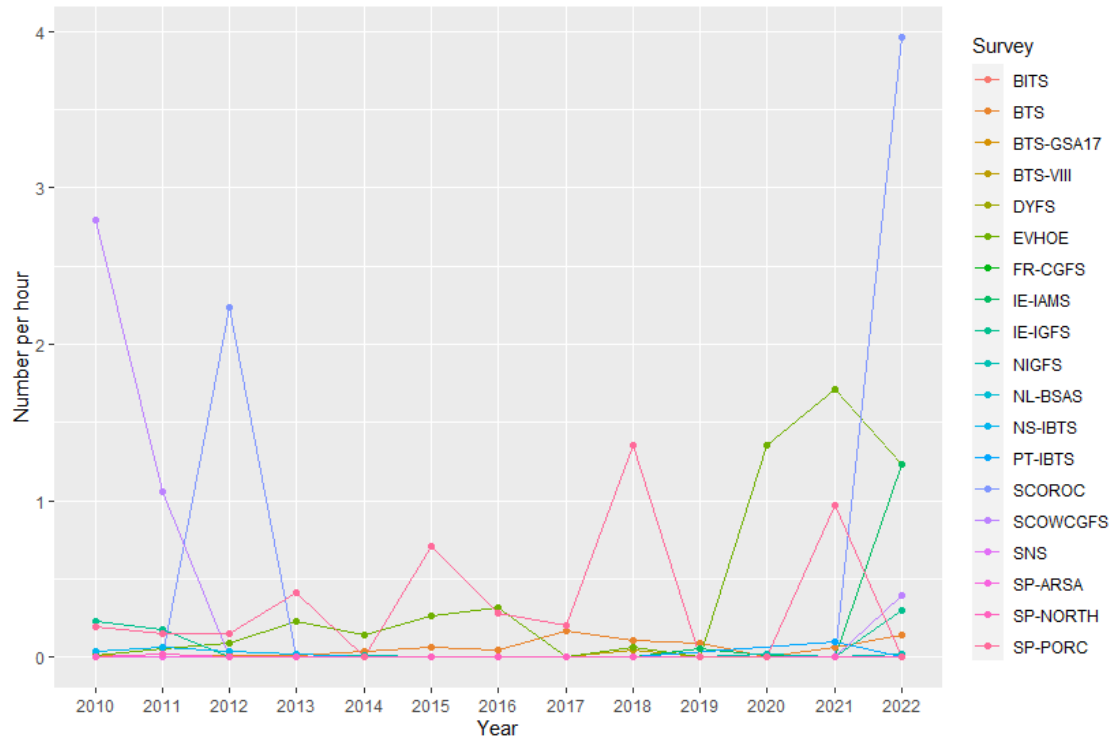


Figure 26.43. Spatial distribution and catch rates of *Dipturus batis-complex* (top, n = 1277), *Dipturus batis* (*Dipturus cf. flossada* (center, n = 1738) and *Dipturus intermedius* (bottom, n = 3303), as recorded during research vessel surveys between 2010 and 2022.



**Figure 26.44.** Boxplot on depth range (m) for *D. batis* (n = 1276), *Dipturus batis* (*Dipturus cf. flossada*) (n = 1738) and *D. intermedius* (n = 3302) recorded during research vessel trawl surveys between 2010 and 2021. Red line is the median depth of catch.



