

# **Working title: Spatial separation of catches in highly mixed fisheries**

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**In mixed fisheries overexploitation of weaker stocks results when catches continue in fisheries pursuing quota for healthy stocks. As EU fisheries management moves to a count all fish caught against quota (the ‘Landings obligation’), the challenge is to catch available quota within new constraints, else lose productivity.**

**A mechanism for decoupling exploitation of species caught together is spatial targeting, but this remains challenging due to complex fishery dynamics and lack of understanding of spatiotemporal community dynamics. We apply a joint species distribution model to understand how spatial community and fishery dynamics interact to determine species and size composition in the highly mixed fisheries of the Celtic Sea. Clear common spatial patterns emerge for three distinct species-groups and, while distribution varies inter-annually, the same species-groups are found in higher densities together. More subtle differences are found within species-groups.**

**We highlight the importance of dimension reduction techniques to focus management discussion on axes of maximal separation in space and time. We propose that spatiotemporal modelling of available data is a scientific requirement to address the challenges of managing mixed fisheries.**

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18 **[INCLUDE REFERENCES - comment: guidance for articles says not. I have reduced to fit**  
19 **the 150 word limit, but its still over..]**

20 **[178 words]**

21

22 **Mixed fisheries and the EU landings obligation** Recent efforts to reduce exploitation rates in  
23 commercial fisheries has begun the process of rebuilding depleted fish populations <sup>1</sup>. Improved  
24 management of fisheries has the potential to increase population sizes and allow increased sustain-  
25 able catches, yet fisheries catch globally remains stagnant <sup>2</sup>. In light of projected increased demand  
26 for fish protein <sup>3</sup> there is an important role for well managed fisheries to play in supporting future  
27 food security <sup>4</sup> and there remains a need to ensure fisheries are managed efficiently to maximise  
28 productivity.

29 A particular challenge in realising increased catches from rebuilt populations is maximising yields  
30 from mixed fisheries <sup>5-7</sup>. In mixed fisheries, the predominant type of fishery worldwide, several  
31 fish species are caught together in the same net or fishing operation (known as a ‘technical inter-  
32 action’). If managed by individual quotas, and catches do not match available stock quotas, either  
33 a vessel must stop fishing when the first quota is reached (the ‘choke’ species) or overexploitation  
34 of the weaker species occurs while fishers continue to catch more healthy species and throw back  
35 (‘discard’) the fish for which they have no quota.

36 Sustainability of European fisheries has been hampered by this ‘mixed fishery problem’ for decades

with large-scale discarding resulting <sup>8,9</sup>. A paradigm shift is being introduced under the EU Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) reform of 2012 through two significant management changes. First, by 2019 all fish that are caught are due to be counted against the respective stock quota; second, by 2020 all fish stocks must be fished so as to be able to produce their Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY)<sup>10</sup>. The changes are expected to contribute to attainment of the goals of Good Environmental Status (GES) under the European Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD; <sup>11</sup>) and move Europe towards an ecosystem based approach to fisheries management <sup>12</sup>. Unless fishers can avoid catch of unwanted species they will have to stop fishing when reaching their first restrictive quota. This introduces a potential significant cost to fishers of under-utilised quota<sup>7,13</sup> and provides a strong incentive to mitigate such losses <sup>14,15</sup>.

The ability of fishers to align their catch with available quota depends on being able to exploit target species while avoiding unwanted catch. Methods by which fishers can alter their fishing patterns include by switching fishing method (e.g. trawling to netting), changing technical gear characteristics (e.g. introducing escapement panels in nets), or the timing and location of fishing activity <sup>16,17</sup>.

Spatio-temporal management measures (such as time-limited fishery closures) have been applied to reduce unwanted catch with varying degrees of success (e.g. <sup>18–21</sup>) while move-on rules have also been proposed or implemented to influence catch rates of particular vulnerable species in order to reduce or eliminate discards (e.g. <sup>22–24</sup>). However, such measures have generally been targeted at individual species without considering associations and interactions among several species. Highly

mixed fisheries are complex with spatial, technological and community interactions combining. The design of spatio-temporal management measures which aim to allow exploitation of healthy stocks while protecting weaker stocks requires understanding of these interactions at a meaningful scale to managers and fishers. Here, our goal is to develop a framework for understanding these complexities. We do so by implementing a spatio-temporal dimension reduction method and use the results to draw inference on the fishery-community dynamics, creating a framework to identify trends common among species-groups. We use this to describe where spatial measures can contribute to mitigating unwanted catches in mixed fisheries.

