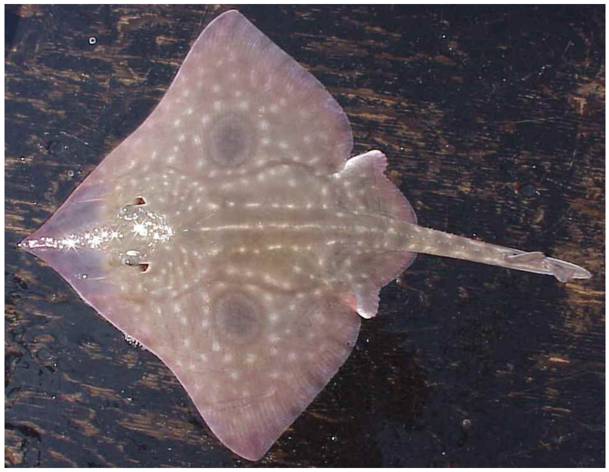
Status of Big Skate (*Beringraja binoculata*) Off the U.S. Pacific Coast in 2019



Ian G. Taylor[1]
Vladlena Gertseva[1]
Joseph Bizzarro[2]
Andi Stephens[3]

[1]Northwest Fisheries Science Center, U.S. Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Marine Fisheries Service, 2725 Montlake Boulevard East, Seattle, Washington 98112

[2]Southwest Fisheries Science Center, U.S. Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Marine Fisheries Service, 110 Shaffer Road, Santa Cruz, California 95060

[3]Northwest Fisheries Science Center, U.S. Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Marine Fisheries Service, 2032 S.E. OSU Drive Newport, Oregon 97365

This report may be cited as:

Taylor, I.G., Gertseva, V., Bizzarro, J., and Stephens, A. Status of Big Skate (*Beringraja binoculata*) Off the U.S. West Coast, 2019. Pacific Fishery Management Council, Portland, OR. Available from http://www.pcouncil.org/groundfish/stock-assessments/

Status of Big Skate (*Beringraja binoculata*) Off the U.S. Pacific Coast in 2019

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Executive Summary

`executive-summary`

Stock

`stock`

This assessment reports the status of the Big Skate (*Beringraja binoculata*) resource in U.S. waters off the coast of … using data through 2018.

Catches

`catches`

Information on historical landings of Big Skate are available back to xxxx… (Table a). Commercial landings were small during the years of World War II, ranging between 329 to 395 metric tons (mt) per year.

(Figures a-b)
(Figure c)

Since 2000, annual total landings of Big Skate have ranged between 135-412 mt, with landings in 2018 totaling 173 mt.

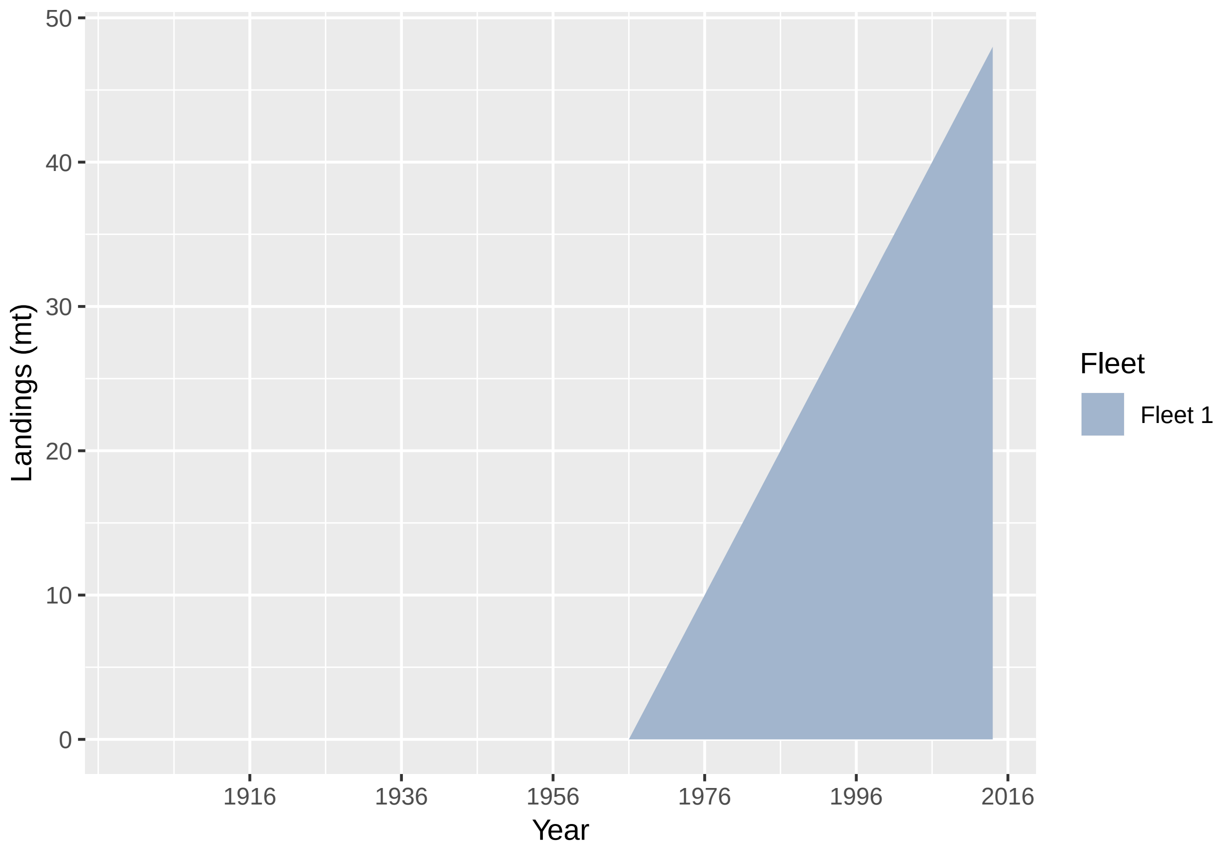


Figure a: Big Skate catch history for the recreational fleets. fig:Exec_catch1

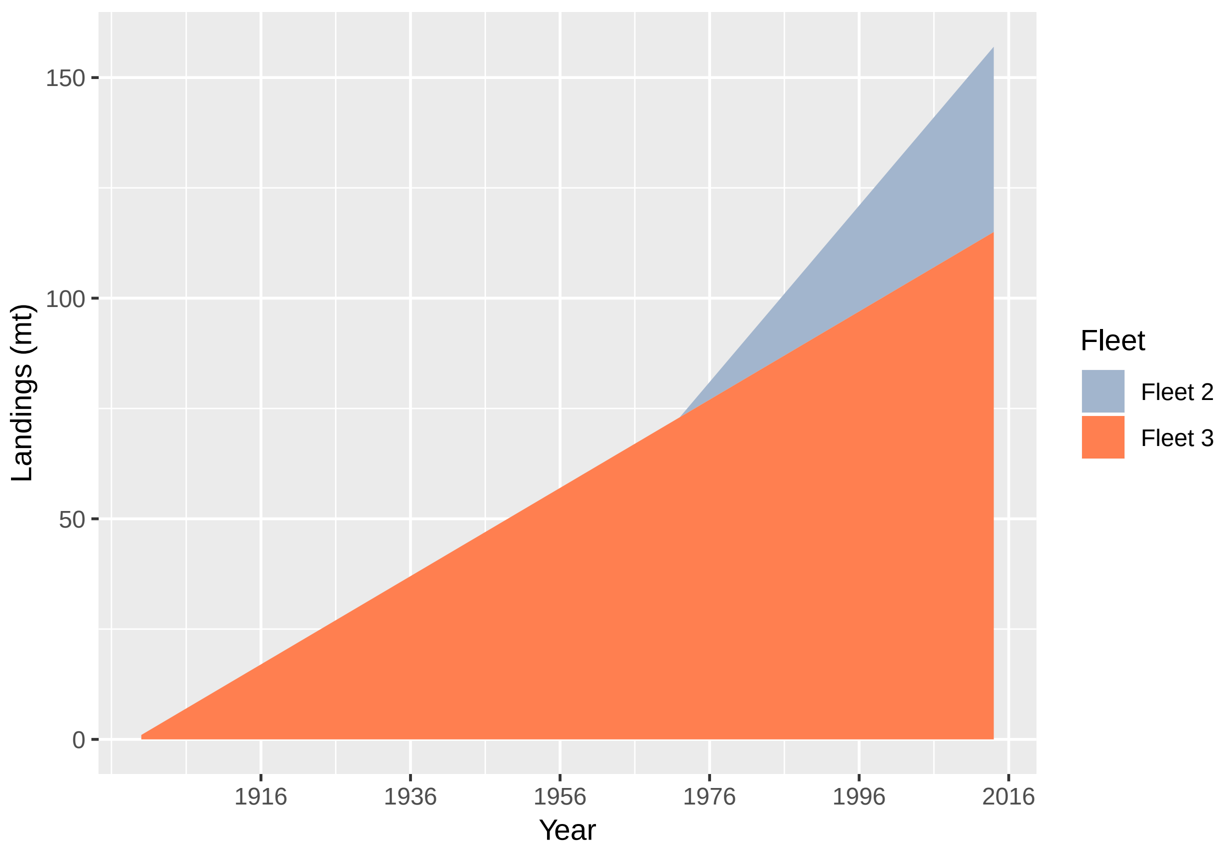


Figure b: Stacked line plot of Big Skate catch history for the commercial fleets. fig:Exec_catch2

Table a: Recent Big Skate landings (mt) by fleet.

tab:Exec_catch

Year	Landings 1	Landings 2	Landings 3	Landings 4	Landings 5	Total
2005	-	-	-	-	-	-
2006	-	-	-	-	-	-
2007	-	-	-	-	-	-
2008	-	-	-	-	-	-
2009	-	-	-	-	-	-
2010	-	-	-	-	-	-
2011	-	-	-	-	-	-
2012	-	-	-	-	-	-
2013	-	-	-	-	-	-
2014	-	-	-	-	-	-

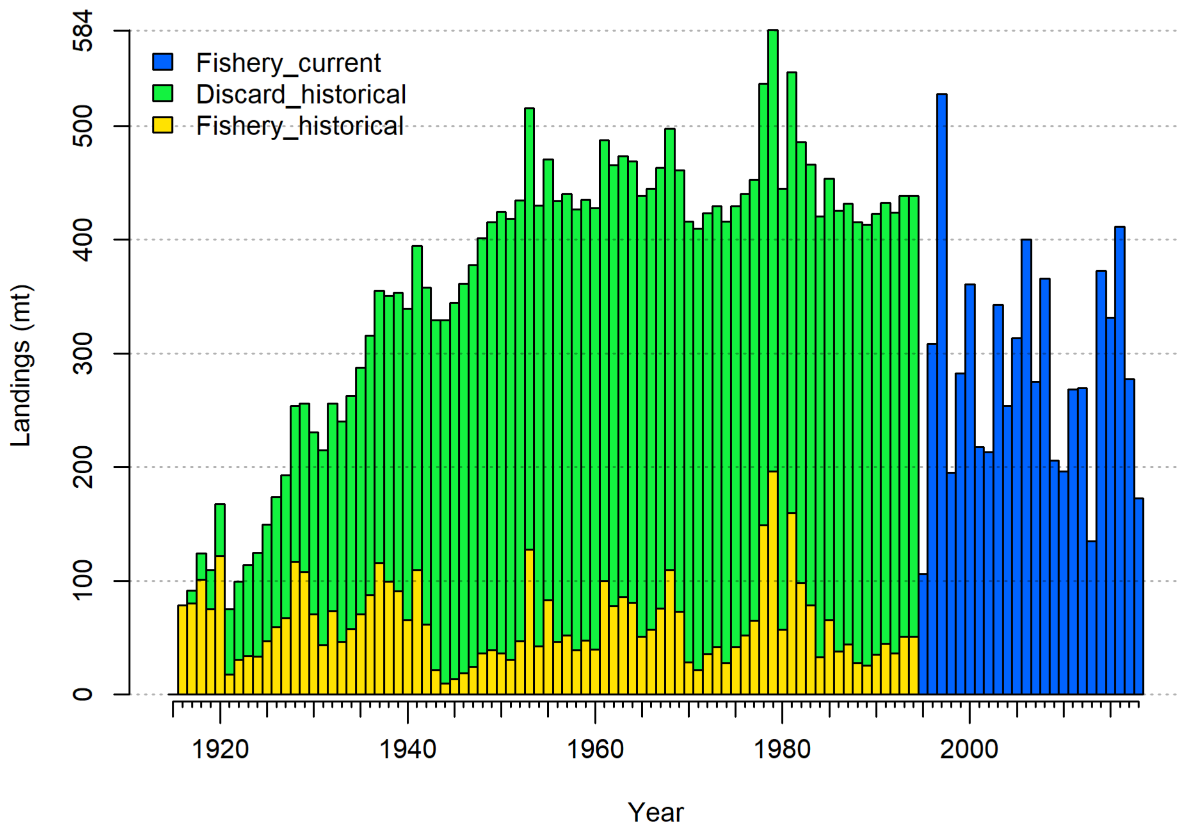


Figure c: Catch history of Big Skate in the model. fig:r4ss_catches

Data and Assessment

data-and-assessment

This the first full assessment for Big Skate, which was last assessed as part of the "Other species" Complex. This assessment uses the newest version of Stock Synthesis (3.30.xx). The model begins in 1916, and assumes the stock was at an unfished equilibrium that year.

(Figure d).

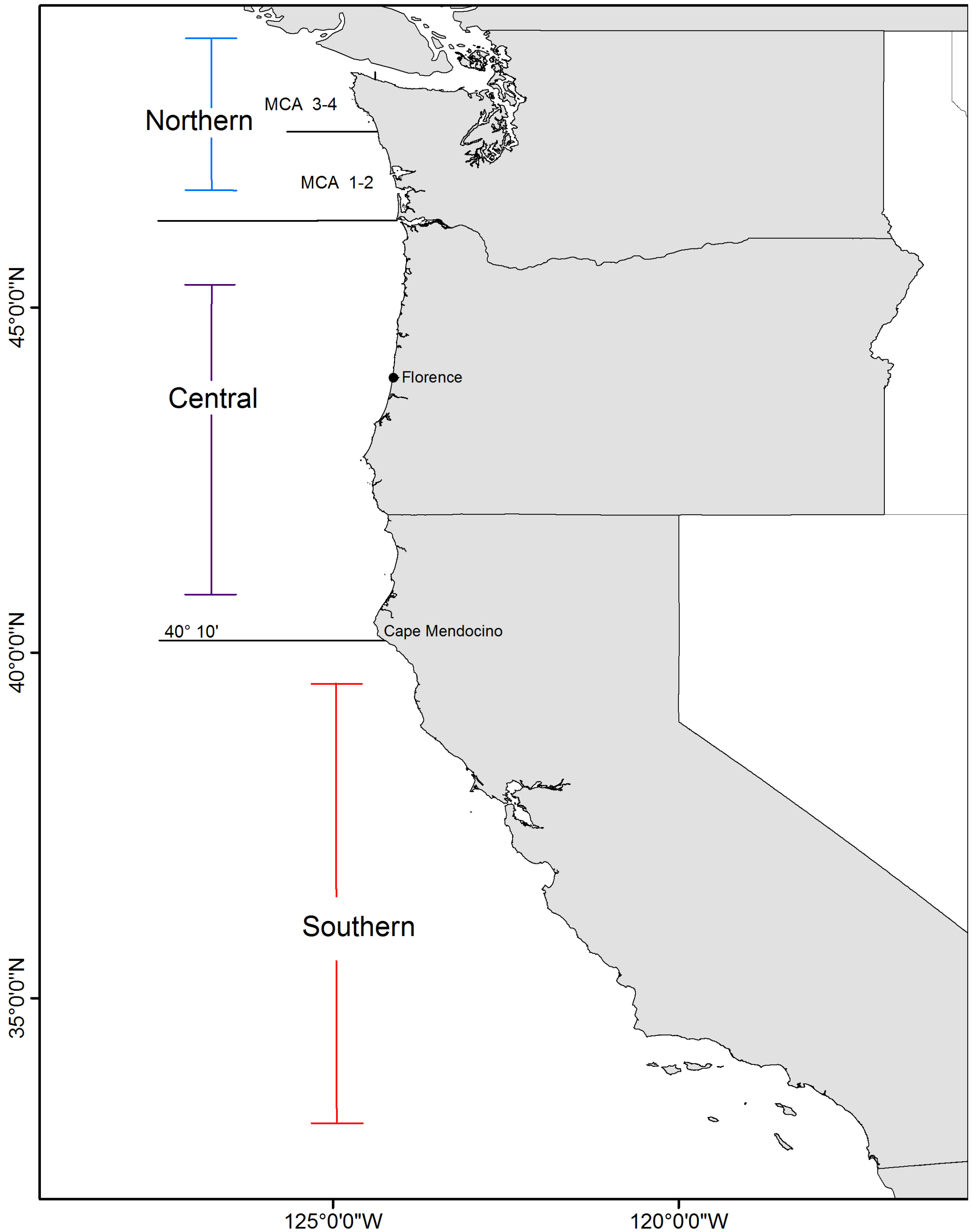


Figure d: Map depicting the distribution of California scorpionfish out to 600 ft. The stock assessment is bounded at Pt. Conception in the north to the U.S./Mexico border in the south. fig:assess_region_map

##Stock Biomass{-} (Figure e and Table b).