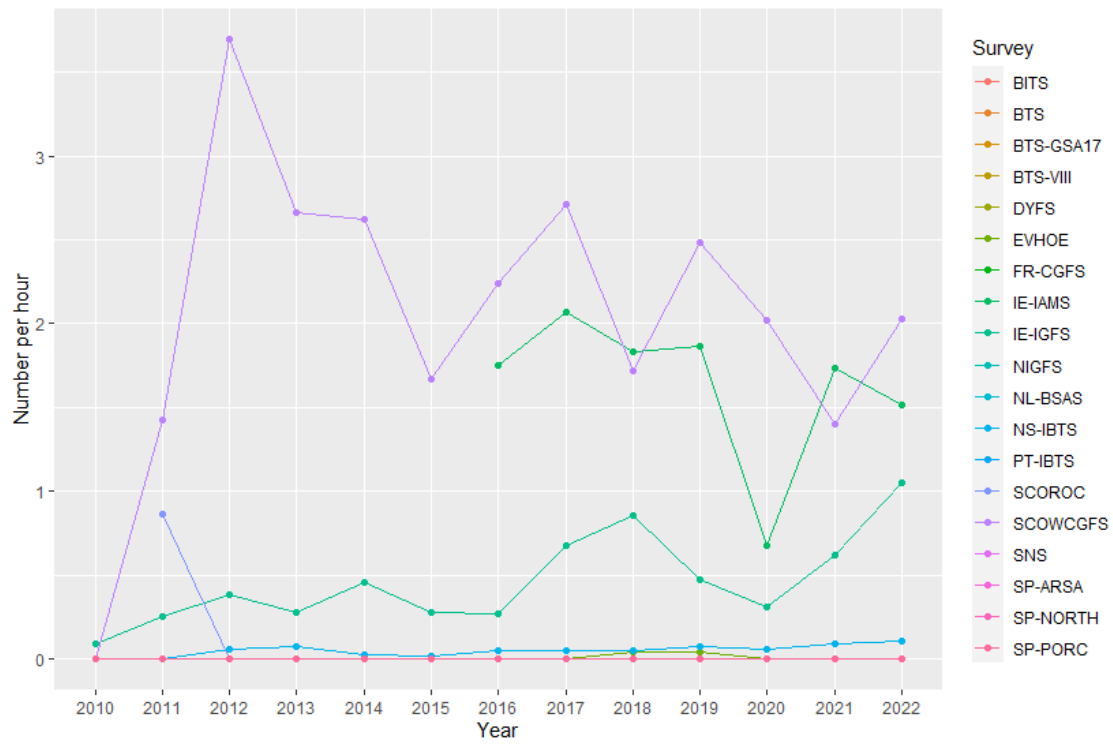
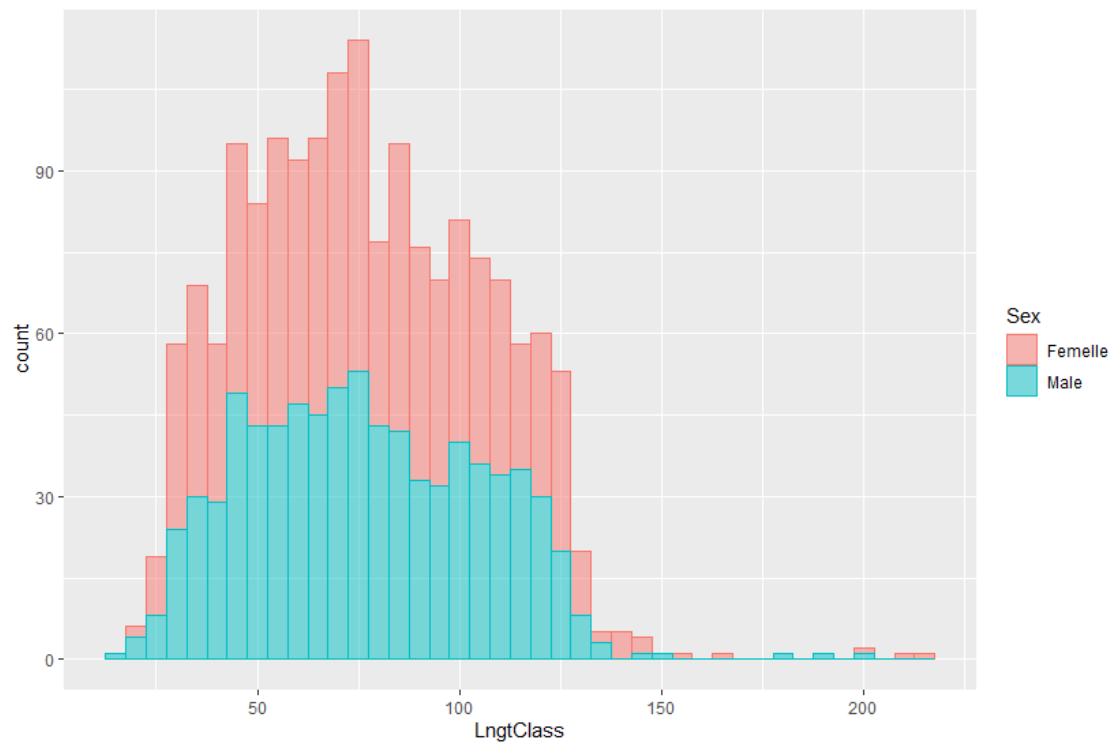