[578 words]

**Framework for analysing spatio-temporal mixed fisheries interactions** We present a framework for analysing how far spatio-temporal avoidance can contribute towards mitigating imbalances in quota in mixed fisheries. We use fisheries-independent survey data to characterise the spatiotemporal dynamics of key components of a fish community by employing a geostatistical Vector Autoregressive Spatiotemporal model (VAST). We implement a factor analysis decomposition to describe trends in spatiotemporal dynamics of the different species as a function of  $n$  latent variables<sup>25</sup> to identify community dynamics and drivers common among species-groups. Of particular importance for mixed fisheries is the ability to analyse species-groups by underlying contributory factors, which can then be investigated for what spatio-temporal drivers to which they pertain and how these jointly affect species-groups. We separately model spatio-temporal encounter probability and catch rates to allow identification of differences in associations for distribution of the species-groups and densities upon encounter<sup>26</sup>, by employing Gaussian Markov

Random Fields (GMRFs) to capture spatial and temporal dependence within and among species groups for both encounter probability and catch rates<sup>27</sup>. VAST is set in a mixed modelling framework to allow estimation of fixed effects to account for systematic differences driving encounter and catches, such as differences in sampling efficiency (a.k.a. catchability), while random effects capture the spatio-temporal dynamics of the fish community.

[206 words]

**Dynamics of Celtic Sea fisheries** We use the highly mixed demersal fisheries of the Celtic Sea as a case study. The Celtic Sea is a temperate sea where fisheries are spatially and temporally complex; mixed fisheries are undertaken by several nations using different gear types<sup>28,29</sup>. Close to 150 species have been identified in the commercial catches of the Celtic Sea, with approximately 30 species dominating the catch<sup>30</sup>.

We parametrise our spatiotemporal model using catch data from seven fisheries independent surveys undertaken in the Celtic Sea over the period 1990 - 2015 (Table S1) and include nine of the main commercial species: Atlantic cod (*Gadus morhua*), Atlantic haddock (*Melanogrammus aeglefinus*), Atlantic whiting (*Merlangius merlangus*), European Hake (*Merluccius merluccius*), white-bellied anglerfish (*Lophius piscatorius*), black-bellied anglerfish (*Lophius budegassa*), megrim (*Lepidorhombus whiffiagonis*), European Plaice (*Pleuronectes platessa*) and Common Sole (*Solea solea*). These species make up >60 % of landings by towed fishing gears for the area (average 2011 - 2015;<sup>31</sup>). Each species was separated into juvenile and adult size classes based on their legal minimum conservation reference size (Table S2).

We analyse the data to understand how the different associations among emergent species-groups (combination of species and size class) and their potential drivers affect catch compositions in mixed fisheries. We consider how these have changed over time, and the implications for mixed fisheries in managing catches of quota species under the EU landing obligation.

[239 words]

**Common average spatial patterns driving species associations** A spatial dynamic factor analysis decomposes the dominant spatial patterns driving differences in encounter probability and abundance. The first three factors (after PCA rotation) account for 83.7 % of the between species-group variance in average encounter probability and 69 % of the between species-group variance in average positive density, respectively. A clear spatial pattern can be seen both for encounter probability and positive density, with a positive value associated with the first factor in the inshore North Easterly part of the Celtic Sea into the Bristol Channel and Western English Channel, moving to a negative value offshore in the south-westerly waters (Figure 1). The species-group loadings coefficients show plaice, sole and whiting to be positively associated with the first factor for encounter probability while the other species-groups are negatively associated. For average positive density, positive associations are also found for haddock and juvenile cod. This is indicative of a more inshore distribution for these species-groups.

On the second spatial factor for encounter probability a North / South split can be seen at approximately 49° N while positive density is more driven by a positive value in the deeper westerly waters as well as some inshore areas. Species-group values for the second factor indicate there are positive associations for juvenile monkfish (*piscatorius*), juvenile hake, juvenile megrim, plaice and

juvenile whiting with average positive density, which may reflect two different spatial distributions in the more offshore and in the inshore areas (Figure 1).