The 2018 estimated spawning biomass relative to unfished equilibrium spawning biomass is above the target of 40% of unfished spawning biomass at 99.8% (95% asymptotic interval: ± 99.8%-99.8%) (Figure f). Approximate confidence intervals based on the asymptotic variance estimates show that the uncertainty in the estimated spawning biomass is high.

Table b: Recent trend in beginning of the year spawning output and depletion for the model for Big Skate.

tab:SpawningDeplete_mod1

Year	Spawning Output (million eggs)	~ 95% confidence interval	Estimated depletion	~ 95% confidence interval
2010	70693.200	(70693.2-70693.2)	0.998	(0.998-0.998)
2011	70697.500	(70697.5-70697.5)	0.998	(0.998-0.998)
2012	70699.900	(70699.9-70699.9)	0.998	(0.998-0.998)
2013	70702.400	(70702.4-70702.4)	0.998	(0.998-0.998)
2014	70709.200	(70709.2-70709.2)	0.998	(0.998-0.998)
2015	70708.700	(70708.7-70708.7)	0.998	(0.998-0.998)
2016	70708.900	(70708.9-70708.9)	0.998	(0.998-0.998)
2017	70706.000	(70706-70706)	0.998	(0.998-0.998)
2018	70706.500	(70706.5-70706.5)	0.998	(0.998-0.998)
2019	70709.900	(70709.9-70709.9)	0.998	(0.998-0.998)

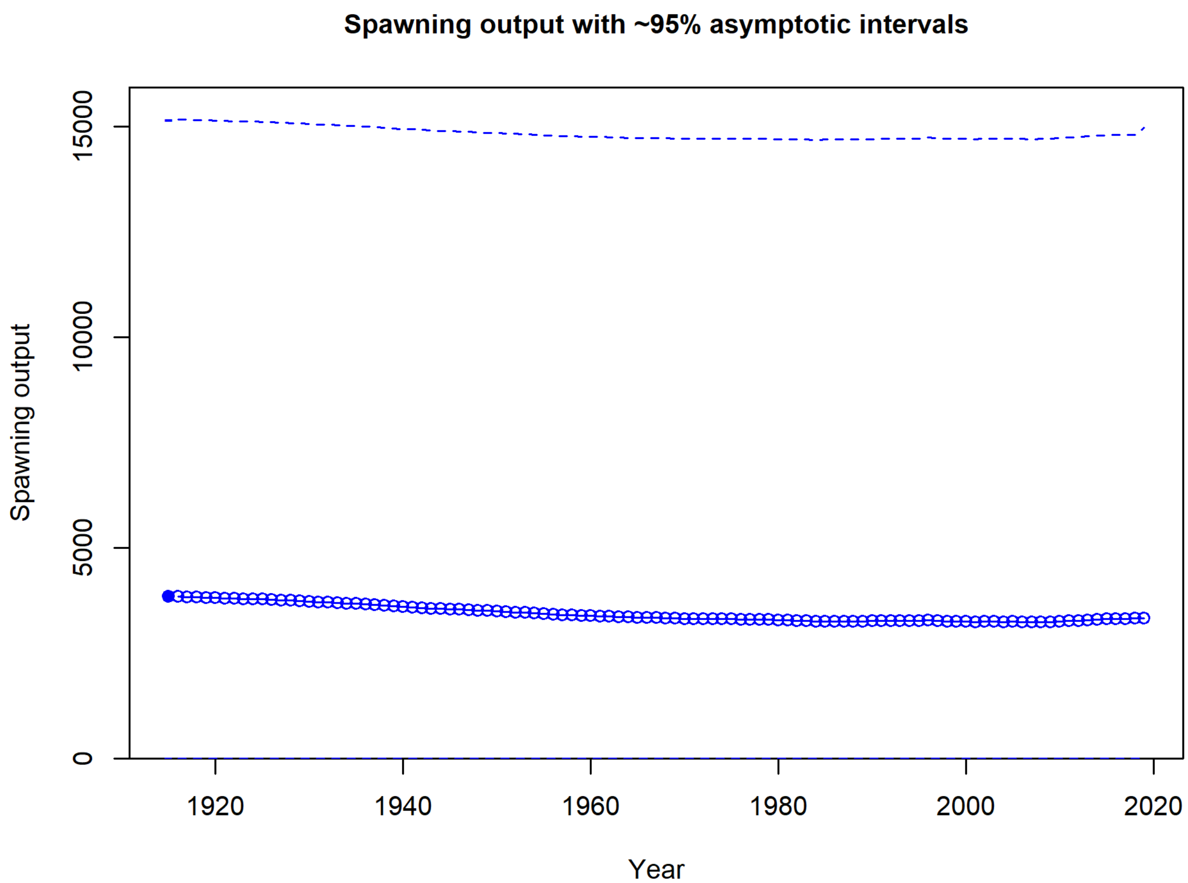


Figure e: Time series of spawning biomass trajectory (circles and line: median; light broken lines: 95% credibility intervals) for the base case assessment model. fig:Spawnbio_all

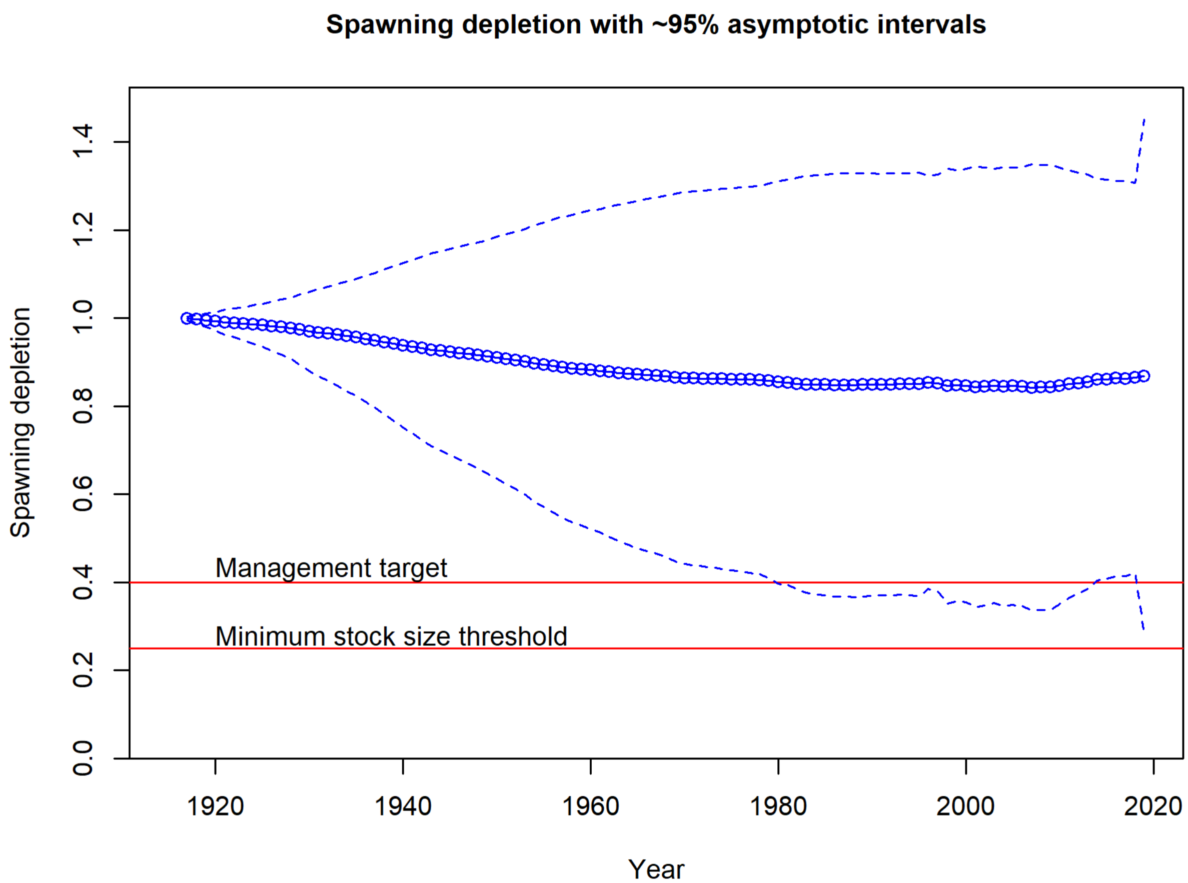


Figure f: Estimated relative depletion with approximate 95% asymptotic confidence intervals (dashed lines) for the base case assessment model. fig:RelDeplete_all

Recruitment

recruitment

Recruitment deviations were estimated from xxxx-xxxx (Figure g and Table c).

Table c: Recent recruitment for the model.

tab:Recruit_mod1

Year	Estimated Recruitment (millions)	~ 95% confidence interval
2010	749.57	(749.57 - 749.57)
2011	749.59	(749.59 - 749.59)
2012	749.60	(749.6 - 749.6)
2013	749.61	(749.61 - 749.61)
2014	749.64	(749.64 - 749.64)
2015	749.63	(749.63 - 749.63)
2016	749.63	(749.63 - 749.63)
2017	749.62	(749.62 - 749.62)
2018	749.62	(749.63 - 749.63)
2019	749.64	(749.64 - 749.64)

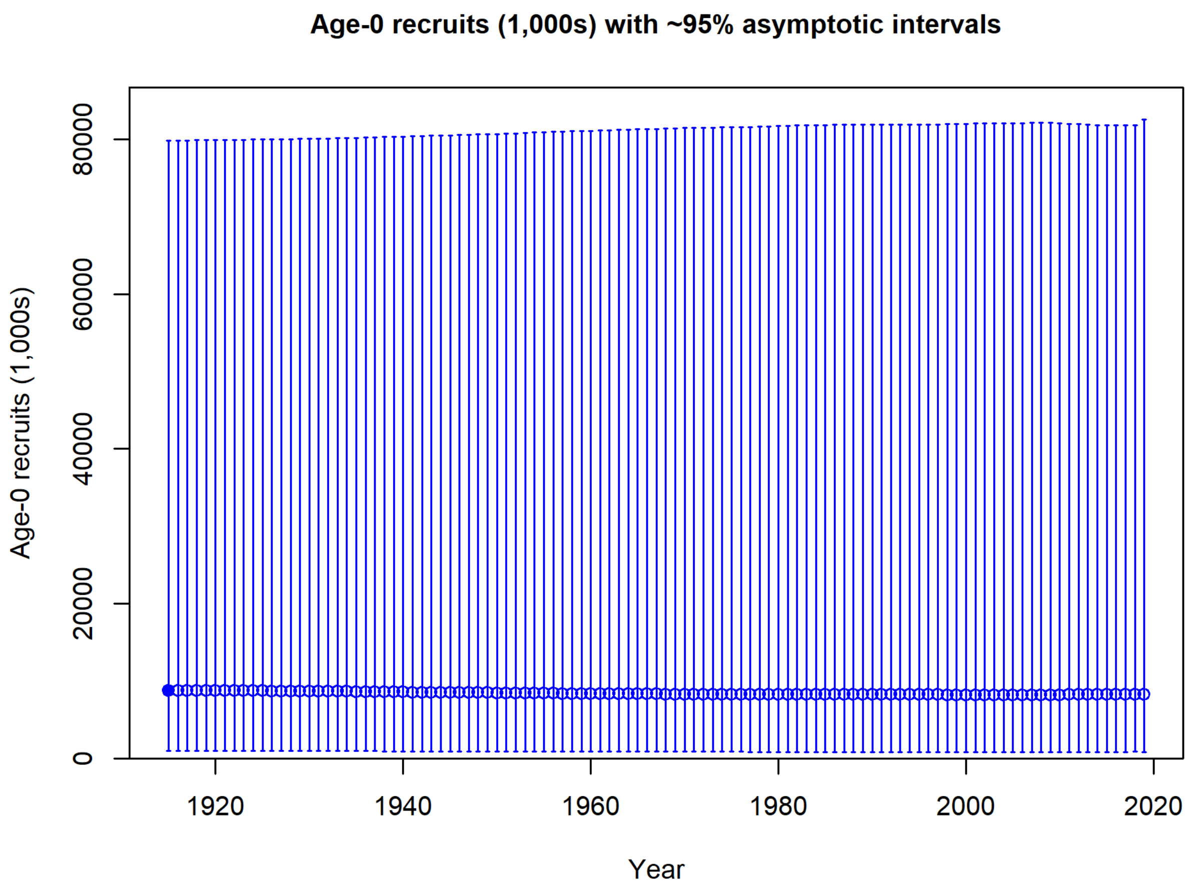


Figure g: Time series of estimated Big Skate recruitments for the base-case model with 95% confidence or credibility intervals. fig:Recruits_all

Exploitation status

exploitation-status

Harvest rates estimated by the base model ..... management target levels (Table d and Figure h).

Table d: Recent trend in spawning potential ratio and exploitation for Big Skate in the model. Fishing intensity is (1-SPR) divided by 50% (the SPR target) and exploitation is F divided by F_{SPR}.

tab:SPR_Exploit_mod1

Year	Fishing intensity	~ 95% confidence interval	Exploitation rate	~ 95% confidence interval
2009	0.00	(0-0)	0.00	(0-0)
2010	0.00	(0-0)	0.00	(0-0)
2011	0.00	(0-0)	0.00	(0-0)
2012	0.00	(0-0)	0.00	(0-0)
2013	0.00	(0-0)	0.00	(0-0)
2014	0.00	(0-0)	0.00	(0-0)
2015	0.00	(0-0)	0.00	(0-0)
2016	0.00	(0-0)	0.00	(0-0)
2017	0.00	(0-0)	0.00	(0-0)
2018	0.00	(0-0)	0.00	(0-0)

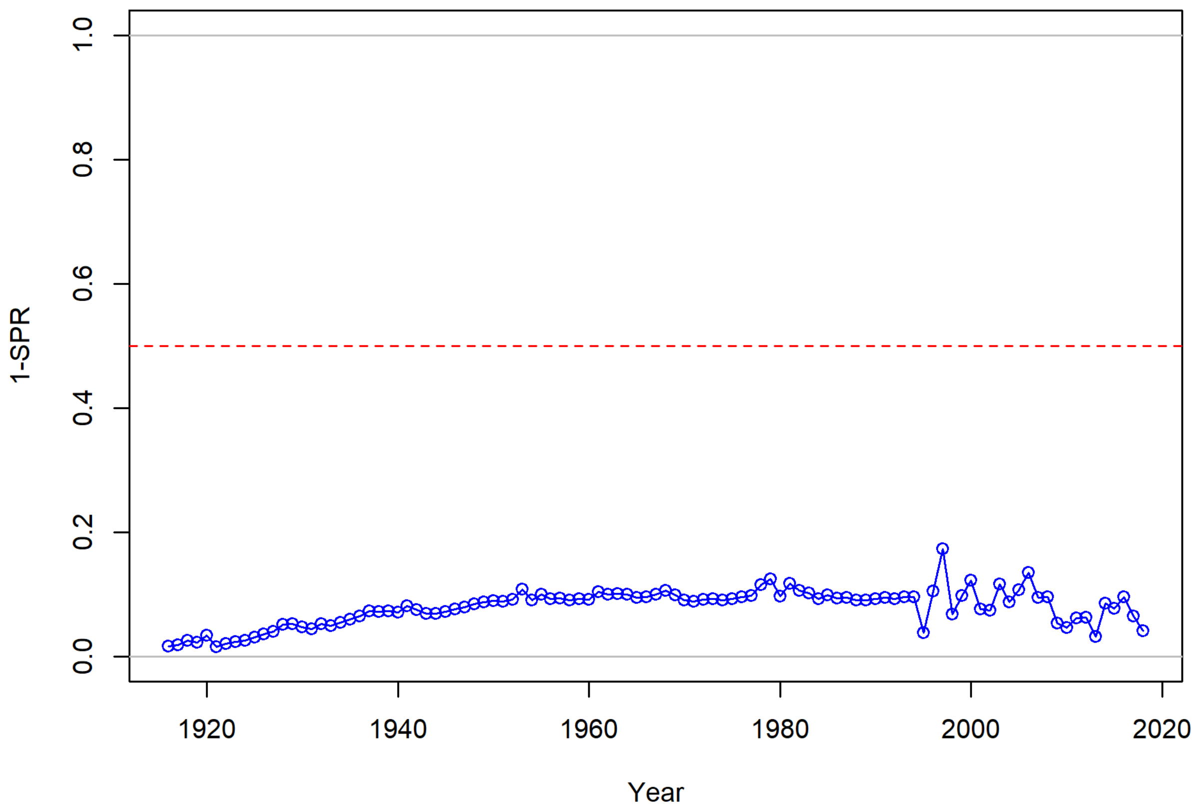


Figure h: Estimated spawning potential ratio (SPR) for the base-case model. One minus SPR is plotted so that higher exploitation rates occur on the upper portion of the y-axis. The management target is plotted as a red horizontal line and values above this reflect harvests in excess of the overfishing proxy based on the $SPR_{50\%}$ harvest rate. The last year in the time series is 2018. fig:SPR_all

Ecosystem Considerations

ecosystem-considerations

In this assessment, ecosystem considerations were not explicitly included in the analysis. This is primarily due to a lack of relevant data and results of analyses (conducted elsewhere) that could contribute ecosystem-related quantitative information for the assessment.