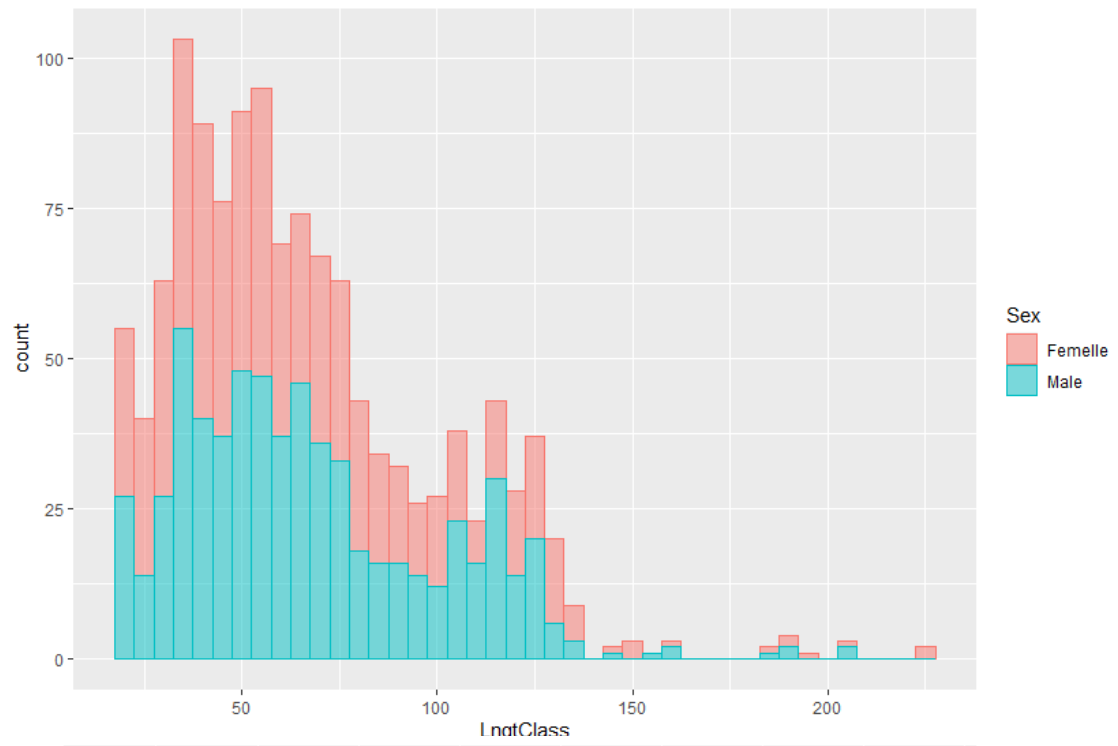