On the third factor, there is a positive association with the Easterly waters for encounter probability and negative with the westerly waters. This manifests in the species associations as splitting the roundfish species cod, haddock and whiting which all have a positive association with the third factor for average encounter probability from the rest of the species-groups which have a negative association. Positive density is driven by a North / South split (Figure 1), with positive values in the Northerly areas. Juvenile monkfish (*budgessa* and *piscatorius*), cod, juvenile haddock, hake, adult plaice and whiting are also positively associated with the third factor towards the North while adult monkfish (*budegassa* and *piscatorius*), adult haddock, megrims, juvenile plaice and sole are negatively associated reflecting their more southerly distribution (Figure 1).

While this exploratory factor analysis is modelling unobserved drivers of distribution, we considered what might be driving the differences seen in the spatial factor loadings. The first factor was highly correlated with log(depth) for both encounter probability (-0.85, CI = -0.88 to -0.81; Figure S2) and positive density (-0.71, CI = -0.77 to -0.65; Figure S4). A random forest classification tree assigned 80 % of the variance in the first factor for encounter probability to depth and predominant substrate type, with the majority (86 %) of the variance explained by depth. The variance explained by these variables dropped to 25 % on the second factor with a more even split between depth and substrate, while explaining 60 % of the variance on the third factor. For positive density, the variables explained less of the variance with 62 %, 35 %, and 31 % for each of the factors, respectively.

It is clear that depth and to a lesser extent substrate are important predictors for the main driver of similarities and differences in distributions and abundances for the different species-groups. The first factor correlates strongly with these variables, despite them not explicitly being incorporated in the model. The utility of these variables as predictors of species distributions has been identified in other marine species distribution models <sup>32</sup>; the advantage to the approach taken here is that, where such data is unavailable at appropriate spatial resolution, the spatial factor analysis can adequately characterise these influences.

[617 words]

**Changes in spatial patterns over time, but stability in species dynamics** While there are clear spatial patterns in the factor coefficients describing differences in average encounter probability and positive density (Figure 1), the inter-annual differences in factor coefficients show less structure (Figures S5, S6). These inter-annual differences are important as they reflect the ability of fishers to predict where they can target species from one year to the next, without which it may be difficult to avoid unwanted catch.

While spatio-temporal factor coefficients did not show consistent trends from year to year, among species-groups there were clear relationships (Figure 2). The same factors appear to drive spatio-temporal distributions of megrim, anglerfish species and hake (the deeper water species, species-grouping negatively associated with the second axes of Figure 2a) and the roundfish and flatfish (species-grouping more positively associated with the second axes of Figure 2a). For spatio-temporal positive density (Figure 2b) cod, haddock and whiting (the roundfish species) are separated from plaice, sole (the flatfish) and deeper water species. As such, it can be predicted that



higher catches of a species within a group would be expected when catching another species within that group. This suggests that one or more common environmental drivers are influencing the distributions of the species groups, and that driver differentially affects the species groups. Temperature is often included as a covariate in species distribution models, but was found not to contribute to the variance in the factor coefficients (Figure S7, correlations for either encounter probability or positive density  $\sim 0$ ).

[178 words]

**Spatial correlations show three distinct species-group associations** In order to gain greater insight into the community dynamics we considered how species-groups covary in space and time through among species-group correlations. Pearson correlation coefficients for the modelled average spatial encounter probability (Figure 3a) show clear strong associations between adult and juvenile size classes for all species ( $>0.75$  for all species except hake, 0.56). Among species-groups, hierarchical clustering identified the same three common groups as above, with roundfish (cod, haddock, whiting) closely grouped in their association, with correlations for adult cod with adult haddock and adult whiting of 0.73 and 0.5 respectively, while adult haddock with adult whiting was 0.63. Flatfish (plaice and sole) are also strongly correlated with adult plaice and sole having a coefficient of 0.75. The final group are principally the species found in the deeper waters (hake, megrim and both anglerfish species) with the megrim strongly associated with the budegassa anglerfish species (0.88). Negative relationships were found between plaice-sole and the monkfish species (-0.27, -0.26 for the adult size class with budegassa adults respectively) and hake (-0.33, -0.37) indicating spatial separation in distributions. This confirms the associations among species

seen in the factor loadings, with three distinct species-group assemblages being present.