Reference Points

reference-points

This stock assessment estimates that Big Skate in the model is above the biomass target ($SB_{40\%}$), and well above the minimum stock size threshold ($SB_{25\%}$). The estimated relative depletion level for the base model in 2019 is 99.8% (95% asymptotic interval: ± 99.8%-99.8%, corresponding to an unfished spawning biomass of 70709.9 million eggs (95% asymptotic interval: 70709.9-70709.9 million eggs) of spawning biomass in the base model (Table e). Unfished age 1+ biomass was estimated to be 2,814 mt in the base case model. The target spawning biomass ($SB_{40\%}$) is 2,834 million eggs, which corresponds with an equilibrium yield of 5,906 mt. Equilibrium yield at the proxy F_{MSY} harvest rate corresponding to $SPR_{50\%}$ is 5,070 mt (Figure i).

Table e: Summary of reference points and management quantities for the base case model.
tab:Ref_pts_mod1

Quantity	**Estimate**	**Low 2.5% limit**	**High 2.5% limit**
Unfished spawning output (million eggs)	7,086	7,086	7,086
Unfished age 1+ biomass (mt)	2,814	2,814	2,814
Unfished recruitment (R_0)	7,502	7,502	7,502
Spawning output(2018 million eggs)	7,071	7,071	7,071
Depletion (2018)	0.998	0.998	0.998
Reference points based on $\mathbf{SB_{40\%}}$			
Proxy spawning output ($B_{40\%}$)	2,834	2,834	2,834
SPR resulting in $B_{40\%}$ ($SPR_{B40\%}$)	0.625	0.625	0.625
Exploitation rate resulting in $B_{40\%}$	0.04	0.04	0.04
Yield with $SPR_{B40\%}$ at $B_{40\%}$ (mt)	5,906	5,906	5,906
Reference points based on SPR proxy for MSY			
Spawning output	1,417	1,417	1,417
SPR_{proxy}	0.5		
Exploitation rate corresponding to SPR_{proxy}	0.058	0.058	0.058
Yield with SPR_{proxy} at SB_{SPR} (mt)	5,070	5,070	5,070
Reference points based on estimated MSY values			
Spawning output at MSY (SB_{MSY})	2,578	2,578	2,578
SPR_{MSY}	0.602	0.602	0.602
Exploitation rate at MSY	0.043	0.043	0.043
Dead Catch MSY (mt)	5,939	5,939	5,939
Retained Catch MSY (mt)	5,939	5,939	5,939

Management Performance

management-performance

Table f

Unresolved Problems and Major Uncertainties

unresolved-problems-and-major-uncertainties

Table f: Recent trend in total catch and commercial landings (mt) relative to the management guidelines. Estimated total catch reflect the commercial landings plus the model estimated discarded biomass.

tab:mnmgt_perform

Year	OFL (mt; ABC prior to 2011)	ABC (mt)	ACL (mt; OY prior to 2011)	Estimated total catch (mt)
2007	-	-	-	-
2008	-	-	-	-
2009	-	-	-	-
2010	-	-	-	-
2011	-	-	-	-
2012	-	-	-	-
2013	-	-	-	-
2014	-	-	-	-
2015	-	-	-	-
2016	-	-	-	-
2017	-	-	-	-
2018	-	-	-	-

101 # Decision Table

decision-table

Table g: Projections of potential OFL (mt) for each model, using the base model forecast.

tab:OFL_projection

Year	OFL
2019	158932.00
2020	149035.00
2021	141655.00
2022	136395.00
2023	132529.00
2024	129293.00
2025	126187.00
2026	122991.00
2027	119650.00
2028	116197.00
2029	112719.00
2030	109333.00

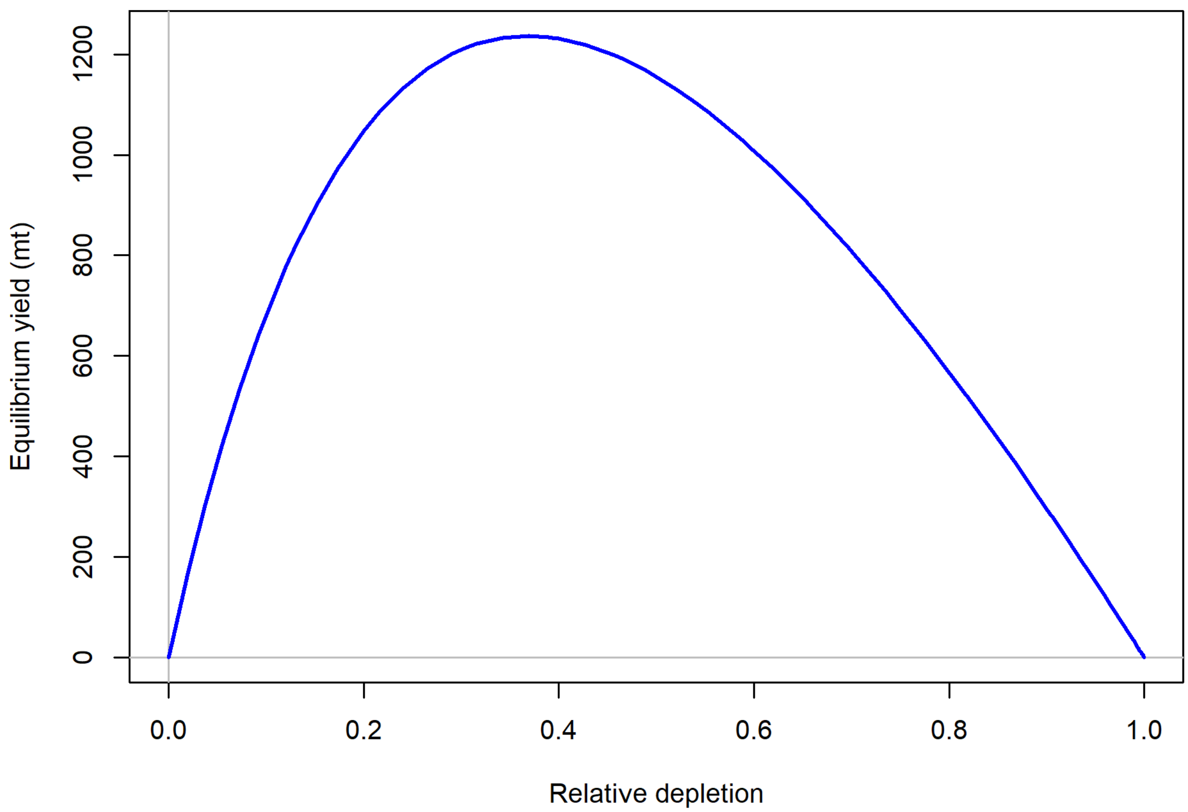


Figure i: Equilibrium yield curve for the base case model. Values are based on the 2018 fishery selectivity and with steepness fixed at 0.718. fig:Yield_all

Table h: Summary of 10-year projections beginning in 2020 for alternate states of nature based on an axis of uncertainty for the model. Columns range over low, mid, and high states of nature, and rows range over different assumptions of catch levels. An entry of "–" indicates that the stock is driven to very low abundance under the particular scenario.

tab:Decision_table_mod1

			States of nature					
			Low M 0.05		Base M 0.07		High M 0.09	
	Year	Catch	Spawning Output	Depletion	Spawning Output	Depletion	Spawning Output	Depletion
40-10 Rule, Low M	2019	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	2020	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	2021	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	2022	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	2023	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	2024	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	2025	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	2026	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	2027	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	2028	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
40-10 Rule	2019	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	2020	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	2021	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	2022	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	2023	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	2024	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	2025	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	2026	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	2027	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	2028	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
40-10 Rule, High M	2019	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	2020	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	2021	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	2022	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	2023	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	2024	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	2025	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	2026	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	2027	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	2028	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Average Catch	2019	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	2020	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	2021	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	2022	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	2023	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	2024	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	2025	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	2026	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	2027	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	2028	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Table i: Base case results summary.

tab:base_summary

Quantity	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Landings (mt)										
Total Est. Catch (mt)										
OFL (mt)										
ACL (mt)										
(1-SPR)(1-$SPR_{50\%}$)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Exploitation rate	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Age 1+ biomass (mt)	2654110	2654240	2654360	2654400	2654430	2654570	2654490	2654470	2654390	2654450
Spawning Output	70693.2	70697.5	70699.9	70702.4	70709.2	70708.7	70708.9	70706.0	70706.5	70709.9
95% CI	(70693.2-70693.2)	(70697.5-70697.5)	(70699.9-70699.9)	(70702.4-70702.4)	(70709.2-70709.2)	(70708.7-70708.7)	(70708.9-70708.9)	(70706-70706)	(70706.5-70706.5)	(70709.9-70709.9)
Depletion	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
95% CI	(0.998-0.998)	(0.998-0.998)	(0.998-0.998)	(0.998-0.998)	(0.998-0.998)	(0.998-0.998)	(0.998-0.998)	(0.998-0.998)	(0.998-0.998)	(0.998-0.998)
Recruits	749.57	749.59	749.60	749.61	749.64	749.63	749.63	749.62	749.62	749.64
95% CI	(749.57 - 749.57)	(749.59 - 749.59)	(749.6 - 749.6)	(749.61 - 749.61)	(749.64 - 749.64)	(749.63 - 749.63)	(749.63 - 749.63)	(749.62 - 749.62)	(749.63 - 749.63)	(749.64 - 749.64)

Research and Data Needs

research-and-data-needs

We recommend the following research be conducted before the next assessment:

1. xxxx:
2. xxxx:
3. xxxx:
4. xxxx:
5. xxxx:

1 Introduction

introduction

1.1 Distribution and Life History

distribution-and-life-history

Big Skate (*Raja binoculata*) is the largest of the skate species in North America with a documented maximum length of 244 cm total length and a maximum weight of 91 kg (Eschmeyer and Herald 1983). The species name "binoculata" (two-eyed) refers to the prominent ocellus at the base of each pectoral fin. Big skate range from the Bering Sea to Cedros Island in Baja California, but are uncommon south of Pt. Conception. Big skate have a shallow depth distribution of 3-800 m, but are most common in the 3-110 m depth zone. Big Skate are observed in progressively shallower water in the northern parts of its range. They occur in coastal bays, estuaries, and over the continental shelf, usually on sandy or muddy bottoms, but occasionally on low strands of kelp.

Skates are the largest and most widely distributed group of batoid fish with approximately 245 species ascribed to two families (Ebert and Compagno 2007)(McEachran and Miyake 1990). Skates are benthic fish that are found in all coastal waters but are most common in cold temperatures and polar waters (Ebert and Compagno 2007).

There are eleven species of skates in three genera (Amblyraja, Bathyraja, and Raja) present in the Northeast Pacific Ocean off California, Oregon and Washington (Ebert 2003). Of that number, just three species (Longnose Skate, *Raja rhina*; Big Skate, *Raja binoculata*; and Sandpaper Skate, *Bathyraja interrupta*) make up over 95 percent of West Coast Groundfish Bottom Trawl Survey (WCGBTS) catches in terms of biomass and numbers, with the Longnose Skate leading in both categories (with 62 percent of biomass and 56 percent of numbers).

Mating has been observed with distinct pairing with embrace. Big Skate are oviparous and lay horned egg cases up to a foot in length with up to seven embryos per egg case (Eschmeyer and Herald 1983). The female deposits her eggs in pairs on sandy or muddy flats; there is no discrete breedingseason and egg-laying occurs year-round (Ebert 2003). Females may use discrete spawning beds, as large numbers of egg cases have been found in certain localized areas (IUCN/SSC Shark Specialist Group 2005). The young emerge after 9 months and measure 18–23 cm (7–9 in).

Female Big Skates mature at 1.3–1.4 m (4 ft 3 in–4 ft 7 in) long and 12–13 years old, while males mature at 0.9–1.1 m (2 ft 11 in–3 ft 7 in) long and seven to eight years old (Bester, C. 2009). The growth rate of Big Skates in the Gulf of Alaska are comparable to those off California, but differ from those off British Columbia. The lifespans of big skates off Alaska are up to 15 years, while those off British Columbia are up to 26 years.

Big Skates are usually seen buried in sediment with only their eyes showing. They feed on polychaete worms, mollusks, crustaceans, and small benthic fishes. Polychaetes and mollusks comprise a slightly greater percentage of the diet of younger individuals. The eyespots on the skates' wings are believed to serve as decoys to confuse predators. A known predator of big skates is the Broadnose Sevengill Shark (*Notorhynchus cepedianus*). Juvenile Northern Elephant Seals (*Mirounga angustirostris*) are known to consume the egg cases of the Big Skate. Known parasites include the copepod *Lepeophtheirus cuneifer*.

1.2 Early Life History

`early-life-history`

Bizzarro.

1.3 Map

`map`

A map showing the scope of the assessment and depicting boundaries for fisheries or data collection strata is provided in Figure 1.

1.4 Ecosystem Considerations

`ecosystem-considerations-1`

In this assessment, ecosystem considerations were not explicitly included in the analysis. This is primarily due to a lack of relevant data and results of analyses (conducted elsewhere) that could contribute ecosystem-related quantitative information for the assessment.

1.5 Fishery Information

`fishery-information`

Big Skate are caught in commercial and recreational fisheries on the West Coast using line and trawl gears. There is a limited market for pectoral fins (skate wings).

The history of Big Skate (*Raja binoculata*) is not well documented. They were used as a food source by the native Coastal and Salish Tribes (Batdorf, C 1990) long before Europeans settled in the Pacific Northwest and then as fertilizer by the settlers (Bowers, G. M. 1909). No directed fishery for Big Skate has been documented; rather, they were taken along with other skates and rays as "scrap fish" and used for fertilizer, fish meal and oil.

Skates have been regarded as a predator on desirable market species such as Dungeness crab, and were thought of as nuisance fish with no appeal as a food item save for small local markets. They had been discarded or harvested at a minimal level until their livers became valued along with those of other cartilaginous fishes for the extraction of vitamin A in the 1940s. Chapman (Chapman, W.M. 1944) recorded that "At present they are being fished heavily, in common with the other elasmobranchs of the coast, forthe vitamins in their livers. The carcasses are either thrown away at sea or made into fish meal. Little use is made of the excellent meat of the wings".

Little information is available about the historic fishery for Big Skate. In records before 2000, they are lumped together with other skates or in market categories; this necessitates considerable attention to reconstructing the fishery by observing the composition of catches in the modern fishery and applying those to historical records.

1.6 Stock Status and Management History

`stock-status-and-management-history`

Big Skate were managed in the Other Fish complex until 2015 when they were designated an Ecosystem Component (EC) species. Catches of Big Skate are estimated to have averaged 95 mt from 2007–2011, along with large landings of "Unspecified Skate". Analysis of Oregon port-sampling data indicates that about 98 percent of the recent Unspecified Skate landings in Oregon were comprised of Big Skate. Such large landings indicates targeting of Big Skate has occurred and an EC designation was not warranted. Based on this evidence, Big Skate was redesignated as an actively-managed species in the fishery. Big skate have been managed with stock-specific harvest specifications since 2017.

The recent OFL of 541 mt was calculated by applying approximate MSY harvest rates toestimates of stock biomass from the Northwest Fisheries Science Center (NWFSC) West Coast Groundfish Bottom Trawl Survey. This survey-based biomass estimate is likely underestimated since Big Skate are distributed all the way to the shoreline and no West Coast trawl surveys have been conducted in water shallower than 55 meters. This introduces an extra source of uncertainty to management and suggests that increased precaution is needed to reduce the risk of overfishing the stock.

There has been consideration for managing Big Skate in a complex with Longnose Skate, the other actively-managed West Coast skate species, but the two species have disparate distributions and fishery interactions (Longnose Skate is much more deeply distributed than Big Skate) and that option was not endorsed. The Pacific Fishery Management Council has chosen to set the Annual Catch Limit (ACL) equal to the Allowable Biological Catch (ABC) with a buffer for management uncertainty (P*) of 0.45.

1.7 Management Performance

`management-performance-1`

Table f

1.8 Fisheries Off Mexico or Canada

fisheries-off-mexico-or-canada

Big Skate and Longnose Skate are landed in the commercial trawl and hook-and-line fisheries in the waters off British Columbia. Assessments of Longnose Skate and Big Skate were conducted by Canada's Division of Fisheries and Oceans in 2015(King, J.R., Surry, A.M., Garcia, S., and P.J. Starr 2015).

For Big Skate, a Bayesian surplus production model failed to provide plausible results, and two data-limited approaches were investigated: Depletion-Corrected Average Catch Analysis (DCAC), and a Catch-MSY (maximum sustainable yield) Approach.

DCAC produced a range of potential yield estimates that were above the long-term average catch, with an upper bound that was three orders of magnitude larger than the long-term average catch. The Catch-MSY approach was found to be quite sensitive to assumptions and was not recommended as the sole basis of advice to managers.

The recommendation for managment for the two skate species was that they should be managed with harvest yeilds based on mean historic catch, with consideration given to survey trends and to the ranges of maximum sustainable yield estimates identified by the Catch-MSY Approach. However, the analysis found no significant trends in abundance indices for Big Skate, and mean historical catches were below the maximum MSY estimate from the catch-MSY results.

2 Fishery Data

fishery-data

2.1 Data

data

Data used in the Big Skate assessment are summarized in Figure 2. Descriptions of the data sources are in the following sections.

2.2 Commercial Fishery Landings

commercial-fishery-landings

2.2.1 Catch reconstructions for WA, OR, and CA

catch-reconstructions-for-wa-or-and-ca

Washington Commercial Skate Landings Reconstruction

Information for Big Skate is very limited, in part because the requirement to sort landings of Big Skate in the shore-based Individual Fishing Quota fishery from landings in the "Unidentified Skate" category was not implemented until June 2015. The historical catch of Big Skate therefore relies on the historical reconstruction of Longnose Skate.

