

LEMON SOLE – ÞYKKVALÚRA

Microstomus kitt

GENERAL INFORMATION

Lemon sole is found all around Iceland, but the highest abundance and the main fishing grounds are off the west and southwest coast. Lemon sole is a demersal and shallow water species, mainly found on a sandy or gravel substrate and occurring mostly at 20-200 m depths.

Females grow a little larger than males; only a small proportion of males become larger than 35 cm, whereas about the same proportion of females grows larger than 40 cm. Size at sexual maturity differs between the sexes. On the main spawning grounds off the south coast, about half of the males have reached maturity at the length of 13 cm, but females reach that level at 24 cm length.

THE FISHERY

The general fishing grounds for lemon sole are on the west and south coasts (Figure 1). Hardly any catch is recorded north and east of Iceland. No obvious changes have been observed in the general distribution of the fishing grounds in recent years.

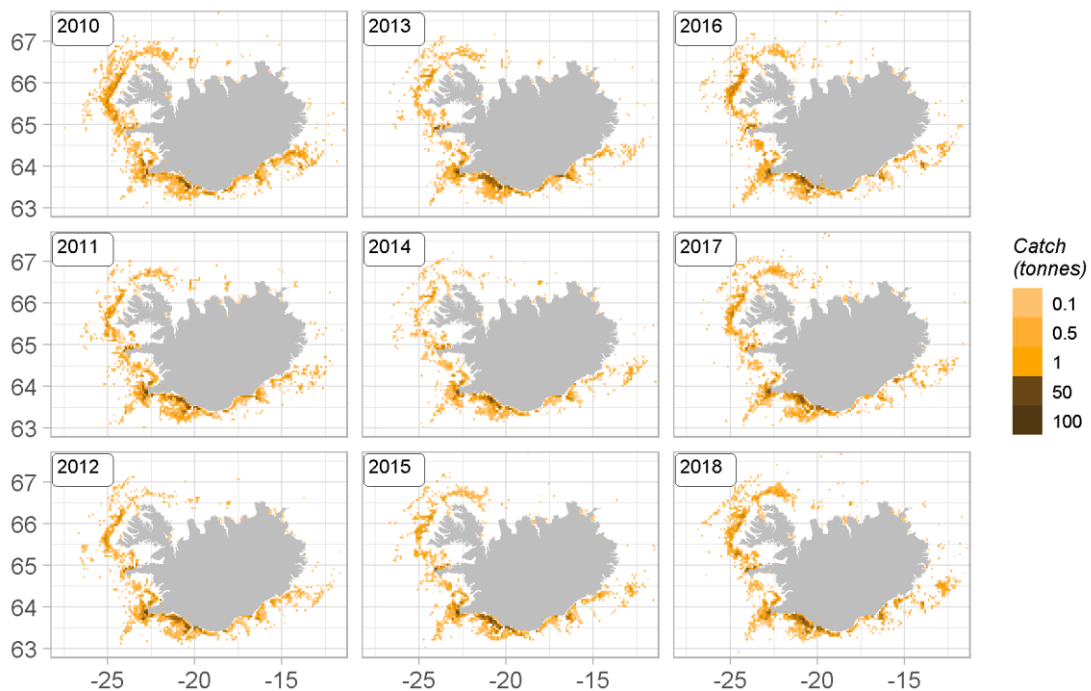


Figure 1. Lemon sole. Geographical distribution of the Icelandic fishery since 2010. Reported catch from logbooks.

Mynd 1. Þykkvalúra. Útbreiðsla veiða á Íslandsmiðum frá 2010 samkvæmt afladagbókum.