Figure 26.45. Nominal catch rates (number per hour) for *D. batis* complex (top), common blue skate *Dipturus batis* (*D. cf. flossada*) (centre) and flapper skate *Dipturus intermedius* (bottom) as reported during trawl surveys available in DATRAS (2010–2022).



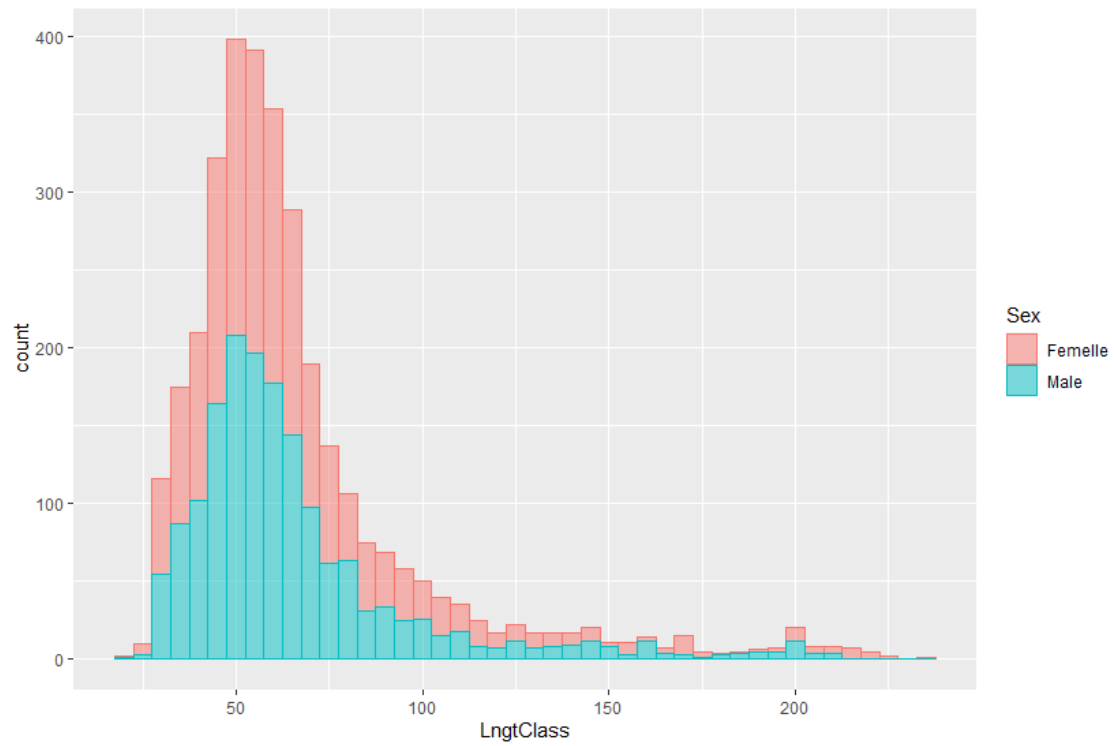


Figure 26.46. Length-frequency distributions of *D. batis* complex (top, n = 1266), common blue skate *Dipturus batis* (*D. cf. flossada*) (centre, n = 1653) and flapper skate (bottom, n = 3298), as observed in scientific trawl surveys from DATRAS data between 2010 and 2021.

## 27 Other issues

### 27.1 Code of conduct and conflict of interest

As knowledge provider ICES gives a high priority to credibility, legitimacy, transparency and accountability of their work. In this context, it is essential that experts contributing to ICES science and advice maintain scientific independence, integrity and impartiality. In addition, behaviours and actions of members should minimise any risk of actual, potential or perceived conflicts of interest. A conflict of interest arises when there is an actual, potential or perceived possibility that a member of the group makes a contribution to ICES work that is not based on a systematic scientific review of the available information and evidence or when decisions or outcomes may be influenced, or are perceived to be influenced, by self-interest or external pressures and other factors.

The Code of Conduct drawn up by ICES is to ensure transparency and responsibility in ICES work and to preserve the role of ICES as knowledge provider. The code of conduct applies to scientists participating in ICES Expert Groups, Review and Advice Drafting Groups as well as ACOM and SCICOM meetings.

ICES has requested the chairs of the working group to address the Code of Conduct and Conflict of Interest at the start of the meeting. All participants at the meeting, including the chairs, are required to declare any Conflicts of Interest and their commitment to agree with the Code of Conduct before their work commences. In 2023, all participants, including the chairs, declared no Conflict of Interest and agreed to abide with the Code of Conduct.

### 27.2 Benchmarked stocks

In contrast to many other assessment Expert Groups, WGEF has few stocks that have gone through a benchmark process. So far, a benchmark assessment for spurdog (*Squalus acanthias*) was carried out through correspondence in 2021 (ICES, 2021b). In recent years, more effort has been made into exploring new assessment models and acquiring relevant data for assessments. As a result, in 2020, WGEF proposed potential benchmarks for several stocks which were successfully completed for four stocks (por.27.nea, rjc.27.8, rjn.27.678 and rju.27.7de) in 2022 (ICES, 2022) and three stocks (rjc.27.3a47d, rjm.27.3a47d and rjh.27.4bc7d) in 2023 (ICES, 2023).

For thornback ray in the North Sea, Skagerrak, Kattegat, and eastern English Channel, a SPiCT assessment using removals since 1999 and two series of biomass indices (NS-IBTS-Q1 and FR-CGFS-Q4 combined, and NS-IBTS-Q3, BTS-ENG-Q3, BTS-BEL-Q3 combined) since 1989 was accepted. The workshop also agreed on the settings for the short-term forecast, allowing the stock to be assessed as category 2. This stock is estimated to be harvested well below Fmsy with a biomass just above BMSY.

For spotted ray in the North Sea, Skagerrak, Kattegat, and eastern English Channel, a SPiCT assessment using removals since 1999 and two series of biomass indices (NS-IBTS-Q1 and FR-CGFS-Q4 combined, and NS-IBTS-Q3, BTS-ENG-Q3, BTS-BEL-Q3 and BTS-NL-Q3 combined) since 1989 was accepted. The workshop also agreed on the settings for the short-term forecast, allowing the stock to be assessed as category 2. This stock is estimated to be harvested well below Fmsy with a biomass above BMSY.