For the 2019 assessment, a new approach has been developed for estimating the catch history for Longnose Skate based on a linear regression model that predicts the catch of Longnose Skate from the catch of Dover sole, for which historical catch estimates are available (Gertseva, V. 2019). The dependent variable for the linear regression model was the West Coast Groundfish Observer Program (WCGOP) annual estimates of the coastwide total catch (landings plus discards) of Longnose Skate for the period 2009 to 2017 and the independent variable was the corresponding WCGOP annual estimates of coastwide total catch (landings plus discards) of Dover sole. The regression model has good predictive power ($R^2 = 95.7\%$) over the range of the Dover sole catches (6,500 to 12,500 mt).

The discard component of the catch reconstruction for Big Skate may be based either on the catch reconstruction for Longnose Skate and the assumption that the two species experience similar discard rates (discard / total catch) or on a similar analysis with links to species that co-occur with big skate. Data from the Pikitch discard study (1985-1987) and from WCGOP (2015-2017) support the idea that discard rates for the two species are very similar. Also, market demand for skates does not seem to distinguish between the two species. There are insufficient years of data from the WCGOP to develop a regression model for Big Skate as was done for Longnose Skate.

Oregon Commercial Skate Landings Reconstruction

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) provided newly reconstructed commercial landings for all observed skate species for the 2019 assessment cycle (1978 – 2018). In addition, the methods were reviewed at a pre-assessment workshop. Historically, skates were landed as a single skate complex in Oregon. In 2009, longnose skates were separated into their own single-species landing category, and in 2014, big skates were also separated. The reconstruction methodology differed by these three time blocks in which species composition collections diverged (1978 – 2008; 2009 – 2014; 2015 – 2018).

Species compositions of skate complexes from commercial port sampling are available throughout this time period but are generally limited, which precluded the use of all strata for reconstructing landings. Quarter and port were excluded, retaining gear type, PMFC area, and market category for stratifying reconstructed landings within the three time blocks. Bottom trawl gear types include multiple bottom trawl gears, and account for greater than 98% of skate landings . Minor gear types include primarily bottom longline gear, but also include mid-water trawl, hook and line, shrimp trawl, pot gear and scallop dredge.

For bottom trawl gears, trawl logbook areas and adjusted skate catches were matched with strata-specific species compositions. In Time Block 1 (1978 – 2008), all bottom trawl gear types were aggregated due to a lack of specificity in the gear recorded on the fish tickets. However, in Time Blocks 2 and 3, individual bottom trawl gear types were retained. Some borrowing of species compositions was required (31% of strata) and when necessary, borrowed from the closest area or from the most similar gear type . Longline gear landings were reconstructed in a similar fashion as to bottom trawl and required some borrowing among strata as well (25%).

Due to insufficient species compositions, mid-water trawl landings were reconstructed using a novel depth-based approach. Available compositions indicate that the proportion by weight of big skates within a composition drops to zero at approximately 100 fathoms, and an inverse relationship is observed for longnose skate, where the proportion by weight is consistently one beyond 100 – 150 fathoms . Complex-level landings were assigned a depth from logbook entries and these species specific depth associations were used to parse out landings by species. The approach differed somewhat by time block . Landings from shrimp trawls were handled using a similar methodology. Finally, very minor landings from hook and line, pot gear and scallop dredges were assigned a single aggregated species composition, as they lack any gear-specific composition samples. Landings from within a time block were apportioned by year using the proportion of the annual ticket landings.

Results indicate that the species-specific landings from this reconstruction are very similar to those from Oregon's commercial catch reconstruction (Karnowski et al. 2014) during the overlapping years but cover a greater time period with methodology more applicable to skates in particular. ODFW intends to incorporate reconstructed skate landings into PacFIN in the future (A. Whitman, ODFW; pers. comm.).

California Catch Reconstruction

A reconstruction of historical skate landings from California waters was developed for the 1916–2017 time period using a combination of commercial catch data (spatially explicit block summary catches and port sample data from 2009-2017) and fishery-independent survey data (Bizzarro, J. 2019). Virtually all landings in California were of "unspecified skate" until species-composition sampling of skate market categories began in 2009.

From 2009 through 2017, catch estimates were based on these market category species-composition samples, and the average of those species-compositions was hindcast to 2002, based on the assumption that those data were representative of the era of large area closures in the post-2000 period.

For the period from 1936-1980, spatially explicit landings data (the California Department of Fisheries and Wildlife (CDFW) block summary data) were merged with survey data to provide species-specific estimates.

For years 1981-2001, a "blended" product of these two approaches was taken, in which a linear weighting scheme blended the two sets of catch estimates through that period. Landings estimates were also scaled upwards by an expansion factor for skates landed as "dressed" based on fish ticket data. Prior to 1981 these data had not been reported and skate landings were scaled by the "average" percentage landed as dressed in the 1981-1985 time period, but by the late 1980s nearly all skates were landed round.

As no spatial information on catch is available from 1916-1930, and the block summary data were very sparse in the first few years of the CDFW fish ticket program (1931–1934), spatial information from the late 1930's was used to hindcast to the 1916–1935 time period.

2.2.2 Tribal Catch in Washington

tribal-catch-in-washington

2.2.3 Commercial Discards

commercial-discards

Commercial discards of Big Skate are highly uncertain. The method used to estimate discards for Longnose Skate was based on a strong correlation between total mortality of that species, and total mortality of Dover Sole for the years 2009–2017 during which Longnose were landed separately from other skates. In contrast, the sorting requirement for Big Skate occurred too recently to provide an adequate range of years for this type of correlation. Furthermore, there is greater uncertainty in the total mortality for the shallow-water species with which Big Skate most often co-occurs, such as Sand Sole and Starry Flounder, than there is for Dover Sole, which has been the subject of recurring stock assessments.

However, those involved in the fishery for both skate species report that discarding for Big Skate and Longnose Skate in the years prior to 1995 were driven by the same market forced and the discard rates were similar. primarily lack of margets or fish processors accepting only skate wings that had been separated at-sea, as well as the quantitative have more uncertainty in their own catch estimates have no stock assessment and more uncertain mortality estimated total mortality and Dover Sole for which a correlation between relationship (Gertseva, V. 2019),

2.2.4 Commercial Fishery Length and Age Data

commercial-fishery-length-and-age-data

The input sample sizes were calculated via the Stewart Method (Ian Stewart, personal communication, IPHC):

$$\text{Input effN} = N_{\text{trips}} + 0.138 * N_{\text{fish}} \text{ if } N_{\text{fish}}/N_{\text{trips}} \text{ is} < 44$$

$$\text{Input effN} = 7.06 * N_{\text{trips}} \text{ if } N_{\text{fish}}/N_{\text{trips}} \text{ is} \geq 44$$

###Sport Fishery Removals and Discards

Biological samples from the recreational fleets are described in the sections below.

###Fishery-Dependent Indices of Abundance

Data Source 1

Data Source 1 Index Standardization

Data Source 1 Length Composition

Data Source 2

Data Source 3

###Fishery-Independent Data Sources

Alaska Fisheries Science Center (AFSC) Triennial Shelf Survey
Research surveys have been used since the 1970s to provide fishery-independent information about the abundance, distribution, and biological characteristics of Big Skate. A coast-wide survey was conducted in 1977 (Gunderson, Donald Raymond and Sample, Terrance M. 1980) by the Alaska Fisheries Science Center, and repeated every three years through 2001. The final year of this survey, 2004, was conducted by the NWFSC according to the AFSC protocol. We refer to this as the **Triennial Survey**.

The survey design used equally-spaced transects from which searches for tows in a specific depth range were initiated. The depth range and latitudinal range was not consistent across years, but all years in the period 1980-2004 included the area from 40° 10'N north to the Canadian border and a depth range that included 55-366 meters, which spans the range where the vast majority of Big Skate encountered in all trawl surveys. Therefore the index was based on this depth range. The survey as conducted in 1977 had incomplete coverage and is not believe to be comparable to the later years, and is not used in the index.

An index of abundance was estimated based on the VAST delta-GLMM model as described for the NWFSC Combo Index above. In this case as well, Q-Q plots indicated slightly better performance of the gamma over lognormal models for positive tows (Figure **??**).

Northwest Fisheries Science Center West Coast Groundfish Bottom Trawl Survey

In 2003, the NWFSC took over an ongoing slope survey the AFSC had been conducting, and expanded it spatially to include the continental shelf. This survey, referred to in this document as the **NWFSC Combo Survey**, has been conducted annually since. It uses a random-grid design covering the coastal waters from a depth of 55 m to 1,280 m from late-May to early-October (Bradburn, M.J. and Keller, A.A and Horness, B.H. 2011 , Keller, A.A. and Wallace, J.R. and Methot, R.D. 2017). Four chartered industry vessels are used each year (with the exception of 2013 when the U.S. federal-government shutdown curtailed the survey). Yellowtail catches in the NWFSC Combo Survey are shown in **??**.

The data from the NWFSC Combo survey was analyzed using a spatio-temporal delta-model (Thorson, J. T. and Shelton, A. O. and Ward, E. J. and Skaug, H. J. 2015), implemented as an R package VAST (Thorson, James T. and Barnett, Lewis A. K. 2017) and publicly available online (https://github.com/James-Thorson/VAST). Spatial and spatio-temporal variation is specifically included in both encounter probability and positive catch rates, a logit-link for encounter probability, and a log-link for positive catch rates. Vessel-year effects were included for each unique combination of vessel and year in the database.

Data Source 1 Index Standardization VAST

Data Source 1 Length Composition

Triennial Survey *Data Source 2 Index Standardization* VAST

###Biological Parameters and Data

Measurement Details and Conversion Factors

Disc width to total length (estimated by Ian on Apr 15, similar to Ebert 2008 estimates for Alaska) L = 1.3399 * W estimated from 95 samples from WCGBTS where both measurements collected (R-squared = 0.9983). Little sex difference observed, so using single relationship for both sexes. Inter-spiracle width to total length from Downs & Cheng (2013): L = 12.111 + 9.761*ISW (females) L = 3.824 + 10.927*ISW (males)

Love et al. (1987)

Length and Age Compositions

Length comps (some based on widths)

WCGBTS Lengths from all years except 2006 and 2007 Widths in 2006 and 2007

Triennial Survey Sample sizes: 3 in 1998 (all widths), 84 in 2001 (3 widths, 81 lengths), 100 in 2004 (all lengths) Triennial survey About 90+ samples in each of 2001 and 2004 Only 3 unsexed fish from 1998

Commercial fisheries In process Discard comps from 2010-2015

Length compositions were provided from the following sources:

- Source 1 (*type, e.g., commercial dead fish, research, recreational*, yyyy-yyyy)
- Source 2 (*type*, yyyy-yyyy)
- Source 3 (*research*, yyyy, yyyy, yyyy, yyyy)

The length composition of all fisheries aggregated across time by fleet is in Figure 3. Descriptions and details of the length composition data are in the above section for each fleet or survey.

Age Structures

von Bertalanffy growth curve (von Bertalanffy, L 1938), $L_i = L_\infty e^{(-k[t-t_0])}$, where L_i is the length (cm) at age i, t is age in years, k is rate of increase in growth, t_0 is the intercept, and L_∞ is the asymptotic length.

Ages WCGBTS Currently only 333 ages from 2010 present in data warehouse as of Apr 15 Patrick submitting an 300 additional ages from 2016 and 2017 to Beth on Apr 2 and promised further additions during the week of Apr 15.

Triennial Survey No ages

Commercial fisheries 2009 samples from WA were stratified by length, so should be treated as conditionals

Aging Precision and Bias

Weight-Length

Estimated by Ian based on WCGBT samples (n = 1159) $Weight = 0.0000074924 * Length^2.9925$ (Figure 4).

Sex Ratio, Maturity, and Fecundity

The female maturity relationship was based on visual maturity estimates from port samplers (n = 278, of which 241 were from Oregon and 37 from Washington, with 24 mature specimens) as well as 55 samples from the WCGBTS (of which 4 were mature). The resulting relationship was $L_{50\%} = 148.2453$ with a slope parameter of $Beta = -0.13155$ in the relationship $M = (1 + Beta(L - L_{50\%}))^{-1}$ (Figure 5).

Natural Mortality

The Hamel prior for M is lognormal(ln(5.4/max age),.438), which based on 1 age-15 fish out of 1034 observed in the WCGBTS results in lognormal(-1.021651, 0.438)

If it needs to be fixed, it should be set to M = 5.4/max age = 5.4/15 = 0.36

###Environmental or Ecosystem Data Included in the Assessment In this assessment, neither environmental nor ecosystem considerations were explicitly included in the analysis. This is primarily due to a lack of relevant data and results of analyses (conducted elsewhere) that could contribute ecosystem-related quantitative information for the assessment.

##Previous Assessments

###History of Modeling Approaches Used for this Stock

Deriving estimates of OFL for species in the “Other Fish” complex or potential alternative complexes

The current “Other Fish” complex and proposed alternatives include a number of species for which estimates of OFL contributions are not available from stock assessments or data-poor methods. Four of the species had OFL contributions for the 2013–2014 management cycle calculated by applying approximate MSY harvest rates to estimates of stock biomass from the NWFSC West Coast Bottom Trawl Survey (Bradburn et al., 2012). This approach is described in detail in Cope et al. (2012).

###yyyy Assessment Recommendations

Recommendation 1:

STAT response: xxxxx

Recommendation 2:

STAT response: xxxxx

Recommendation 3:

STAT response: xxxx

##Model Description

###Transition to the Current Stock Assessment

###Summary of Data for Fleets and Areas There are xxx fleets in the base model. They include:

Commercial: The commercial fleets include ...

Recreational: The recreational fleets include ...

Research: There are xx sources of fishery-independent data available ...

###Other Specifications

###Modeling Software The STAT team used Stock Synthesis 3 version 3.30.05.03 by Dr. Richard Methot at the NWFSC. This most recent version was used, since it included improvements and corrections to older versions. The r4SS package (GitHub release number v1.27.0) was used to post-processing output data from Stock Synthesis.

###Data Weighting

###Priors The log-normal prior for female natural mortality were based on a meta-analysis completed by Hamel (2015), as described under "Natural Mortality." Female natural mortality was fixed at the median of the prior, 0.xxx for an assumed maximum age of xx. An uninformative prior was used for the male offset natural mortality, which was estimated.

The prior for steepness (h) assumes a beta distribution with parameters based on an update for the Thorson-Dorn rockfish prior (Dorn, M. and Thorson, J., pers. comm.), which was endorsed by the Science and Statistical Committee in 2018. The prior is a beta distribution with mu=0.xxx and $sigma$=0.xxx. Steepness is fixed in the base model at the mean of the prior. The priors were applied in sensitivity analyses where these parameters were estimated.

###Estimated and Fixed Parameters A full list of all estimated and fixed parameters is provided in Tables **??**.

The base model has a total of xxx estimated parameters in the following categories:

- xxx,
- xxx
- xxx, and
- xxx selectivity parameters

The estimated parameters are described in greater detail below and a full list of all estimated and parameters is provided in Table **??**.

Growth.

Natural Mortality.

Selectivity.

Other Estimated Parameters.

Other Fixed Parameters.

##Model Selection and Evaluation ###Key Assumptions and Structural Choices

###Alternate Models Considered

###Convergence

##Response to the Current STAR Panel Requests

Request No. 1:

Rationale: xxx

STAT Response: xxx

Request No. 2:

Rationale: xxx

STAT Response: xxx

Request No. 3:

Rationale: x.

STAT Response: xxx

Request No. 4:

Rationale: xxx

STAT Response: xxx

Request No. 5:

Rationale: xxx

STAT Response: xxx

##Base Case Model Results The following description of the model results reflects a base model that incorporates all of the changes made during the STAR panel (see previous section). The base model parameter estimates and their approximate asymptotic standard errors are shown in Table **??** and the likelihood components are in Table **??**. Estimates of derived reference points and approximate 95% asymptotic confidence intervals are shown in Table e. Time-series of estimated stock size over time are shown in Table **??**.

###Parameter Estimates

The additional survey variability (process error added directly to each year's input variability) for all surveys was estimated within the model.

(Figure 7).

The stock-recruit curve . . . Figure 8 with estimated recruitments also shown.

###Fits to the Data Model fits to the indices of abundance, fishery length composition, survey length composition, and conditional age-at-length observations are all discussed below.

###Uncertainty and Sensitivity Analyses A number of sensitivity analyses were conducted, including:

1. Sensitivity 1
2. Sensitivity 2
3. Sensitivity 3
4. Sensitivity 4
5. Sensitivity 5, etc/

###Retrospective Analysis

###Likelihood Profiles

###Reference Points Reference points were calculated using the estimated selectivities and catch distribution among fleets in the most recent year of the model, (2017). Sustainable total yield (landings plus discards) were 5,070 mt when using an $SPR_{50\%}$ reference harvest rate and with a 95% confidence interval of 5,070 mt based on estimates of uncertainty. The spawning biomass equivalent to 40% of the unfished level ($SB_{40\%}$) was 2,834 mt.

(Figure 12

The 2018 spawning biomass relative to unfished equilibrium spawning biomass is above/below the target of 40% of unfished levels (Figure 13). The relative fishing intensity, $(1 - SPR)/(1 - SPR_{50\%})$, has been xxx the management target for the entire time series of the model.