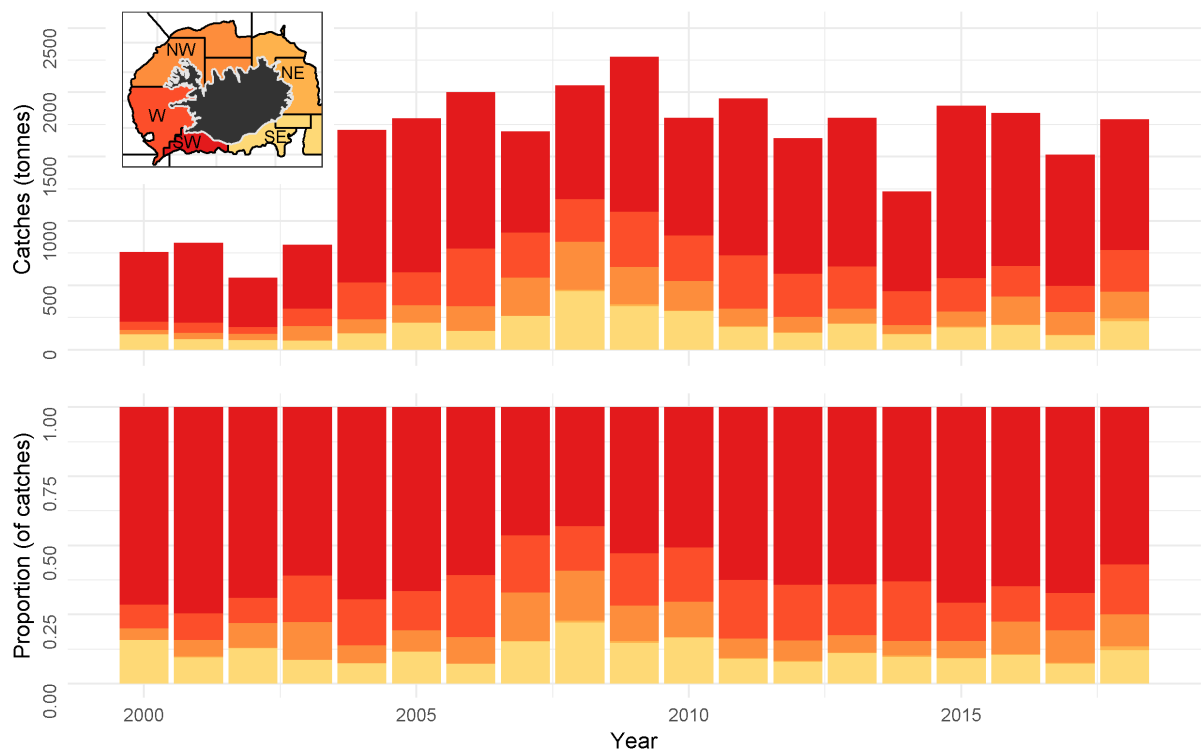


Figure 2. Lemon sole. Spatial distribution of the Icelandic fishery by fishing area since 2000 according to logbooks. All gears combined.

Mynd 2. Þykkvalúra. Útbreiðsla veiða á íslensku veiðisvæði frá árinu 2000 samkvæmt afladagbókum. Öll veiðarfæri samanlagt.

Since 2000, the main fishing grounds of lemon sole have been in the southwestern part of the Icelandic shelf (Figure 2) according to logbook entries. Spatial distribution of the Icelandic lemon sole fishery is considerably stable, with around 75% caught in the southwest.

On Icelandic fishing grounds about half the catch is taken at 61-100 m depth (Figure 3). In the last four years, considerable proportion (50-70%) of demersal seine catch was taken at 41-80 m depth. More than half the catch in demersal trawl is taken in waters deeper than 80 m.

Lemon sole is mainly caught in demersal seine and bottom trawl, amounting to more than 95% of the landings in most years (Figure 4, Table 1). This proportion has been relatively stable through the years, with demersal seine taking more than half of the catches.