Correlation coefficients for the average positive density (Figure 3b) show less significant positive or negative relationships among species-groups than for encounter probability, but still evident are the strong association among the roundfish with higher catches of cod are associated with higher catches of haddock (0.58) and whiting (0.47), as well as the two anglerfish species (0.71 for piscatorius and 0.44 for budegassa) and hake (0.73). Similarly, plaice and sole are closely associated (0.31) and higher catches of one would expect to see higher catches of the other, but also higher catches of some juvenile size classes of roundfish (whiting and haddock) and anglerfish species. Negative association of juvenile megrim, anglerfish (budegassa) and hake with adult sole (-0.61, -0.61 and -0.47 respectively), plaice (-0.36 and -0.35 for megrim and hake only) indicate generally high catches of one can predict low catches of the other successfully.

In addition to the average spatial correlations, we also estimate spatio-temporal correlations. Spatial population correlations (representing the average correlations between pairs for species-group  $x$  and species group  $y$  across all years) are linearly associated with the spatio-temporal population correlations (representing how correlations between species-group  $x$  and species-group  $y$  change from year to year), indicating generally predictable relationships between species-groups from one year to the next. This suggests that a positive or negative association between two species-groups is likely to persist from one year to the next, and that species-groups are consistently associated with each other in the catch. The correlation coefficients were 0.59 (0.52 - 0.66) and 0.47 (0.38 - 0.55) for encounter probability and positive density respectively. However, a linear regression between the spatial correlations and the spatio-temporal correlations shows high variance ( $R^2 = 0.36$

and 0.22 respectively), indicating that the scale of these relationships does change from one-year to the next. This would have implications for the predictability of the relationship between catches of one species-group and another when trying to balance catch with quotas in mixed fisheries. It can also be seen in the spatial factor scores that there are subtle differences in spatial patterns in factor coefficients from one year to the next (Figures S5 and S6) indicating changes may be driven by temporally changing environmental factors.

[560 words]

#### **Subtle differences in distributions may be important to separate catches within groups under**

**the landing obligation** The analysis shows the interdependence within species-groups (roundfish, flatfish and deeper water species) where catching one species within the group indicates a high probability of catching the other species, which has important implications for how spatial avoidance can be used to support implementation of the EU's landings obligation. If production from mixed fisheries is to be maximised, decoupling catches of species between and within the groups will be key. For example, asking where the maximal separation in the densities of two coupled species is likely to occur? To address this requirement, we map the difference in spatial distribution within a group for each of the species-groupings for a single year (2015; Figure 4).

Figure 4a indicates that cod had a more North-westerly distribution than haddock, while cod was more westerly distributed than whiting roughly delineated by the 7° W line. Whiting appeared particularly concentrated in an area between 51 and 52 ° N and 5 and 7 ° W, which can be seen by comparing the whiting distribution with both cod (Figure 4b) and haddock (Figure 4c). For the deeper water species Figures 4d and 4e indicate that hake are more densely distributed in two areas

225 compared to anglerfishes<sup>1</sup> and megrim (though megrim has a stable density across the modelled  
226 area as indicated by the large amount of white space). For anglerfishes and megrim (Figure 4f),  
227 anglerfishes have a more easterly distribution than megrim. For the flatfish species plaice and sole  
228 (Figure 4g), plaice appear to be more densely distributed along the coastal areas of Ireland and  
229 Britain, while sole are more densely distributed in the Southern part of the English Channel along  
230 the coast of France.

231 Figure 4h shows the predicted catch distribution from a "typical" Otter trawl gear and Beam trawl  
232 gear fishing at three different locations. As can be seen, both the gear selectivity and area fished  
233 play important contributions to the catch compositions; in the inshore area (location 'A') plaice  
234 and sole are the two main species in catch reflecting their distribution and abundance, though  
235 the otter trawl gear catches a greater proportion of plaice to sole than the beam trawl. The area  
236 between Britain and Ireland (location 'B') has a greater contribution of whiting, haddock, cod, hake  
237 and anglerfishes in the catch with the Otter trawl catching a greater proportion of the roundfish,  
238 haddock, whiting and cod while the beam trawl catches more anglerfishes and megrims. The  
239 offshore area has a higher contribution of megrim, anglerfishes and hake with the Otter trawl  
240 catching a greater share of hake and the Beam trawl a greater proportion of megrim. Megrim  
241 dominates the catch for both gears in location 'C', reflecting its relative abundance in the area.