Table e shows the full suite of estimated reference points for the base model and Figure 14 shows the equilibrium curve based on a steepness value xxx.

#Harvest Projections and Decision Tables The forecasts of stock abundance and yield were developed using the final base model, with the forecasted projections of the OFL presented in Table g.

The forecasted projections of the OFL for each model are presented in Table h.

#Regional Management Considerations

#Research Needs There are a number of areas of research that could improve the stock assessment for Big Skate. Below are issues identified by the STAT team and the STAR panel:

1. **xxxx**:
2. **xxxx**:
3. **xxxx**:
4. **xxxx**:
5. **xxxx**:

#Acknowledgments

#Figures

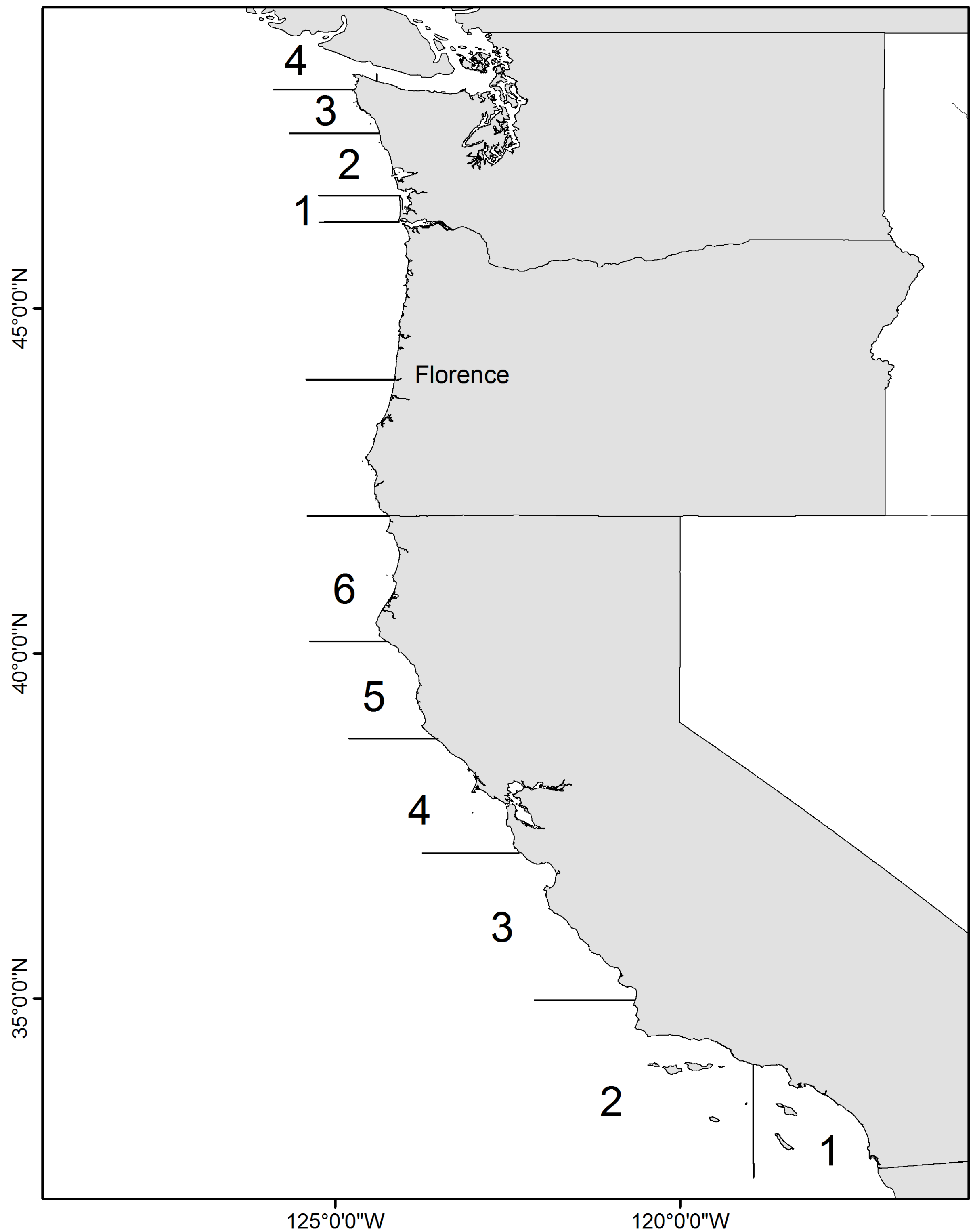


Figure 1: Map showing the state boundary lines for management of the recreational fishing fleets fig:boundary_map

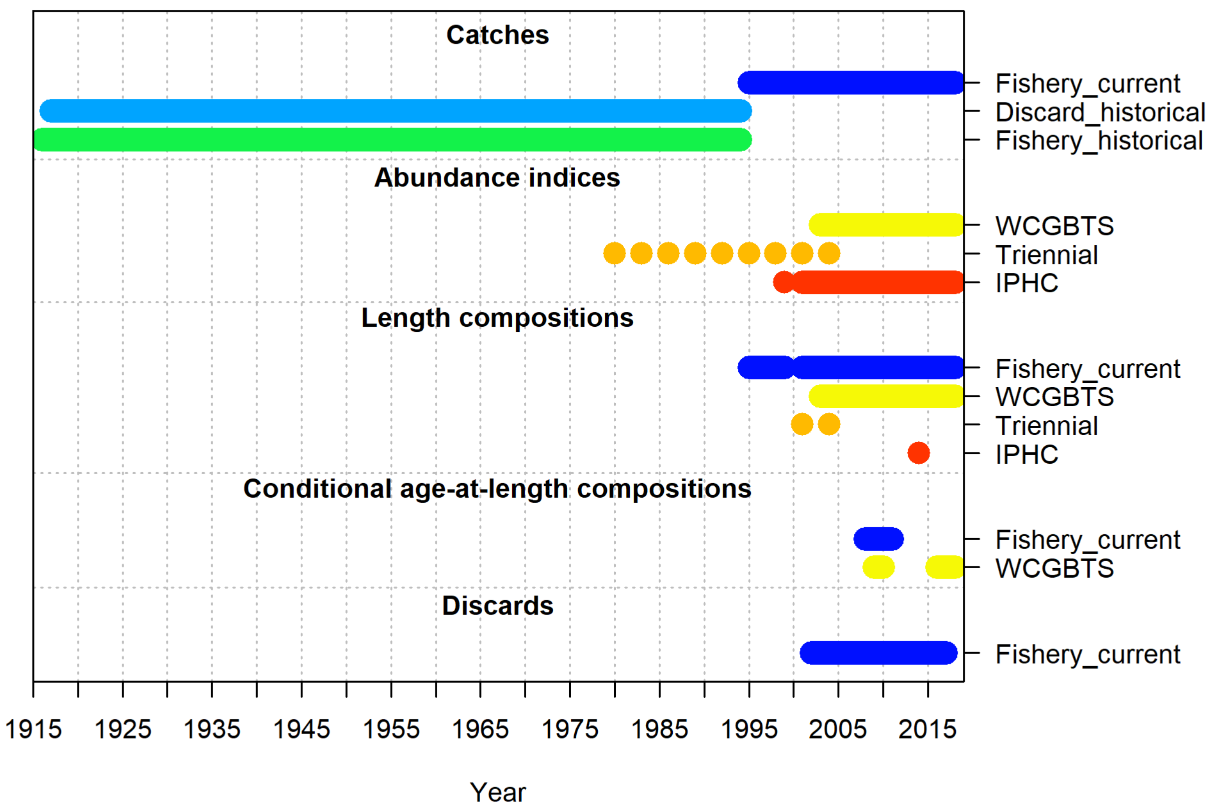


Figure 2: Summary of data sources used in the model. fig:data_plot

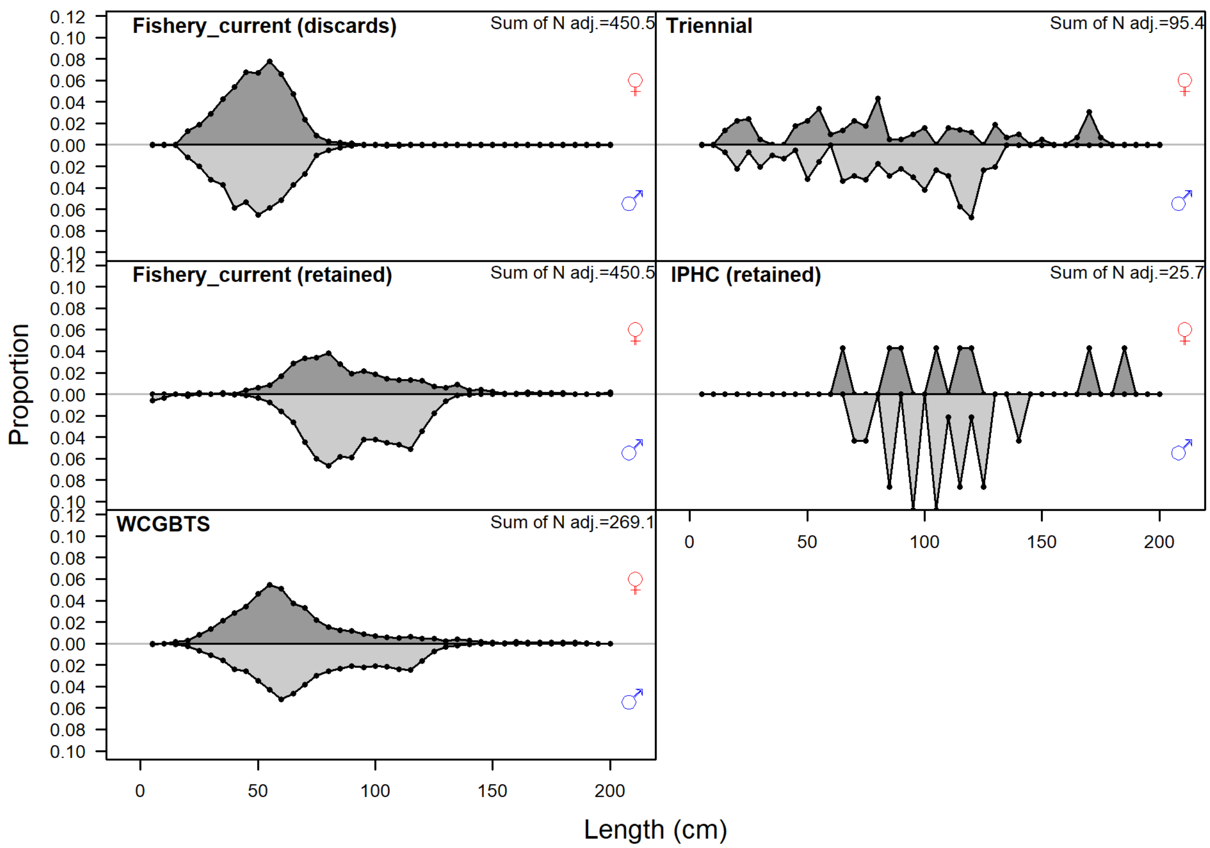


Figure 3: Length comp data, aggregated across time by fleet. Labels 'retained' and 'discard' indicate discarded or retained sampled for each fleet. Panels without this designation represent the whole catch. fig:comp_lendat_aggregated_across_time

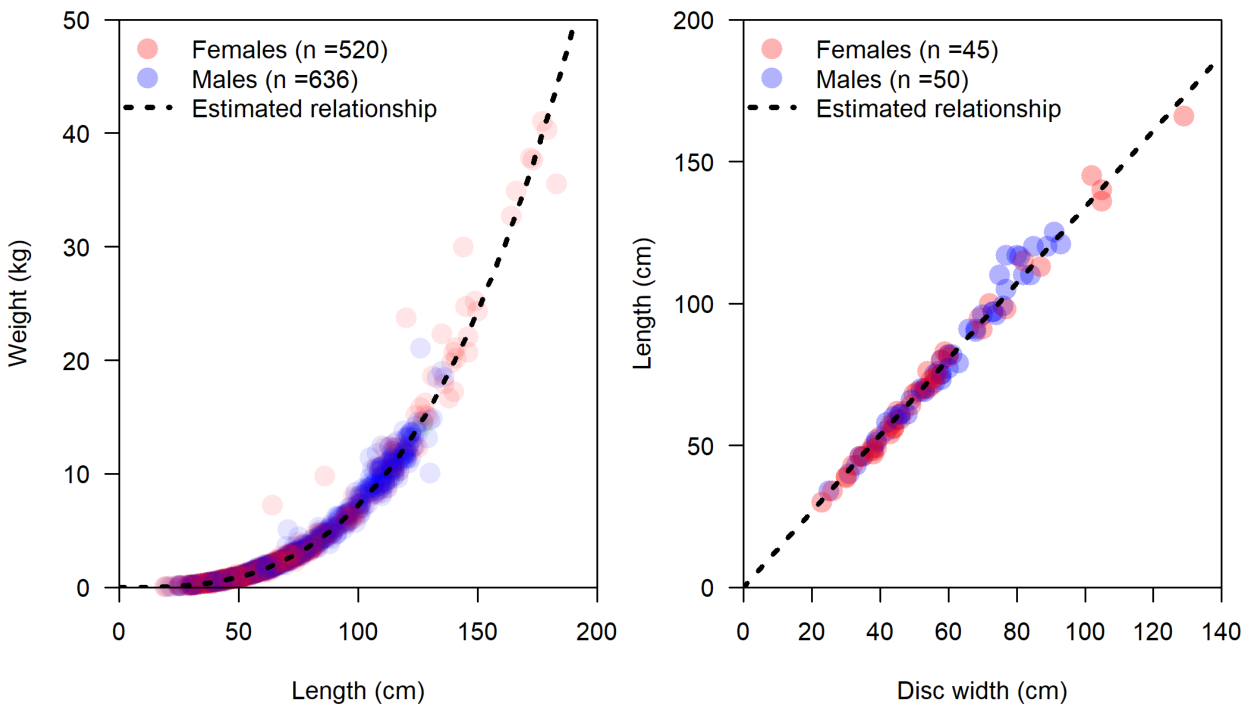


Figure 4: Estimated relationship between length and weight (left) and disc-width and length (right) for Big Skate. Colored points show observed values and the black line indicates the estimated relationship $W = 0.0000074924L^{2.9925}$.fig:weight-length

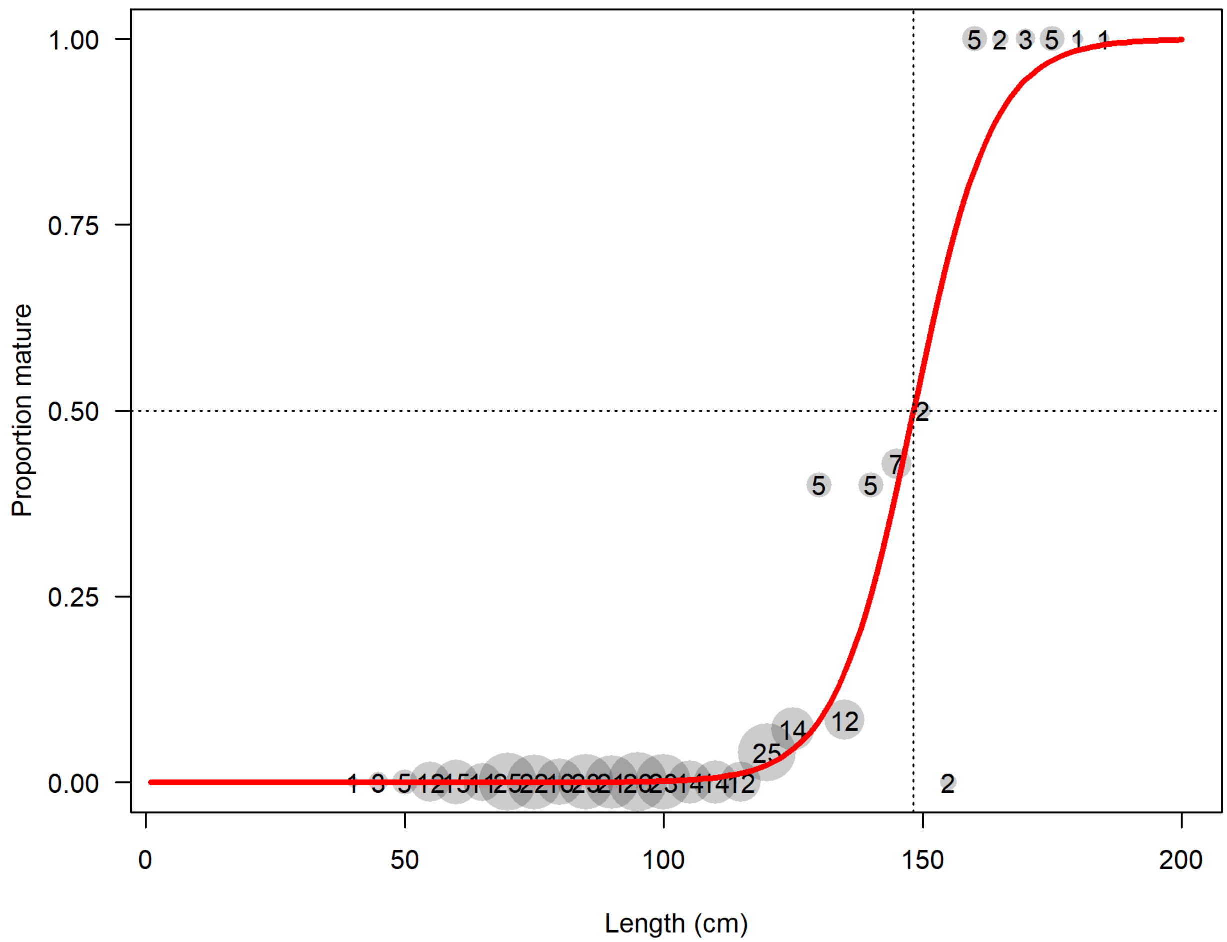


Figure 5: Estimated maturity relationship for female Big Skate. Gray points indicate average observed functional maturity within each length bin with point size proportional to the number of samples (indicated by text within each point). fig:maturity