For blonde ray in the North Sea and eastern English Channel, a synthesis of stock ID information (tagging, surveys) was presented, indicating that the stock unit for blonde ray should cover

Division 4.b. Therefore, WKBELASMO has considered a new stock unit (rjh.27.4bc7d) for the assessment. A SPiCT assessment using removals since 1999 and one series of biomass indices (NS-IBTS-Q1, Q3 and FR-CGFS-Q4 combined) since 1997 was accepted. The workshop also agreed on the settings for the short-term forecast, allowing the stock to be assessed as category 2. This stock is estimated to be harvested well below  $F_{msy}$  with a biomass above  $B_{MSY}$ .

In 2023 the group proposed to explore and evaluate the use of SPiCT for three skate and ray stocks in Iberian waters in a benchmark in 2024. The following three stocks were selected: rjc.27.9a, rjh.27.9a and rjn.27.9a. While exploratory assessments are ongoing, the presented results looked promising and capable of moving the assessments to a next level (i.e. quantitative analyses and reference points). The data compilation for this benchmark is planned from 20 to 24 November 2023, with the actual benchmark set for 26<sup>th</sup> of February until 1<sup>st</sup> of March 2024 (dates to be confirmed).

## 27.3 WSKKATE

In 2019, it was agreed that a dedicated workshop was needed to examine the use of surveys in the assessment of elasmobranchs. New surveys and time series and a lack of standardization amongst stocks meant that current assessment inputs and combination methods may no longer be the best sources of information on stock status. A Workshop on the use of surveys for stock assessment and Reference Points for Rays and Skates (WSKKATE) was proposed and accepted by ACOM.

WSKKATE was successfully held online in November 2020 (ICES, 2021a). Primarily due to constraints caused by COVID-19, it was decided prior to the meeting to concentrate on stocks that were due to be assessed by WGEF in 2021, namely skates and ray stocks in the North Sea. It was also decided to examine skate and ray stocks in Biscay and Iberia that were affected by the cessation of Portuguese surveys.

A second workshop examining the survey use and methods to provide indices is being considered. The workshop would have a particular focus on elasmobranch stocks in the Celtic Sea and Iberian waters. While initially planned for 2022, it was decided to defer the WSKKATE2 workshop until after WGEF 2025. This is primarily due to the large time demands being made on ICES elasmobranch experts in recent years, i.e. several consecutive benchmarks since 2021. In addition to the work on skates and rays, a third workshop would be beneficial to examine the surveys used to assess the remaining stocks, primarily sharks, including catsharks.

## 27.4 Data preparatory meeting

Prior to the WGEF 2023 meeting, a data preparatory meeting was organized with a small group of WGEF members (including the chairs) to prepare all data submitted to InterCatch or Accessions. This was an online meeting held on 8 and 9 June 2023. This meeting was following earlier work done in 2020 (see section 1.11.2). The aim of this meeting is to finalize landings, discards and length data for all species and stocks submitted to the WGEF data call. Preparing these in advance will enable stock assessors to start with their assessments in advance of the meeting and thus will relieve some of the time pressure. During the 2-day meeting in 2023, the group split in three subgroups and worked on the three different tables separately. Work was discussed in plenary sessions.

For the landings table, extensive work has already been done and an issue list and stock allocation file already exist which can be applied to latest submitted landings. The first day of the data prep meeting was mainly used to harmonize historic landings which included the following steps not necessarily in this order:



- WGEFfleet; e.g. in earlier years we used 'bottom trawls', in more recent years 'all other bottom trawls'. All fleet types were checked and harmonized to the same spelling.
- Fishing area; e.g. fishing areas 27.3.a.20 and 27.3.a.21 were harmonized to 23.3.a. All areas were also checked on spelling and additional spaces.
- WGEFSpeciesName; this is assigned automatically in the script based on the stock allocation list. However, in historic landings this has been done manually resulting in for example three different spellings for the same species. All names were checked and updated accordingly.
- ICESStockCode; this is assigned automatically in the script based on the stock allocation list. Checks showed that some stocks contained up to 4 different spellings (e.g. "syc.27.67a-ce-j", "syc.27.67a-ce-k", "syc.27.67acej", "syc.27.67acek"). All stock codes were checked and updated accordingly.

WGEF has also put effort in creating a discards and length data table in 2021 and 2022, respectively. In the 2023 data prep meeting, this was further updated. Standardized scripts were already available for the discards table but were further harmonized following the same stock allocation list as for the landings table. The script for the length data table was further developed. Historical data were harmonized where necessary.

The second day of the meeting was used to harmonize submitted data from the 2023 data call and these were collated with the tables. During this meeting an issue list specifically for discards has also been discussed. In future meetings, effort will have to be put in creating such lists as conceivably these data will be used in the assessments (e.g. SPiCT) of more stocks.