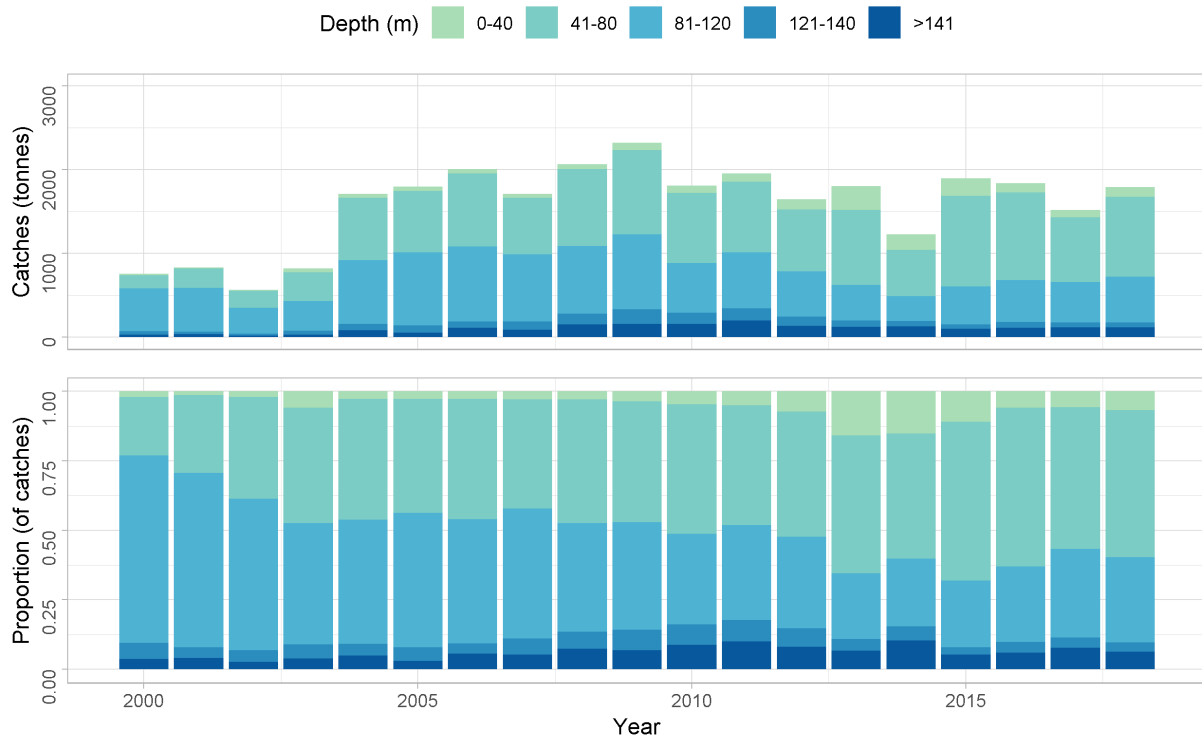


Figure 3. Lemon sole. Depth distribution of catches according to logbooks.

Mynd 3. Þykkvalúra. Afli samkvæmt afladagbókum, skipt eftir dýpi.