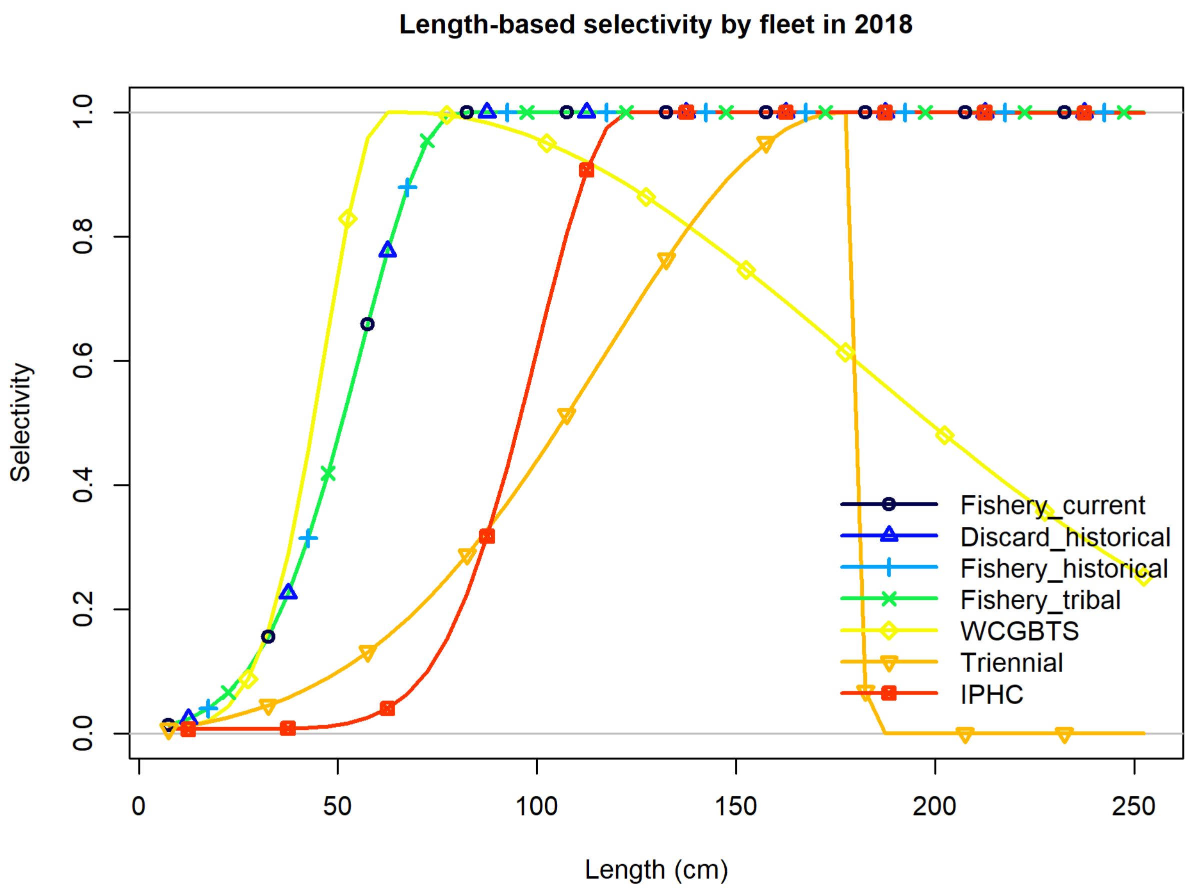


Figure 6: Selectivity at length for all of the fleets in the base model. fig:sel01_multiple_flee

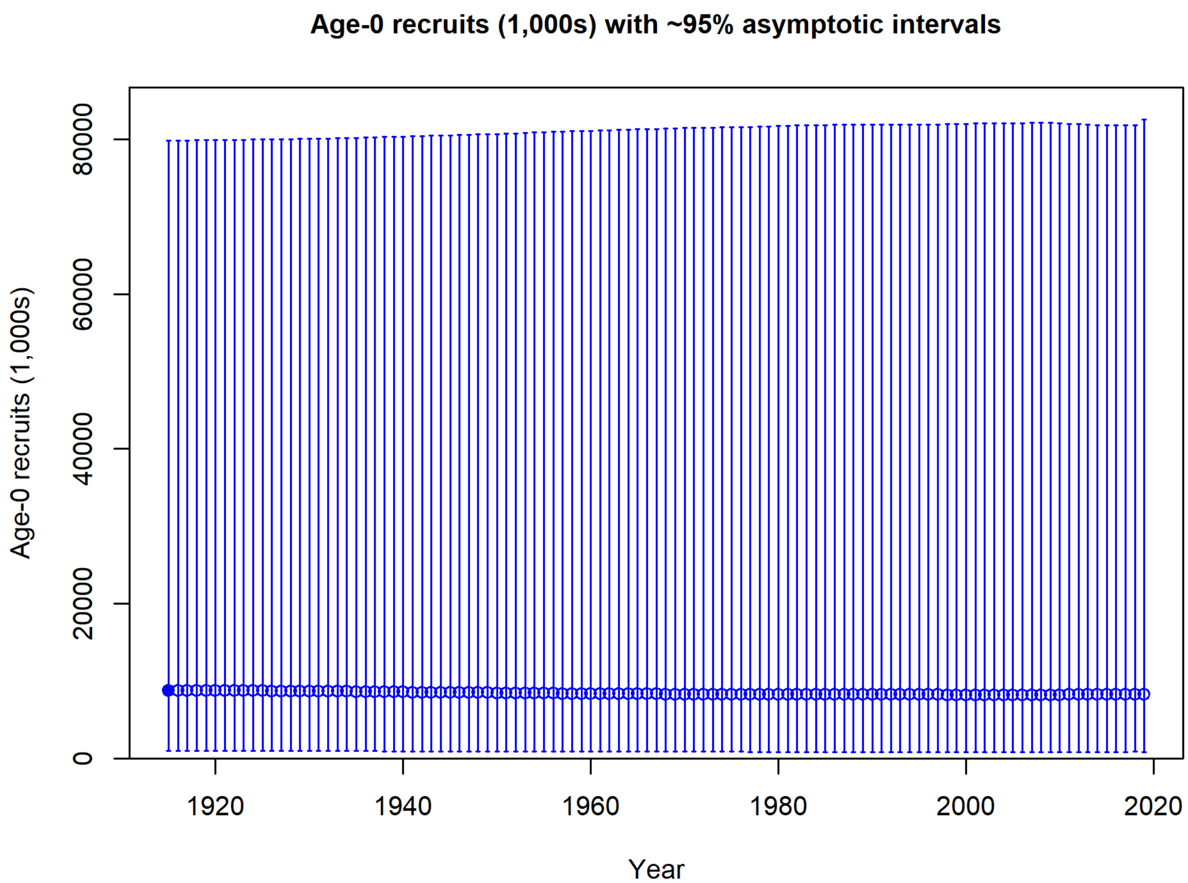


Figure 7: Estimated time-series of recruitment for Big Skate. fig:ts11_Age-0_recruits_(1

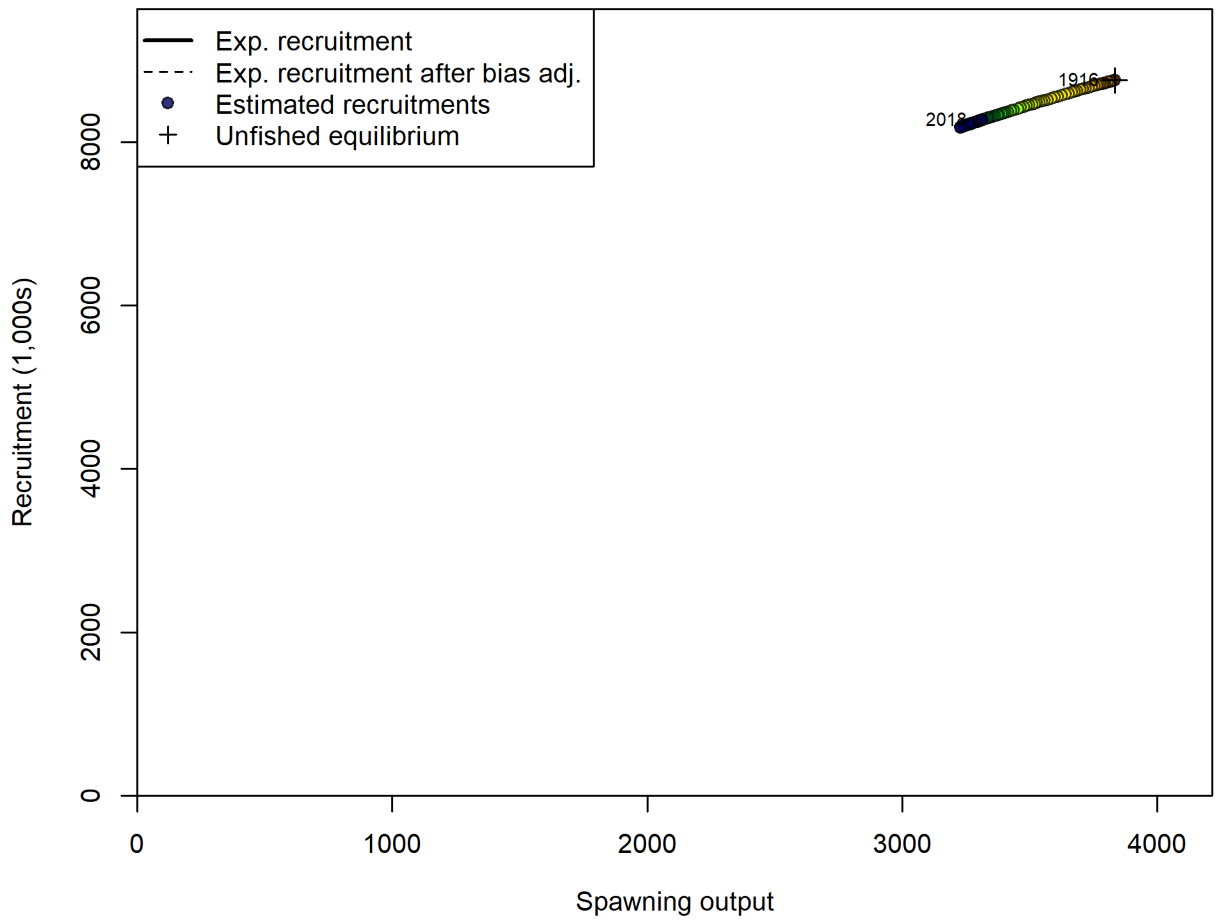
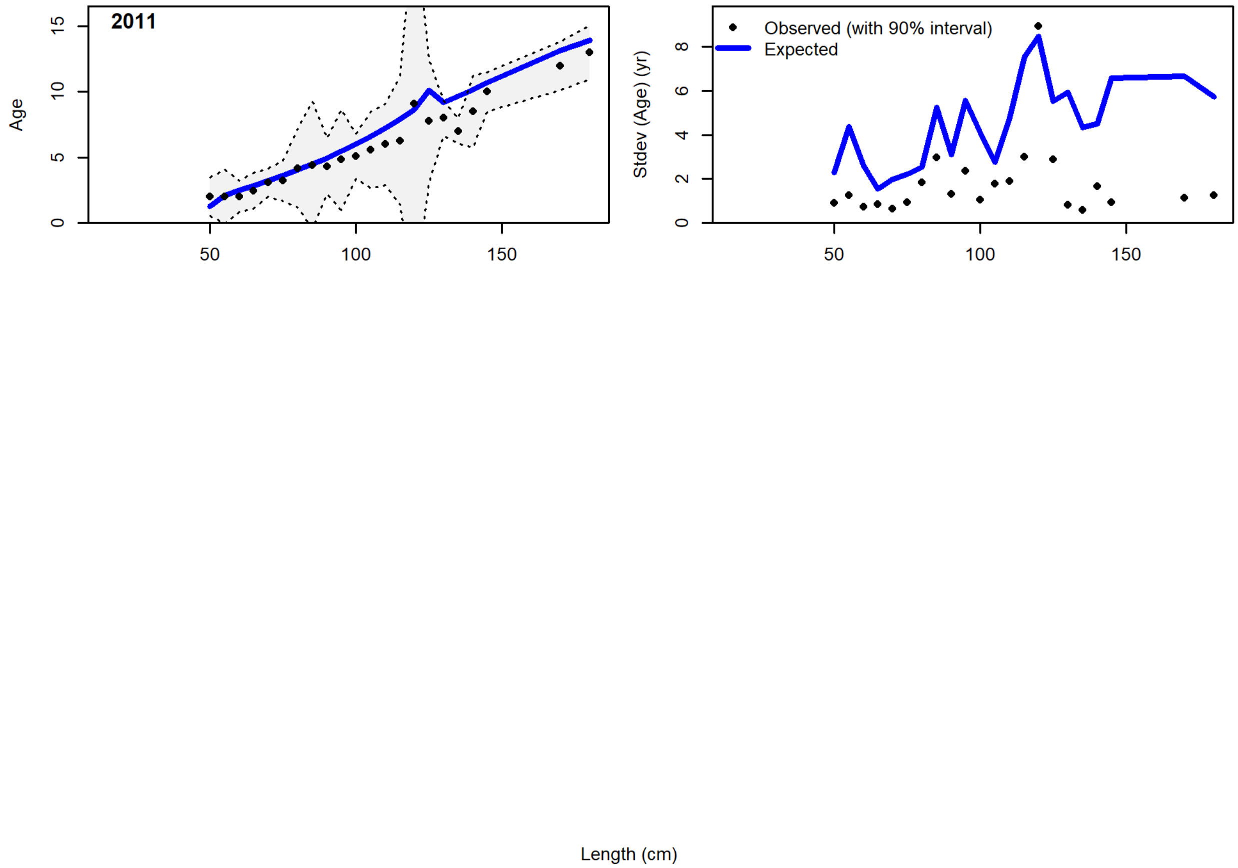


Figure 8: Estimated recruitment (red circles) and the assumed stock-recruit relationship (black line) for Big Skate. The green line shows the effect of the bias correction for the lognormal distribution. fig:SR_curve2



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560 Figure continued from previous page

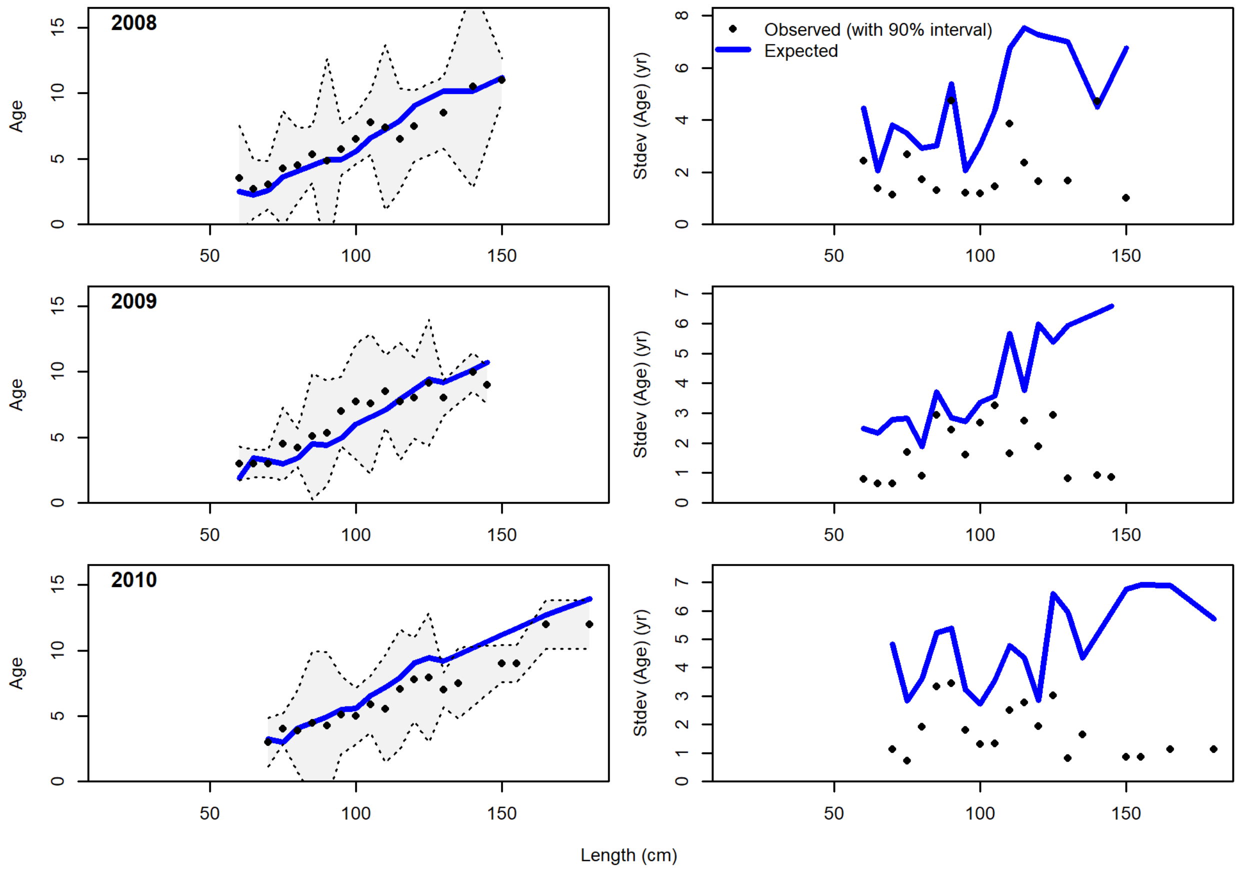

Figure 9: Conditional AAL plot, retained, Fishery_current (plot 1 of 2) These plots show mean age and std. dev. in conditional AAL. Left plots are mean AAL by size_class (obs. and pred.) with 90% CIs based on adding 1.64 SE of mean to the data. Right plots in each pair are SE of mean AAL (obs. and pred.) with 90% CIs based on the chi_square distribution. fig:mod1_4_co