## 27.5 Implementing WKLIFE method

The Workshop on the Development of Quantitative Assessment Methodologies based on Life-history traits, exploitation characteristics, and other relevant parameters for data-limited stocks (WKLIFE X; ICES 2021c) developed methods for stock assessment and catch advice for stocks in ICES Categories 3 and 4, focusing on the provision of sound advice rules that are within the ICES MSY framework.

Previous category 3 assessments for skates and rays applied a two over five rule on the stock size indicator as these species have long generation times. However, WKLIFE X emphasized the need to have assessment methods which accounted for the uncertainty and being more effective and precautionary compared to this two over five rule. Additional work on advice rules for stocks in Category 3 based on life-history traits (k), tested through simulation and management strategy evaluation (MSE), showed that the addition of specific multipliers based on the stock's life-history characteristics decreases the risk of the control rule's performance.

Starting in 2022, the advice rules for category 3 stocks were introduced within WGEF. During 2022 and 2023, 13 and 11 category 3 stocks, respectively, transitioned from the conventional 2 over 5 rule to adopting the rfb or rb-rule. Consequently, all category 3 assessments within WGEF were subsequently revised, and advice is now given in alignment with the MSY framework.

## 27.6 Science

In 2023 a dedicated science session was organised in which members of the group were given the opportunity to present their science projects related to elasmobranchs. In total the following presentations were given:

- 1) Busy in Ireland: Elasmobranch research and news

- An overview was given by Graham Johnston on flapper skate research and angel shark sightings.
- 2) Assessment of starry ray in Icelandic waters.  
A surplus production model on starry ray in Subarea 27.5 was presented by Klara Jakobsdottir. The outcomes of the model demonstrated this population is showing a similar downward trend as is observed in the North Sea stock (rjr.27.23a4).
  - 3) The International Shark Research Alliance (ISRA)  
Rima Jababo presented to raise awareness about the importance of shark conservation and the need to protect the species. By fostering international cooperation and promoting sustainable practices, ISRA plays a vital role in safeguarding the future of shark species and the health of our oceans.
  - 4) Bridging knowledge gaps: Vertical movements of skates in the North Sea.  
Jurgen Batsleer presented the scientific work using Data-storage tags to understand the long-term migration and daily movement patterns of several North Sea skates.

## 27.7 References

- ICES. 2021a. Workshop on the use of surveys for stock assessment and reference points for rays and skates (WFSKATE; outputs from 2020 meeting). ICES Scientific Reports. 3:23. 177 pp. <https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.pub.7948>.
- ICES. 2021b. Benchmark Workshop on North Sea Stocks (WKNSEA). ICES Scientific Reports. 3:25. 756 pp. <https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.pub.7922>
- ICES. 2021c. Tenth Workshop on the Development of Quantitative Assessment Methodologies based on LIFE-history traits, exploitation characteristics, and other relevant parameters for data-limited stocks (WKLIFE X). ICES Scientific Reports. 2:98. 72 pp. <http://doi.org/10.17895/ices.pub.5985>
- ICES. 2022. Benchmark Workshop for selected elasmobranch stocks (WKLASMO). ICES Scientific Reports. 4:47. 136 pp. <http://doi.org/10.17895/ices.pub.21025021>
- ICES. 2023. Benchmark Workshop for selected elasmobranch stocks (WKBELASMO). ICES Scientific Reports. Report. <https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.pub.22760042.v1>