242 [456 words]

## 243 **Application of framework to support implementation landing obligation in mixed fisheries**

244 In application to the Celtic Sea we have identified spatial separation of three distinct species-

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<sup>1</sup>two species combined as they are managed as one

groupings (roundfish, flatfish and deeper water species) while showing that only subtle differences in distributions within species-groups. The differences in catch compositions between gears at the same location in Figure 4h show that changing fishing methods can go some way to affecting catch, yet that differences in catches between locations are likely to be more important. For example, beam trawls fishing at the inshore locations (e.g. location 'A' in Figure 4) are likely to predominately catch plaice and sole, yet switching to the offshore locations (e.g. location 'C') would likely yield greater catches of megrim and anglerfishes. Such changes in spatial fishing patterns are likely to play an important role in supporting implementation of the landings obligation.

More challenging is within-group spatial separation due to significant overlap in spatial distributions for the species, driven by common environmental factors. Subtle changes may yield some benefit in changing catch composition, yet the outcome is likely to be much more difficult to predict. For example, subtle differences in the distribution of cod, haddock and whiting can be seen in Figures 4a-c, showing spatial separation of catches is much more challenging and likely to need to be supported by other measures such as changes to the selectivity characteristics of gear (e.g. <sup>33</sup>).

A role that science can play in supporting effectiveness of spatio-temporal avoidance could be to provide probabilistic advice on likely hotspots for high probability of species occurrence and high species density which can inform fishing decisions. Such advice could be supported by data obtained directly from commercial fishing vessels at a higher temporal resolution, providing real-time forecasts to inform fishing choices that also captures seasonal differences in distributions. The framework we develop here could be extended to include commercial data and real-time updates.

An important question for the implementation of the EU's landing obligation is how far spatial

avoidance can go to achieving catch balancing in fisheries. While this is likely to be fishery and even fisher specific with differing results observed elsewhere (e.g. in the British Columbia trawl fishery<sup>5</sup> and the West US coast<sup>6</sup>) here we provide a framework that could be used to simulate different management and/or fishing effort scenarios. A supporting analysis could be to identify the joint production function for the entire spatial domain for each pair of species, as a way of identifying optimum fishing locations to meet a given target or avoidance objective<sup>34</sup>. In conjunction such analysis could identify the limits of spatial targeting and avoidance in contributing to meeting the goal of maximising catches in mixed fisheries under single stock quota constraints. It may also inform what additional measures are needed (e.g. gear changes, time-area closures) to support transition to the new management system, in order to ensure mixed fisheries can sustainably increased catches consistent with rebuilding fish populations and help support future food security.

Complex environmental, fishery and community drivers of distribution for groups of species highlights the scale of the challenge in separating catches within the species-groups using spatial management measures. This has important implications for management of the mixed fisheries under the EU landings obligation and our analysis identifies where it may be easier to separate catches of species (among groups) and where it is more challenging (within groups). The framework we propose reduces the complexity of the system to its major components and thus allows informed management discussion over more traditional anecdotal knowledge of single-species distribution in space and time.

[words 583]

## Methods

**Model structure:** VAST<sup>2</sup> implements a delta-generalised linear mixed modelling (GLMM) framework that takes account of spatio-temporal correlations among species-groups through implementation of a spatial dynamic factor analysis (SDFA). In the model, spatio-temporal variation is represented through three-dimensional Gaussian Random Fields while covariates affecting catchability (to account for differences between fishing surveys) and density (to account for environmental preferences) can be incorporated for predictions of presence and positive density. The following briefly summarises the key methods implemented in the VAST framework. For full details of the model the reader is invited directed to Thorson *et al* 2017<sup>35</sup>.