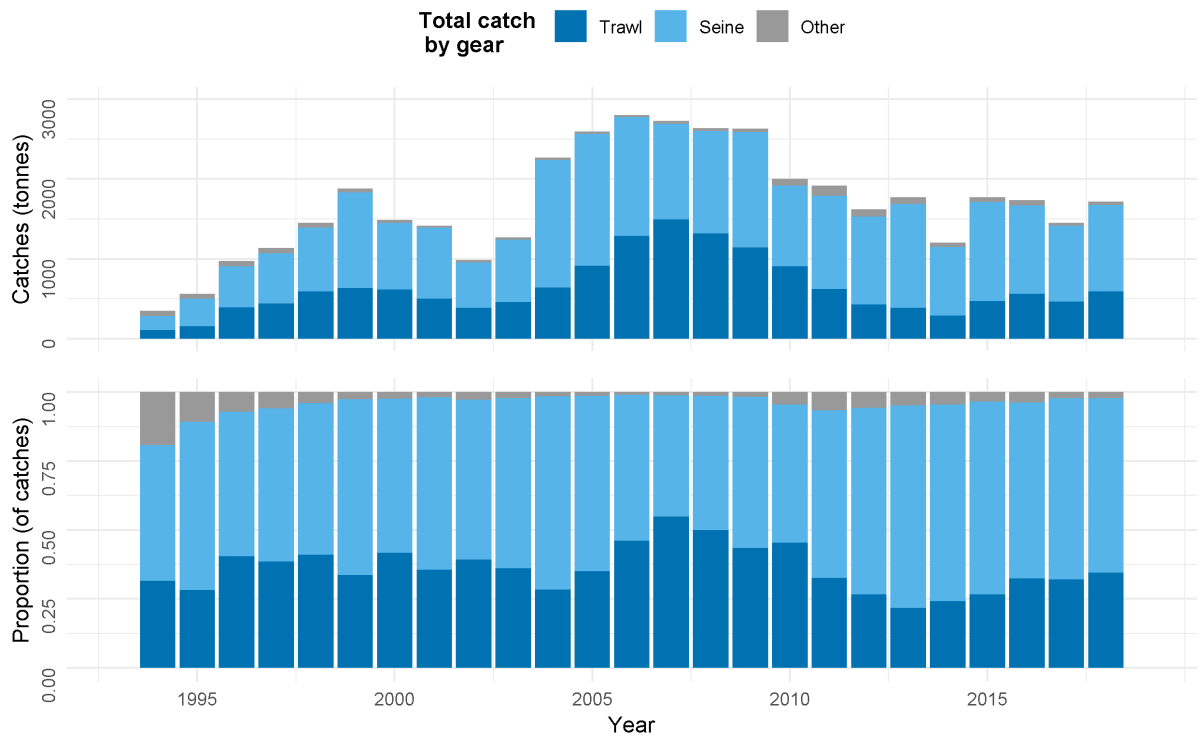


Figure 4. Lemon sole. Total catch (landings) by fishing gear since 1994, according to statistics from the Directorate of Fisheries.

Mynd 4. Þykkvalúra. Landaður afli eftir veiðarfærum frá árinu 1994, samkvæmt aflaskráningarkerfi Fiskistofu.

Since 2000, around 45-85 trawlers (demersal- and *Nephrops* trawlers) and 28-50 seiners have reported catches of lemon sole (1000 kg or more). Since 2000, the number of bottom trawlers has decreased but their numbers have remained stable since 2011, while the number of seiners has decreased (Table 1).

Table 1. Lemon sole. Number of Icelandic vessels landing catch of 1000 kg or more of lemon sole, and all landed catch divided by gear type.

Tafla 1. Þykkvalúra. Fjöldi íslenskra skipa sem landað hafa 1000 kg af þykkvalúru og allur landaður afli eftir veiðarfærum.

YEAR	NUMBER OF VESSELS			CATCHES (TONNES)			
	<i>Trawlers</i>	<i>Seiners</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Demersal</i>	<i>Demersal seine</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Sum</i>
2000	85	50	7	591	815	32	1438
2001	70	46	4	483	861	27	1371
2002	60	37	10	370	552	28	950
2003	66	46	5	446	782	18	1246
2004	65	56	9	608	1565	36	2209
2005	66	50	11	868	1608	29	2505
2006	71	49	10	1220	1446	22	2688
2007	74	44	11	1450	1194	18	2662
2008	69	41	9	1318	1282	34	2634
2009	66	47	11	1143	1437	49	2629
2010	59	39	15	894	995	81	1970
2011	42	38	13	611	1164	124	1899
2012	38	39	12	435	1099	79	1614
2013	38	35	14	378	1304	82	1765
2014	31	30	13	290	860	52	1202
2015	38	28	12	473	1237	62	1772
2016	45	28	11	565	1112	61	1738
2017	41	29	8	464	953	33	1450
2018	47	29	7	592	1085	38	1715

The number of vessels accounting for 95% of the total catch of lemon sole changed from about 160 in 1996 to about 50 in the last two years (Figure 5). The reduction in number of vessels in 1996-2007 occurred despite catches being higher, but in 2009-2014 the drop coincided with reduced catches.