## Annex 1: List of participants

### WGEF - Working Group on Elasmobranch Fishes

Name	Institute	Country	Email
Caroline Aas Tranang	IMR Institute of Marine Research	Norway	caroline.aas.tranang@hi.no
Thomas Barreau	Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, station Dinard	France	thomas.barreau@mnhn.fr
Jurgen Batsleer (chair)	WMR Wageningen Marine Research	The Netherlands	jurgen.batsleer@wur.nl
Loïc Baulier	Ifremer Lorient Station	France	loic.baulier@ifremer.fr
Katinka Bleeker	WMR Wageningen Marine Research	Netherlands	katinka.bleeker@wur.nl
Guzman Diaz	AZTI Marine and Food Science and Technology.	Spain	gdiez@azti.es
Jim Ellis	Cefas Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science	UK	jim.ellis@cefas.co.uk
Ivonne Figueiredo	IPMA Portuguese Institute for the Sea and the Atmosphere	Portugal	ifigueiredo@ipma.pt
Christopher Griffiths	SLU Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences	Sweden	christopher.griffiths@slu.se
Klara Jakobsdottir	Hafro Marine and Freshwater Research Institute	Iceland	klara@hafro.is
Graham Johnston	Marine Institute	Ireland	graham.johnston@marine.ie
Claudia Junge	IMR Institute of Marine Research	Norway	claudia.junge@hi.no
Wendel Lleal	University of the Azores Department of Oceanography and Fisheries DOP	Portugal	wendellmedeirosleal@gmail.com
Pascal Lorance	Ifremer Nantes Centre	France	pascal.lorance@ifremer.fr
Catarina Maia	IPMA Portuguese Institute for the Sea and the Atmosphere	Portugal	cmaia@ipma.pt
Inigo Martinez	ICES Secretariat	Denmark	inigo@ices.dk
Tobias Mildenberger	DTU-Aqua	Denmark	tobm@aqua.dtu.dk
Tanja Miethe	Marine Science Scotland Marine Laboratory	UK	t.miethe@marlab.ac.uk
Teresa Moura	IPMA Portuguese Institute for the Sea and the Atmosphere	Portugal	tmoura@ipma.pt

Name	Institute	Country	Email
Sophy McCully Phillips (chair)	Cefas Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science	UK	sophy.phillips@cefasc.co.uk
Cristina Rodríguez- Cabello	IEO Instituto Español de Oceanografía Centro Oceanográfico de Santander	Spain	cristina.cabello@ieo.csic.es
Matthias Schaber	Thünen Thünen Institute of Sea Fisheries	Germany	matthias.schaber@thuenen.de
Joana Silva	Cefas Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science	UK	joana.silva@cefasc.co.uk
Morten Vinter	DTU-Aqua	Denmark	mv@aqua.dtu.dk

## Annex 2: List of Stock Annexes

The table below provides an overview of the WGEF Stock Annexes. Stock annexes for other stocks are available on the ICES website Library under the Publication Type “Stock Annexes”. Use the search facility to find a particular Stock Annex, refining your search in the left-hand column to include the *year*, *ecoregion*, *species*, and *acronym* of the relevant ICES expert group.

Stock id	Stock name	Last updated	Link
dgs.27.nea	Spurdog ( <i>Squalus acanthia</i> ) in subareas 1-10, 12 and 14 (the Northeast Atlantic and adjacent waters)	March 2021	<a href="#">dgs.27.nea SA</a>
rjb.27.89a	Common skate ( <i>Dipturus batis</i> - complex) in Subarea 8 and Division 9.a (Bay of Biscay and Atlantic Iberian waters)	April 2014	<a href="#">rjb-89a SA</a>
rjc.27.8	Thornback ray ( <i>Raja clavata</i> ) in Subarea 8 (Bay of Biscay)	June 2014	<a href="#">rjc-bisc SA</a>
rjc.27.7e	Thornback ray ( <i>Raja clavata</i> ) in Division 7.e (western English Channel)	June 2014	<a href="#">rjc-echw SA</a>
rjc.27.9a	Thornback ray ( <i>Raja clavata</i> ) in Division 9.a (Atlantic Iberian waters)	2014	<a href="#">rjc-pore SA</a>
rje.27.7de	Small-eyed ray ( <i>Raja microocellata</i> ) in divisions 7.d and 7.e (English Channel)	June 2014	<a href="#">rje-ech SA</a>
rjh.27.9a	Blonde ray ( <i>Raja brachyura</i> ) in Division 9.a (Atlantic Iberian waters)	2014	<a href="#">rjh-pore SA</a>
rjm.27.8	Spotted ray ( <i>Raja montagui</i> ) in Subarea 8 (Bay of Biscay)	June 2020	<a href="#">rjm.27.8 SA</a>
rjm.27.9a	Spotted ray ( <i>Raja montagui</i> ) in Division 9.a (Atlantic Iberian waters)	2014	<a href="#">rjm-pore SA</a>
rjn.27.678abd	Cuckoo ray ( <i>Leucoraja naevus</i> ) in Division 678abd (West of Scotland, southern Celtic Seas, western English Channel and Bay of Biscay)	August 2020	<a href="#">rjn.27.678abd</a>
rjn.27.8c	Cuckoo ray ( <i>Leucoraja naevus</i> ) in Division 8.c (Cantabrian Sea)	August 2020	<a href="#">rjn.27.8c SA</a>
rjn.27.9a	Cuckoo ray ( <i>Leucoraja naevus</i> ) in Division 9.a (Atlantic Iberian waters)	2020	<a href="#">rjn.27.27.9a SA</a>
rju.27.9a	Undulate ray ( <i>Raja undulata</i> ) in Division 9.a (Atlantic Iberian waters)	2014	<a href="#">riu-9a SA</a>
rju.27.7de	Undulate ray ( <i>Raja undulata</i> ) in divisions 7.d and 7.e (English Channel)	2020	<a href="#">riu.27.7de SA</a>
sck.27.nea	Kitefin shark ( <i>Dalatias licha</i> ) in subareas 1-10, 12 and 14 (the Northeast Atlantic and adjacent waters)	2015	<a href="#">sck-neo SA</a>