**SDFA:** A spatial dynamic factor analysis incorporates advances in joint dynamic species models<sup>35</sup> to take account of associations among species / species-groups by modelling response variables as a multivariate process. This is achieved through implementing a factor analysis decomposition where common latent trends are estimated so that the number of common trends ( $M$ ) is less than the number of species-groups ( $N$ ) modelled ( $1 \leq N \leq M$ ). The factor coefficients are then associated through a function for each factor that returns a positive or negative association of one or more species with any location. Log-density of any species is then be described as a linear combination of factors and loadings:

$$\theta_p(s, t) = \sum_{j=1}^{n_j} L_{p,j} \psi_j(s, t) + \sum_{k=1}^{n_k} \gamma_{k,p} \chi_k(s, t) \quad (1)$$

Where  $\theta_p(s, t)$  represents log-density for species  $p$  at site  $s$  at time  $t$ ,  $\psi_j$  is the coefficient for factor

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<sup>2</sup>software in the R statistical programming language can be found here: [www.github.com/james-thorson/VAST](https://www.github.com/james-thorson/VAST)

296  $j$ ,  $L_{p,j}$  the loading matrix representing association of species  $p$  with factor  $j$  and  $\gamma_{k,p}\chi_k(s, t)$  the  
 297 linear effect of covariates at each site and time <sup>36</sup>.

298 The factor analysis can identify community dynamics and where species have similar spatio-  
 299 temporal patterns, allowing inference of species distributions and abundance of poorly sampled  
 300 species through association with other species and allows for computation of spatio-temporal cor-  
 301 relations among species-groups <sup>36</sup>.

**Estimation of abundances:** Spatio-temporal encounter probability and positive catch rates are modelled separately with spatio-temporal encounter probability modelled using a logit-link linear predictor;

$$\text{logit}[p(s_i, p_i, t_i)] = \gamma_p(p_i, t_i) + \varepsilon_p(s_i, p_i, t_i) + \delta_p(p_i, v_i) \quad (2)$$

and positive catch rates modelling using a gamma- distribution <sup>26</sup>.

$$\text{gamma}[r(s_i, p_i, t_i)] = \gamma_p(p_i, t_i) + \varepsilon_p(s_i, p_i, t_i) + \delta_p(p_i, v_i) \quad (3)$$

302 With  $\gamma_*(p_i, t_i)$ ,  $\varepsilon_*(s_i, p_i, t_i)$  and  $\delta_*(p_i, v_i)$  representing an intercept, spatio-temporal variation and  
 303 a vessel effect ( $v$ ) respectively for for either probability of encounter,  $* = p$  or positive density  
 304  $* = r$ .

305 **Spatio-temporal variation:** The spatio-temporal variation is modelled using Gaussian Markov  
 306 Random Fields (GMRF) where data is associated to nearby locations through a Matérn covariance  
 307 function with the parameters estimated within the model. Here, the correlation decays smoothly  
 308 over space/time the further from the location and includes geometric anisotropy to reflect the fact



that correlations may decline in one direction faster than another (e.g. moving offshore)<sup>27</sup>. The best fit estimated an anisotropic covariance where the correlations were stronger in a North-East - South-West direction, extending approximately 97 km and 140 km before correlations for encounter probability and positive density reduced to <10 %, respectively (Figure S10). Incorporating the spatio-temporal correlations among and within species provides more efficient use of the data as inference can be made about poorly sampled locations from the covariance structure.

A probability distribution for spatio-temporal variation in both encounter probability and positive catch rate was specified,  $\varepsilon_*(s, p, t)$ , with a three-dimensional multivariate normal distribution so that:

$$vec[\mathbf{E}_*(t)] \sim MVN(0, \mathbf{R}_* \otimes \mathbf{V}_{\varepsilon_*}) \quad (4)$$

Here,  $vec[\mathbf{E}_*(t)]$  is the stacked columns of the matrices describing  $\varepsilon_*(s, p, t)$  at every location, species and time,  $\mathbf{R}_*$  is a correlation matrix for encounter probability or positive catch rates among locations and  $\mathbf{V}_*$  a correlation matrix for encounter probability or positive catch rate among species-groups (modelled within the factor analysis).  $\otimes$  represents the Kronecker product so that the correlation among any location and species can be computed<sup>35</sup>.