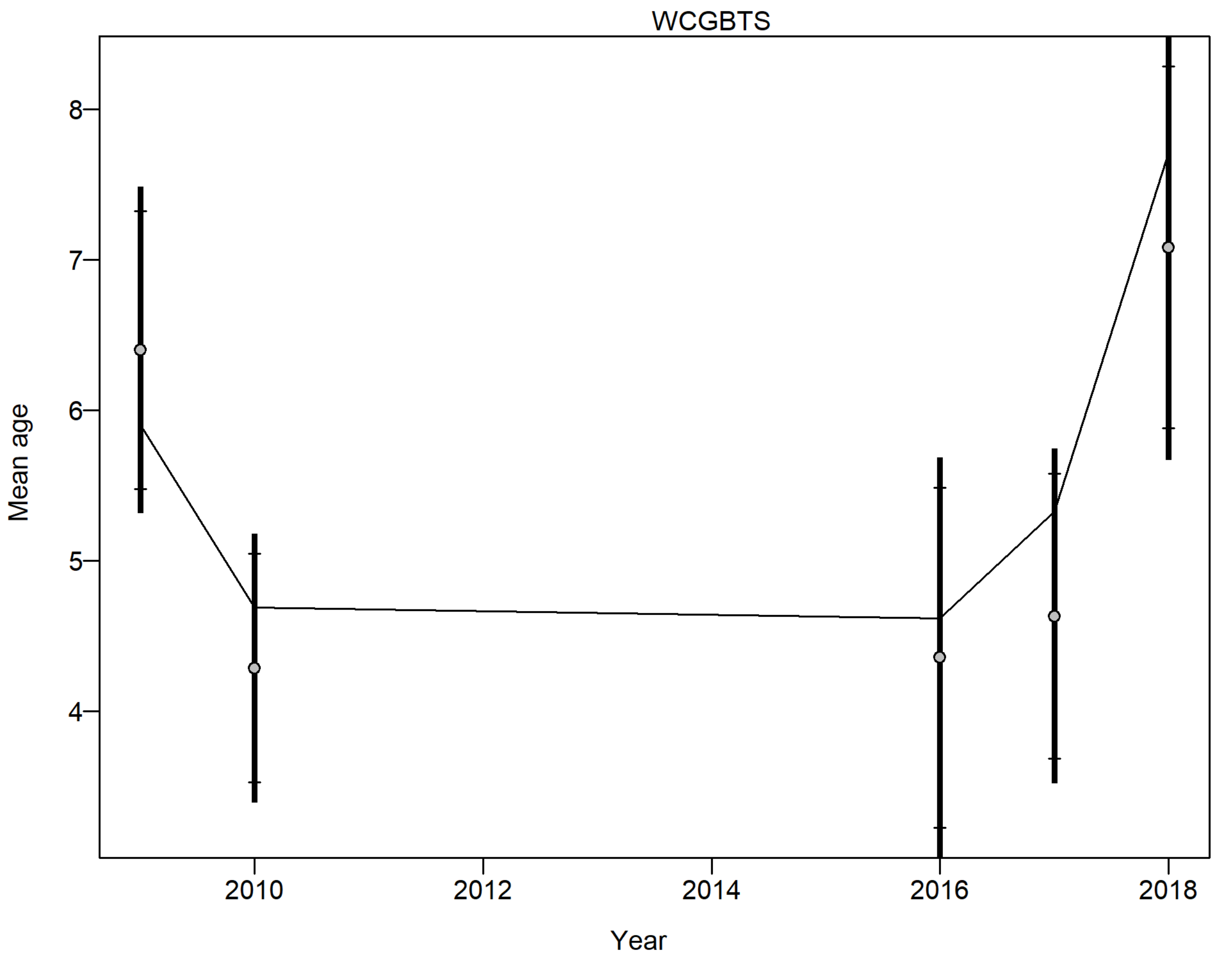

Figure 10: Mean age from conditional data (aggregated across length bins) for WCGBTS with 95% confidence intervals based on current samples sizes. Francis data weighting method TA1.8: thinner intervals (with capped ends) show result of further adjusting sample sizes based on suggested multiplier (with 95% interval) for conditional age_at_length data from WCGBTS: 1.3806 (0.8289_39.92) For more info, see Francis, R.I.C.C. (2011). Data weighting in statistical fisheries stock assessment models. Can. J. Fish. Aquat. Sci. 68: 1124_1138. fig:mod1_6_com

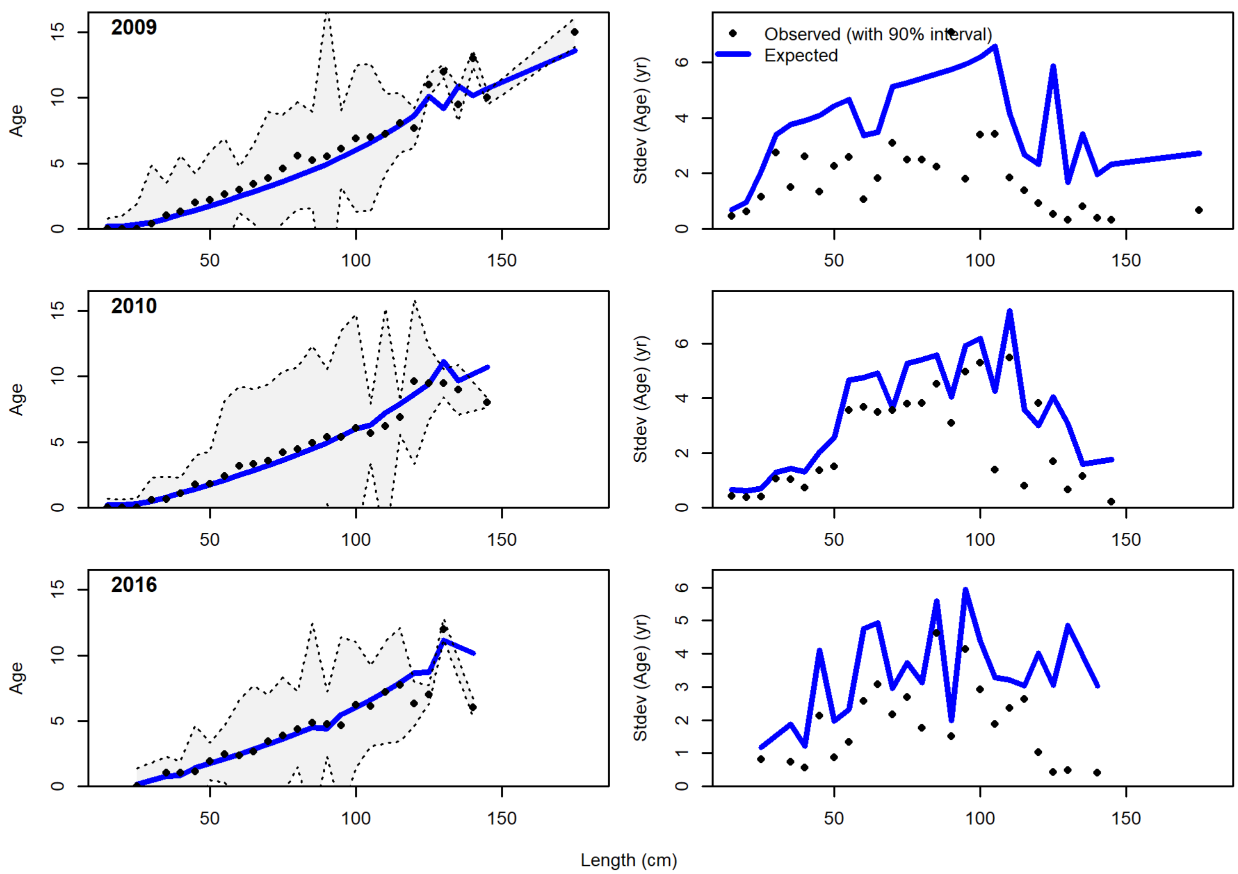

Figure 11: Conditional AAL plot, whole catch, WCGBTS (plot 1 of 2) These plots show mean age and std. dev. in conditional AAL. Left plots are mean AAL by size_class (obs. and pred.) with 90% CIs based on adding 1.64 SE of mean to the data. Right plots in each pair are SE of mean AAL (obs. and pred.) with 90% CIs based on the chi_square distribution. fig:mod1_7_co

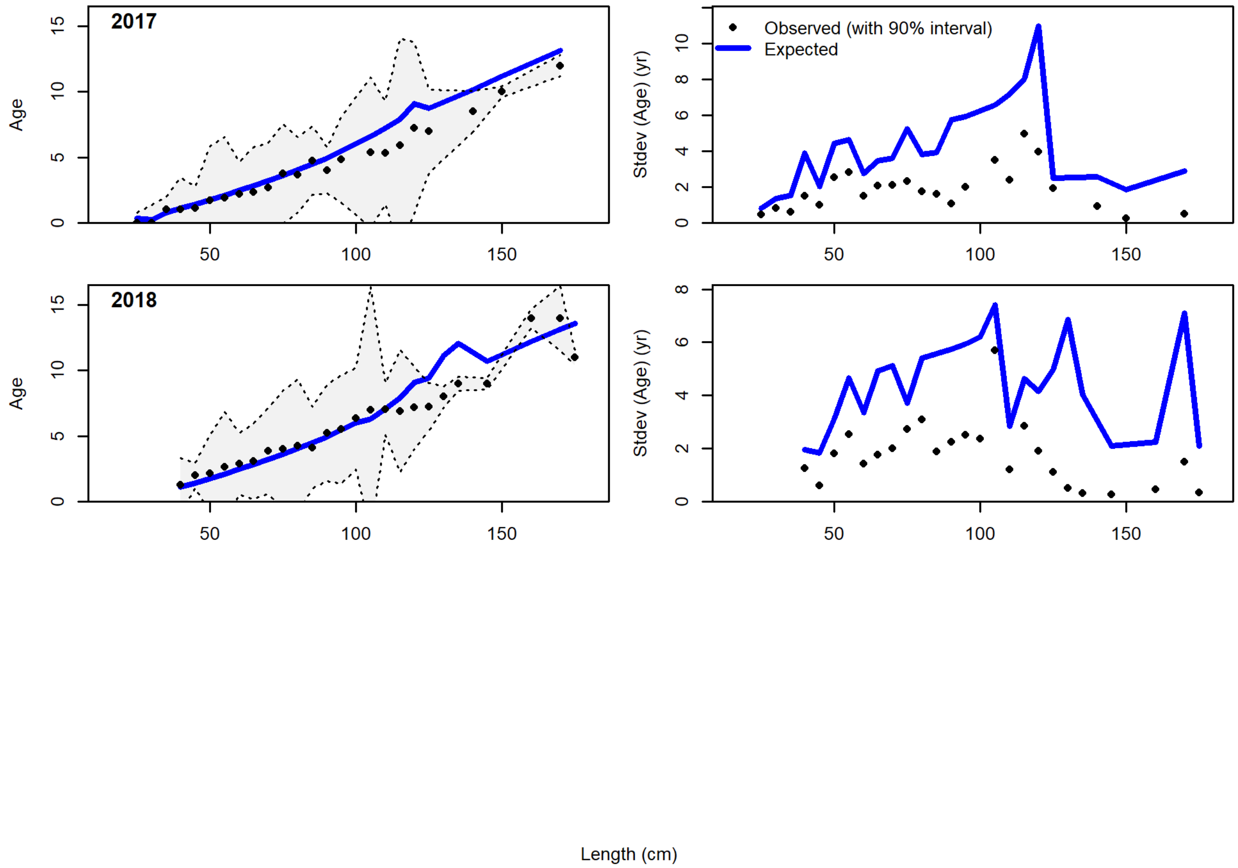

Figure continued from previous page

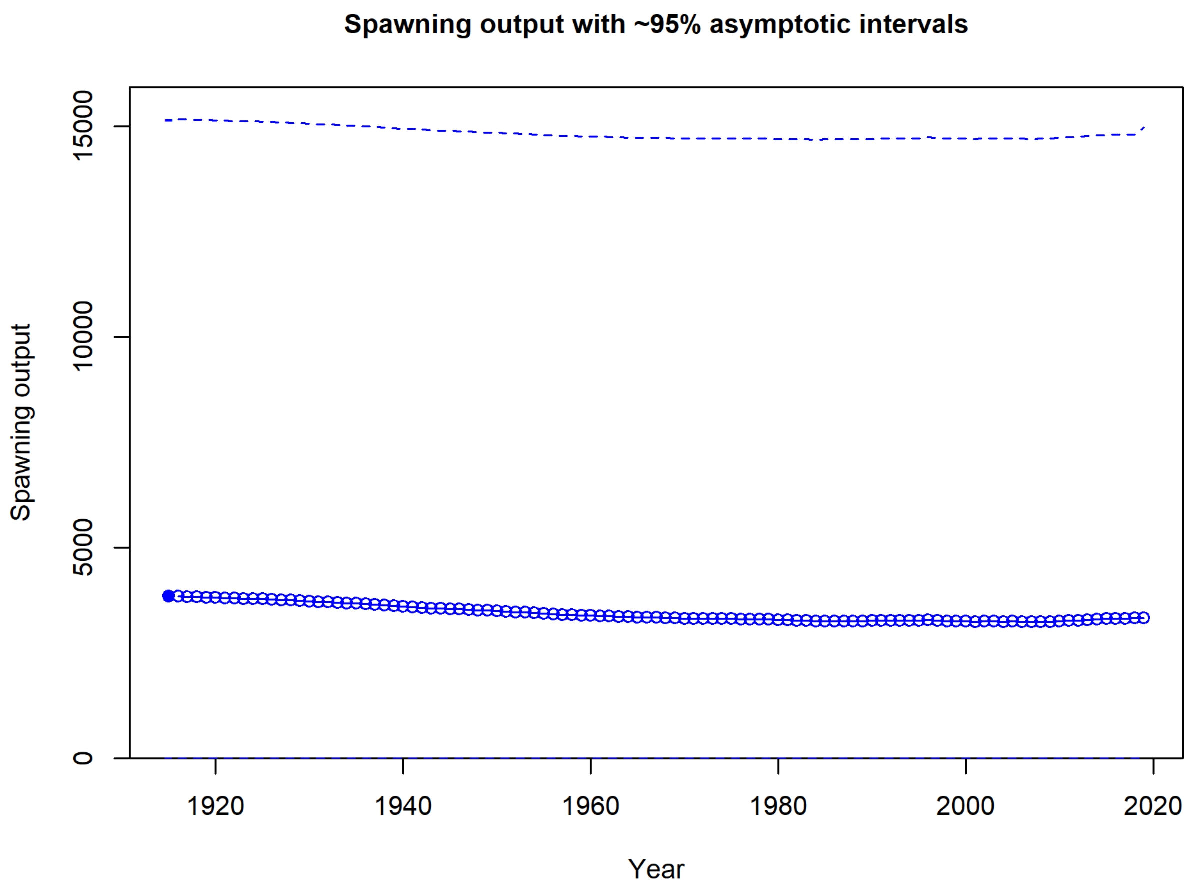

Figure 12: Estimated spawning biomass (mt) with approximate 95% asymptotic intervals. fig:ts7_Spawn