Stock id	Stock name	Last updated	Link
bsk.27.nea	Basking shark ( <i>Cetorhinus maximus</i> ) in Sub-areas 1-10, 12 and 14 (the Northeast Atlantic and adjacent waters)	June 2015	<a href="#">bsk-nea_SA</a>
cyo.27.nea	Portuguese dogfish ( <i>Centroscymnus coelolepis</i> , <i>Centrophorus squamosus</i> ) in subareas 1-10, 12 and 14 (the Northeast Atlantic and adjacent waters)	February 2010	<a href="#">cyo-nea_SA</a>
guq-nea	Stock Annex: Leafscale gulper shark ( <i>Centrophorus squamosus</i> ) in subareas 1-10, 12 and 14 (the Northeast Atlantic and adjacent waters)	February 2010	<a href="#">guq-nea_SA</a>
por-nea	Porbeagle ( <i>Lamna nasus</i> ) in subareas 1-10, 12 and 14 (the Northeast Atlantic and adjacent waters)	June 2010	<a href="#">por.27.nea_SA</a>
sho.27.89a	Black-mouth dogfish ( <i>Galeus melastomus</i> ) in Subarea 8 and Division 9.a (Bay of Biscay and Atlantic Iberian waters)	June 2019	<a href="#">sho.27.89a_SA</a>
syc.27.8abd	Lesser-spotted dogfish ( <i>Scyliorhinus canicula</i> ) in divisions 8.a-b and 8.d (Bay of Biscay)	June 2019	<a href="#">syc.27.8abd_SA</a>
syc.27.8c9a	Lesser-spotted dogfish ( <i>Scyliorhinus canicula</i> ) in divisions 8.c and 9.a (Cantabrian Sea and Atlantic Iberian waters)	July 2021	<a href="#">syc.27.8c9a_SA</a>
syt.27.67	Greater-spotted dogfish ( <i>Scyliorhinus stellaris</i> ) in subareas 6 and 7 (West of Scotland, southern Celtic Sea, and the English Channel)	June 2019	<a href="#">syt.27.67_SA</a>
Other deep-water sharks	Other deep-water sharks and skates from the Northeast Atlantic (ICES Subareas 4–14)	June 2019	<a href="#">Other deep-water sharks_SA</a>

## Annex 3: List of Working Documents 2023

WD number	Title	Authors
1	Demersal elasmobranchs in the Irish Sea (ICES Division 7.a) and Bristol Channel (ICES divisions 7.f-g)	Silva, J. F.
2	Results on main elasmobranch species captured in the 2022 Northern Spanish Shelf Groundfish Survey	O. Fernández-Zapico, S. Ruiz-Pico, M. Blanco, C. Rodríguez-Cabello, A. Punzón, J.M. González-Irusta, F. Velasco.
3	Results on main elasmobranch species from the 2022 Spanish Groundfish Survey on the Porcupine Bank (NE Atlantic)	S. Ruiz-Pico, O. Fernández-Zapico, M. Blanco, F. Velasco, C. Rodríguez-Cabello, F. Baldó
4	Abundance, biomass and CPUE of deep-water sharks in the long-line survey (PALPROF) in the Bay of Biscay (ICES 8c). Update from 2015 to 2022.	Diez, G., Basterretxea M., Oyarzabal, I., Cuende E., Mugerza, A., Maceira, A., Abaroa, K., and Pedrajas, A.
5	Species composition of rays and skates (Rajidae) landed in Denmark.	Vinther, M.
6	Exploratory assessment of <i>Scyliorhinus canicula</i> stock in ICES Division 8c and 9a (syc.27.8c9a) using LBI and the rfb rule	Rodríguez-Cabello, C., Moura, T., Diez, G., Maia, C. and Figueredo, I.
7	An overview of the growth parameters of demersal elasmobranchs in the ICES area and adjacent waters	Ellis, J. R., Silva, J. F. and McCully Phillips, S. R.