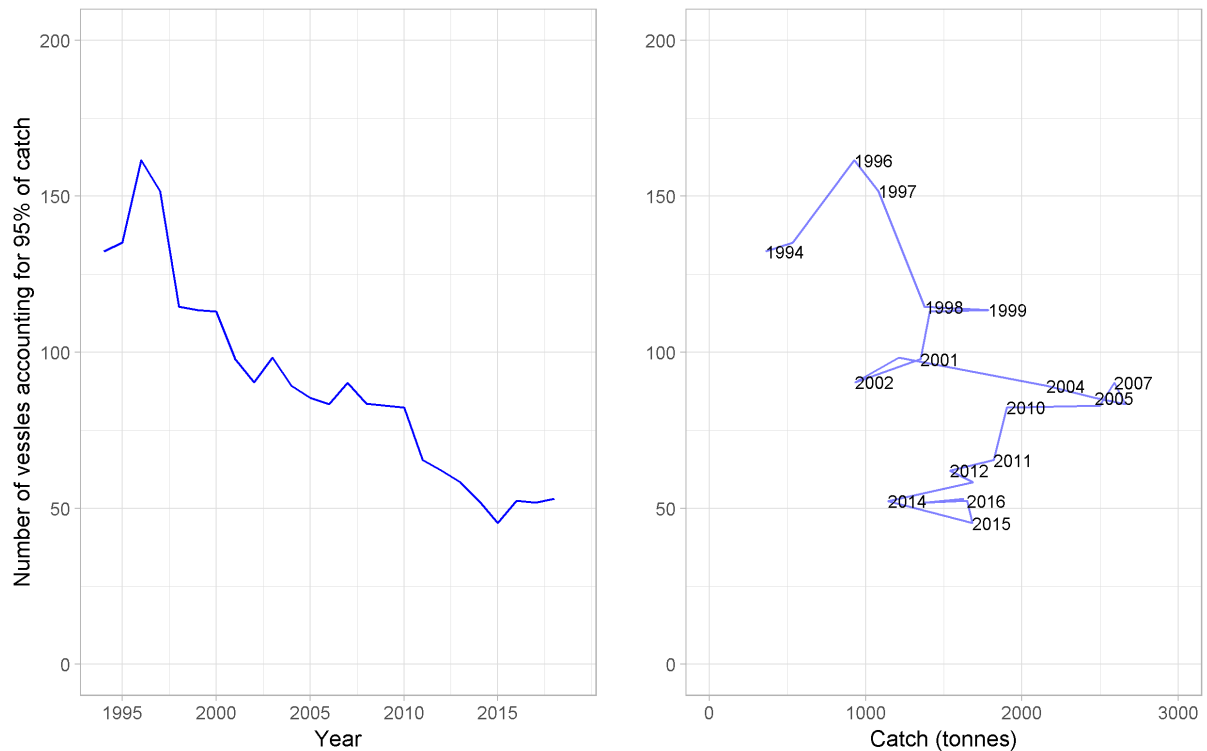


Figure 5. Lemon sole. Number of vessels (all gear types) accounting for 95% of the total catch annually since 1994. Left: Plotted against year. Right: Plotted against total catch. Data from the Directorate of Fisheries.

Mynd 5. Pykkvalúra. Fjöldi skipa og báta (öll veiðarfæri) sem veiddu 95% heildaraflans hvert ár frá 1994. Vinstri: Sýnt eftir árum. Hægri: Sýnt í samanburði við heildarafla. Gögn frá aflaskráningarkerfi Fiskistofu.