***Incorporating covariates*** Survey catchability (the relative efficiency of a gear catching a species-group) was estimated as a fixed effect in the model,  $\delta_s(v)$ , to account for differences in spatial fishing patterns and gear characteristics which affect encounter and capture probability of the sampling gear<sup>37</sup>. Parameter estimates (Figure S11) showed clear differential effects of surveys using otter trawl gears (more effective for round fish species) and beam trawl gears (more effective for flatfish species).

No fixed covariates for habitat quality or other predictors of encounter probability or positive density were included. While incorporation may improve the spatial predictive performance<sup>35</sup>, it was not found to be the case here based on model selection with Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) and Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC).

**Parameter estimation** Parameter estimation was undertaken through Laplace approximation of the marginal likelihood for fixed effects while integrating the joint likelihood (which includes the probability of the random effects) with respect to random effects. This was implemented using Template Model Builder (TMB;<sup>38</sup>) with computation through support by the Irish Centre for High End Computing (ICHEC; <https://www.ichec.ie>) facility.

**Data** The model integrates data from seven fisheries independent surveys taking account of correlations among species-group spatio-temporal distributions and abundances to predict spatial density estimates consistent with the resolution of the data.

The model was been fit to nine species separated into adult and juvenile size classes (Table S2) to seven survey series (Table S1) in the Celtic Sea bound by 48° N to 52 ° N latitude and 12 ° W to 2° W longitude (Figure S9) for the years 1990 - 2015 inclusive.

The following steps were undertaken for data processing: i) data for survey stations and catches were downloaded from ICES Datras ([www.ices.dk/marine-data/data-portals/Pages/DATRAS.aspx](http://www.ices.dk/marine-data/data-portals/Pages/DATRAS.aspx)) or obtained directly from the Cefas Fishing Survey System (FSS); ii) data were checked and any tows with missing or erroneously recorded station information (e.g. tow duration or distance infeasible) removed; iii) swept area for each of the survey tows was estimated based

on fitting a GAM to gear variables so that Doorspread = s(Depth) + DoorWt + WarpLength + WarpDiameter + SweepLength and a gear specific correction factor taken from the literature <sup>39</sup>; iii) fish lengths were converted to biomass (Kg) through estimating a von bertalanffy length weight relationship,  $Wt = a \cdot L^b$ , fit to sampled length and weight of fish obtained in the EVHOE survey and aggregated within size classes (adult and juvenile).

The final dataset comprised of estimates of catches (including zeros) for each station and species-group and estimated swept area for the tow.

[1019 words]

**Model setup** The spatial domain was setup to include 250 knots representing the Gaussian Random Fields. The model was configured to estimate nine factors to describe the spatial and spatio-temporal encounter probability and positive density parameters, with a log-link between the logit encounter probability and assumed gamma distribution on positive catches.

Three candidate models were identified, i) a base model where the vessel interaction was a random effect, ii) the base but where the vessel x species effect was estimated as a fixed covariate, iii) with vessel x species effect estimated, but with the addition of estimating fixed density covariates for both predominant habitat type at a knot and depth. AIC and BIC model selection favoured the second model (Table S3). The final model included estimating 130,950 parameters (1,674 fixed and 129,276 random effects).

**Model validation** Q-Q plots show good fit between the derived estimates and the data for positive catch rates and between the predicted and observed encounter probability (S12, S13). Further, model outputs are consistent with stock-level trends abundances over time from international assessments (S14), yet also provide detailed insight into species co-occurrence and the strength of associations in space and time.

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**Figure 1** Factor coefficients for the first three factors for (a) the average encounter probability and (b) the average positive density for the species-groups (outer figures) and spatially (inner figures). Red: positive association to the factor, Blue: negative association

**Figure 2** Position of each species-group on the first two axes from the factor analysis for (a) spatio-temporal encounter probability and (b) spatio-temporal positive density

**Figure 3** Inter-species correlations for (a) spatial encounter probability over all years and (b) spatial positive density. Species-groups are clustered into three groups based on a hierarchical clustering method with non-significant correlations (the Confidence Interval [ $\pm 1.96 * SEs$ ] spanned zero) left blank

**Figure 4** Differences in the standardised spatial density for pairs of species and expected catch rates for two different gears at three different locations in 2015