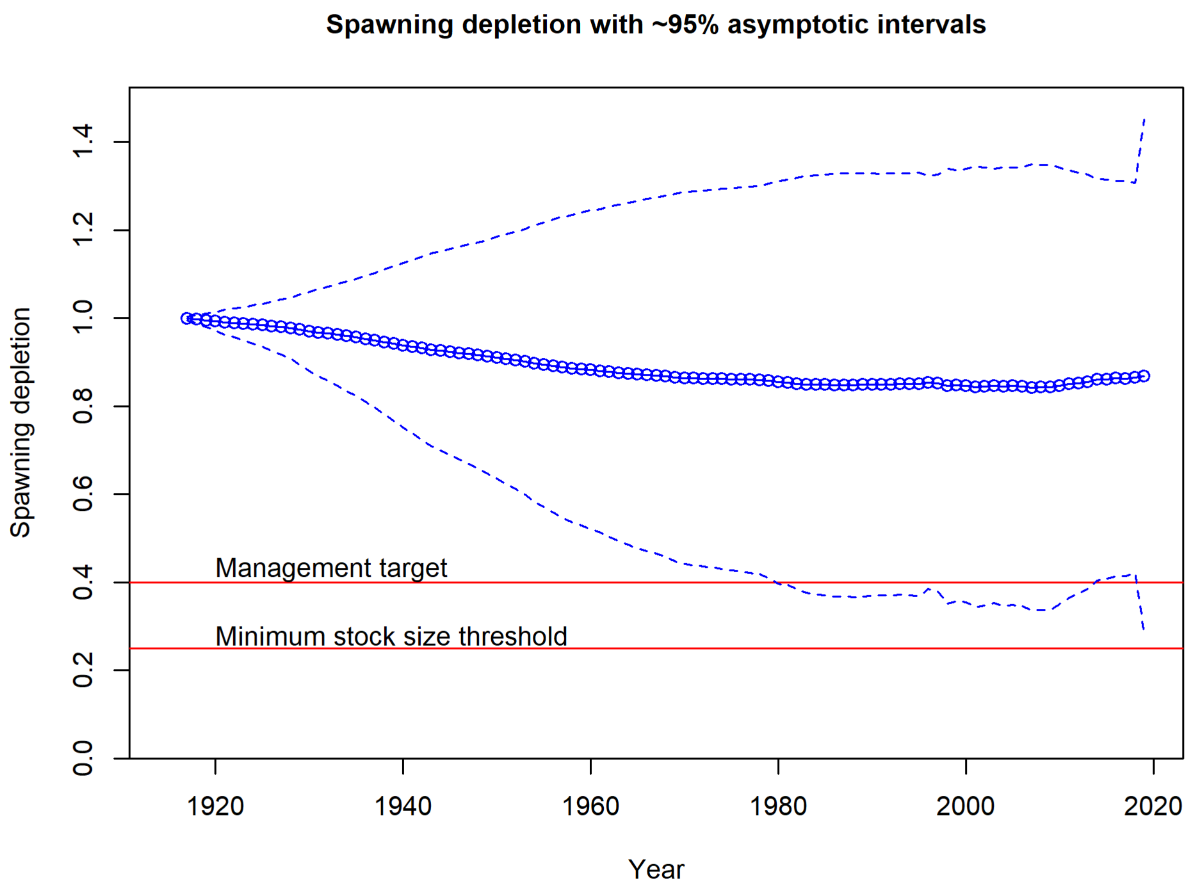

Figure 13: Estimated spawning depletion with approximate 95% asymptotic intervals. fig:ts9_Spawnin

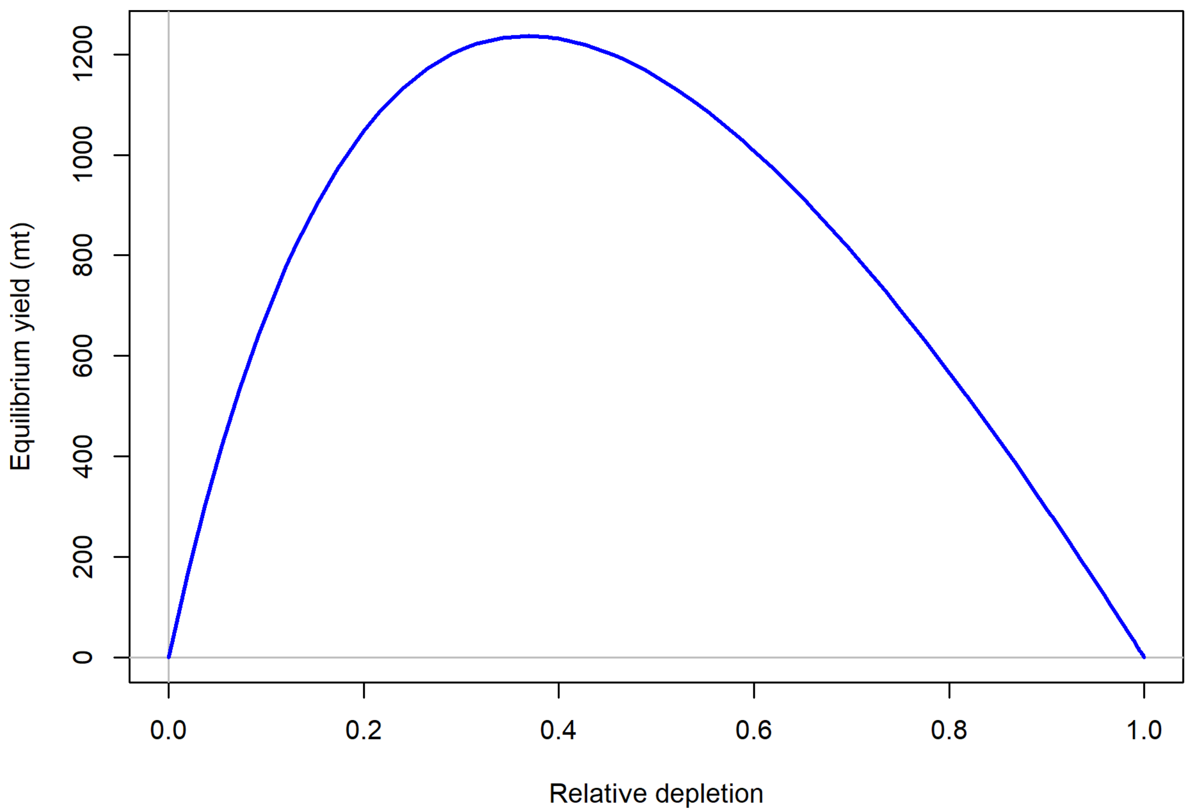

Figure 14: Equilibrium yield curve for the base case model. Values are based on the 2018 fishery selectivity and with steepness fixed at 0.718. fig:yield1_yield_curve

#Appendix A. Detailed fits to length composition data {-}

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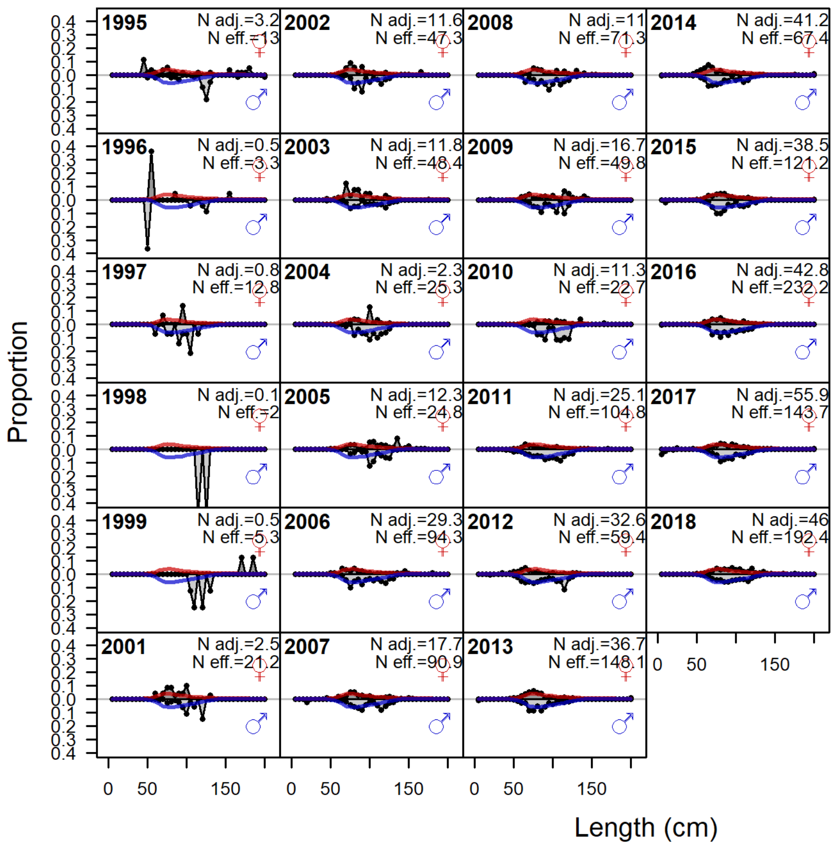

Figure A15: Length comps, retained, Fishery_current. 'N adj.' is the input sample size after data_weighting adjustment. N eff. is the calculated effective sample size used in the McAllister_Iannelli tuning method. fig:mod1_1_comp_lenfit_flt1mkt2

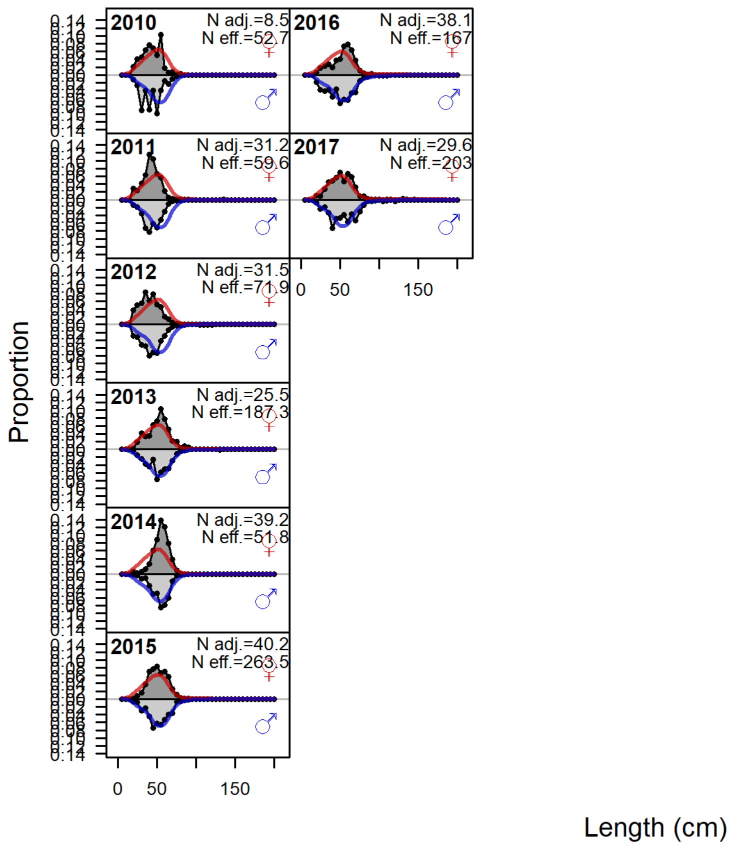

Figure A16: Length comps, discard, Fishery_current. 'N adj.' is the input sample size after data_weighting adjustment. N eff. is the calculated effective sample size used in the McAllister_Iannelli tuning method. fig:mod1_2_comp_lenfit_flt1mkt1

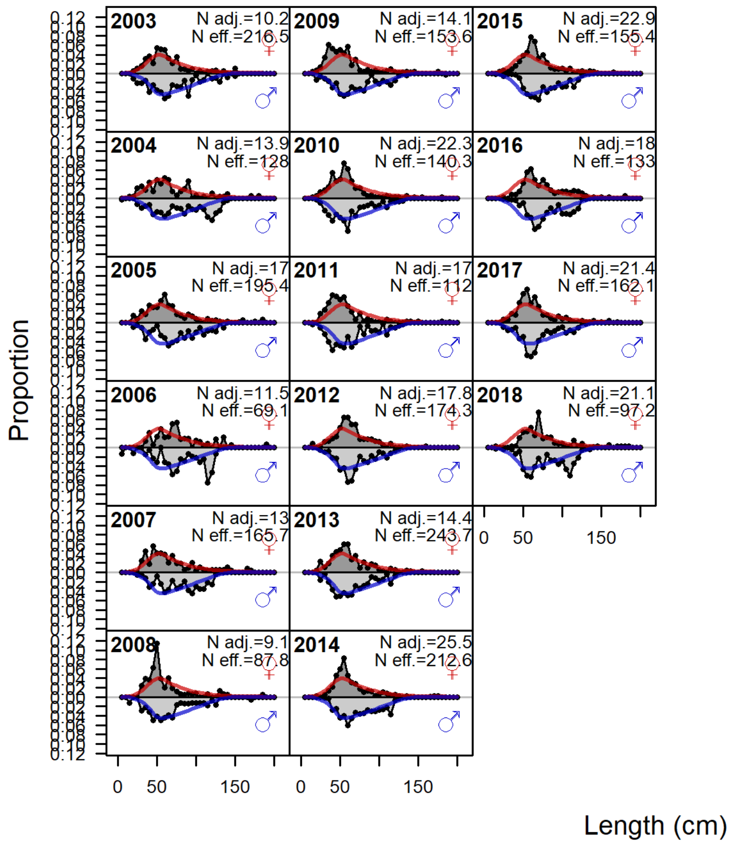

Figure A17: Length comps, whole catch, WCGBTS. 'N adj.' is the input sample size after data_weighting adjustment. N eff. is the calculated effective sample size used in the McAllister_Iannelli tuning method. fig:mod1_3_comp_lenfit_flt5mkt0

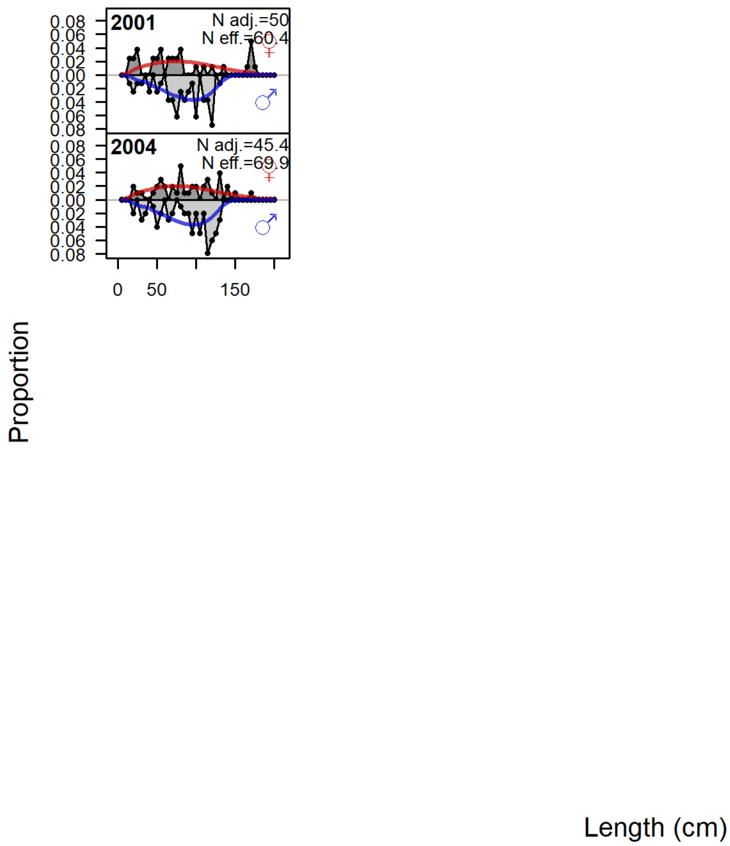

Figure A18: Length comps, whole catch, Triennial. 'N adj.' is the input sample size after data_weighting adjustment. N eff. is the calculated effective sample size used in the McAllister_Iannelli tuning method. fig:mod1_4_comp_lenfit_flt6mkt0

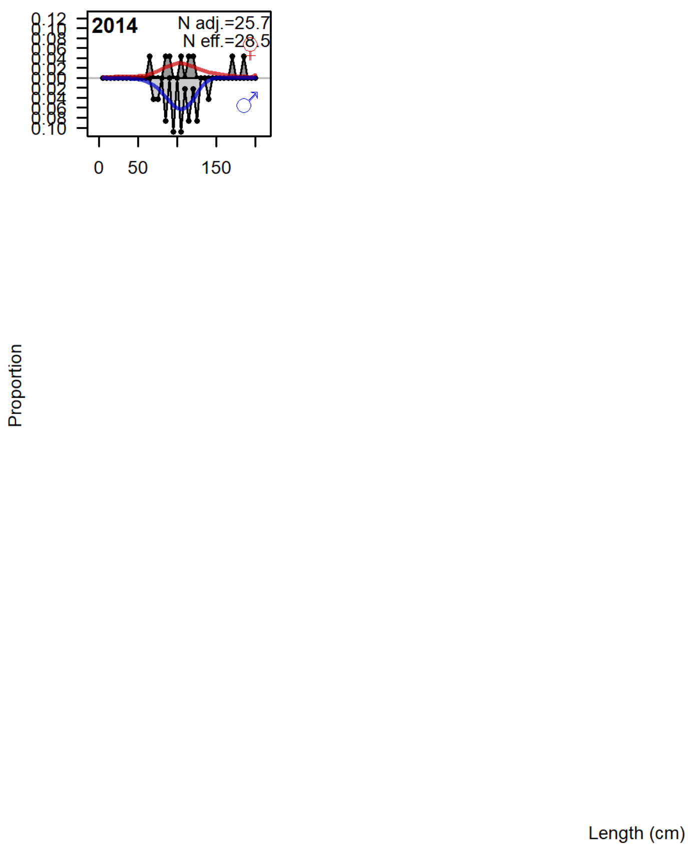

Figure A19: Length comps, retained, IPHC. 'N adj.' is the input sample size after data_weighting adjustment. N eff. is the calculated effective sample size used in the McAllister_Iannelli tuning method. fig:mod1_5_comp_lenfit_flt7mkt2

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