CATCH PER UNIT EFFORT (CPUE) AND EFFORT.

CPUE estimates of lemon sole in Icelandic waters are not considered representative of stock abundance as changes in fleet composition, technical improvements and differences in gear setup among other things have not been accounted for when estimating CPUE.

Non-standardized CPUE in demersal seine (kg/set) is calculated as the total weight in sets in which lemon sole was more than 10% of the catch. In the years 2000-2014, according to logbooks, lemon sole CPUE gradually increased from 200 to around 400 kg/set (Figure 6). In 2015 and 2016, however, the CPUE was 600 and 550 kg/set, respectively, and it was still high in 2018 (483 kg/set). CPUE of lemon sole in demersal trawl has been slowly increasing since 2002.

Total fishing effort for lemon sole by demersal seine is estimated as the number of sets where lemon sole was more than 10% of the total catch. The fishing effort was relatively low in 2002 but rose to a peak in 2004. After 2004 it has been decreasing more or less continuously. This is both due to the fact that fewer seiners are fishing and catch per unit effort is higher. For demersal trawl, fishing effort during these years was highest in 2006-2011 (Figure 6).

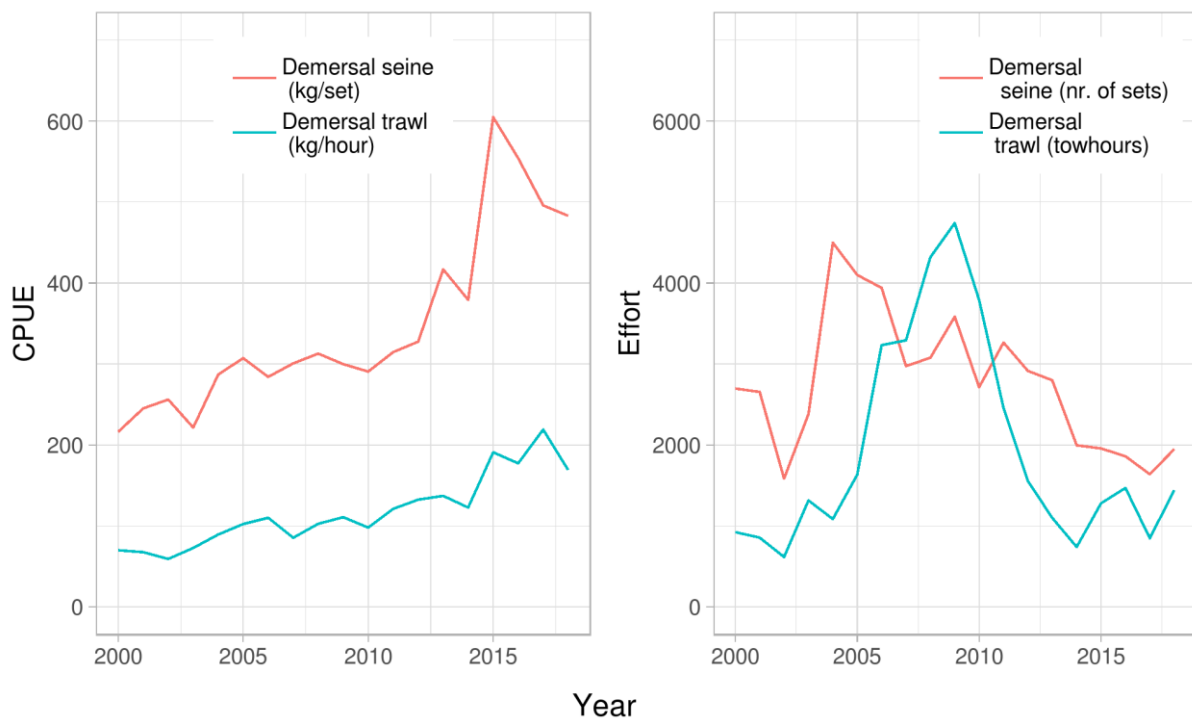


Figure 6. Lemon sole. Raw CPUE (left) and fishing effort (right) from demersal seine (kg/set or nr. of sets) (in red) and demersal trawl (kg/hour or towhours) (in blue).

Mynd 6. Bykkvalúra. Afli á sóknareiningu (vinstri) og sókn (hægri) með dragnót (kg í kasti eða fjöldi kasta) (rautt) og botnvörpu (kg/klst eða tog tímar) (blátt).

AGE DISTRIBUTION OF LANDED LEMON SOLE

Otoliths have been collected from commercial catches since 1999. Annually 11-38 samples have been collected from demersal seine and 3-21 samples from demersal trawl, or a total of 275-1100 and 100-500 otoliths respectively (Table 2, Figure 7). Samples were not taken from other gears, as they represent a small proportion (~5%) of the total catch.

Table 2. Lemon sole. Number of samples and aged otoliths from landed catch.

Tafla 2. Þykkvalúra. Fjöldi sýna og aldursgreindra fiska úr lönduðum afla.

Year	Demersal seine		Demersal trawl	
	Samples	Otoliths	Samples	Otoliths
2010	23	575	21	506
2011	36	875	12	300
2012	37	925	14	361
2013	36	899	8	200
2014	20	500	8	200
2015	28	700	17	420
2016	27	675	17	425
2017	22	475	19	550
2018	22	545	11	275

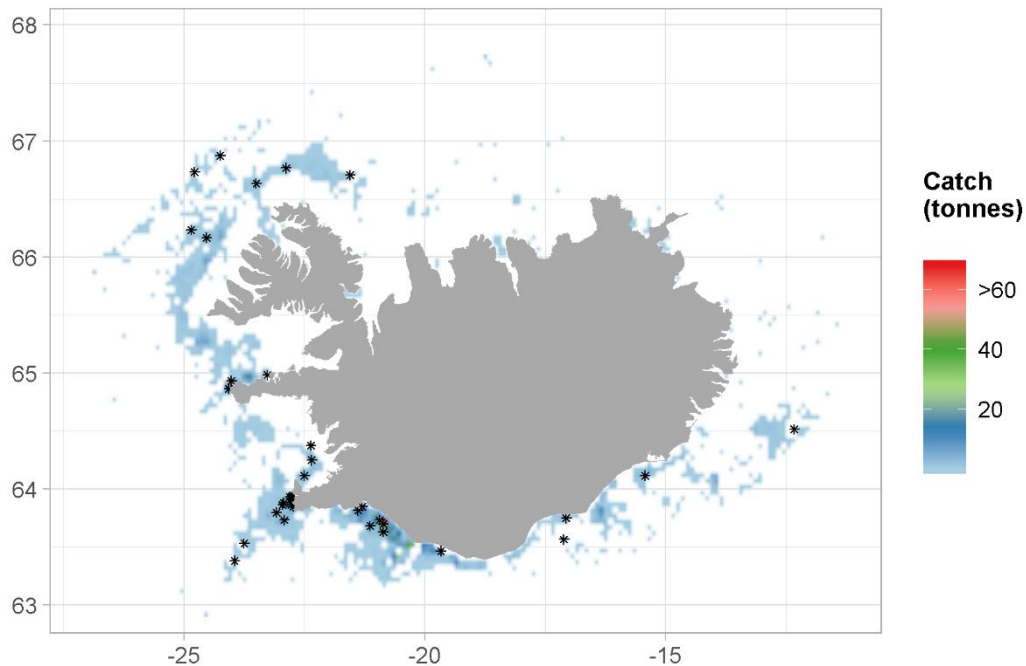


Figure 7. Lemon sole. Fishing grounds in 2018 as reported in logbooks and positions of samples taken from landings (asterisks).

Mynd 7. Þykkvalúra. Veiðisvæði við Ísland árið 2018 samkvæmt afladagbókum og staðsetningar sýna úr lönduðum afla (stjörnur).

In 2010-2015, the majority of the catch was 6-8 years old lemon sole, or about 70% of landings in numbers (Figure 8). Age of landed fish has slowly increased over the last three years, with 8-10 year old fish being most common in 2018.

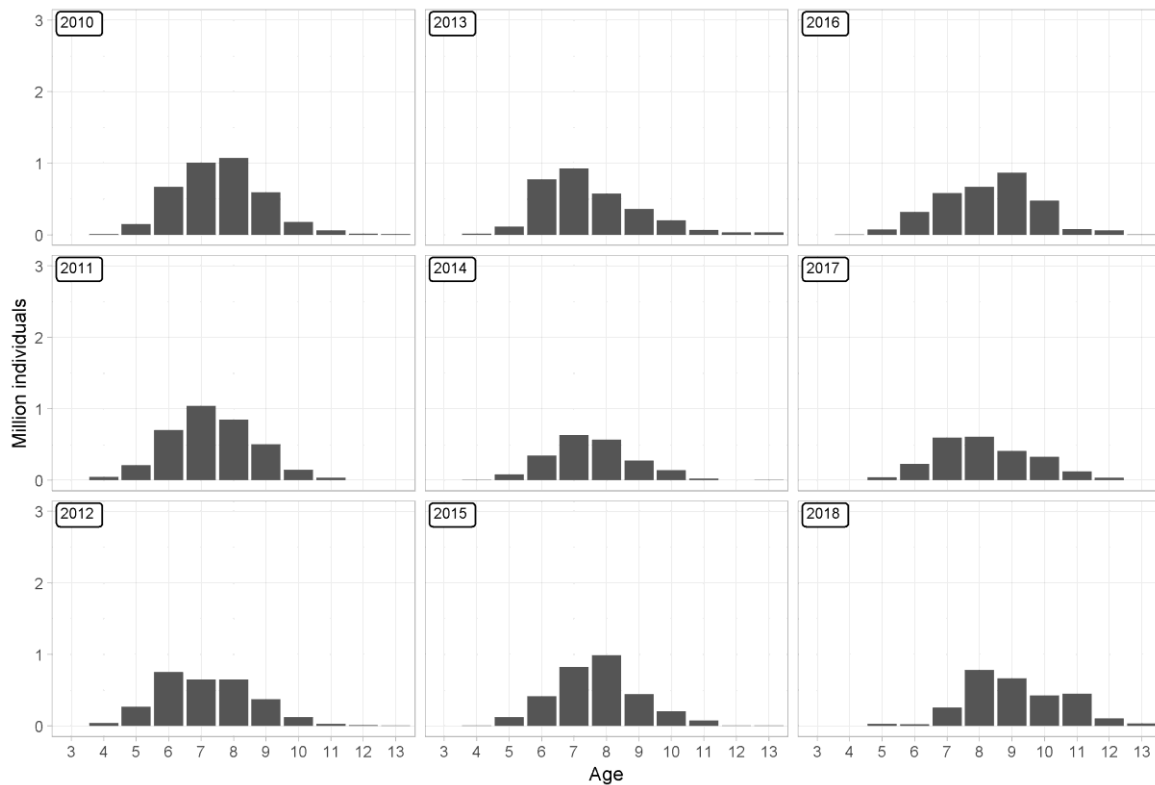


Figure 8. Lemon sole. Estimated age distribution of landed catch based on landings and otoliths collected from landed catch.

Mynd 8. Þykkvalúra. Áætluð aldursdreifing landaðs afla byggð á aldursgreiningum á fiskum úr afla.

LENGTH DISTRIBUTION OF LANDED LEMON SOLE

Length distribution of landed lemon sole has remained stable since 2003, however there has been a slight shift towards larger fish since 2017 (Figure 9).

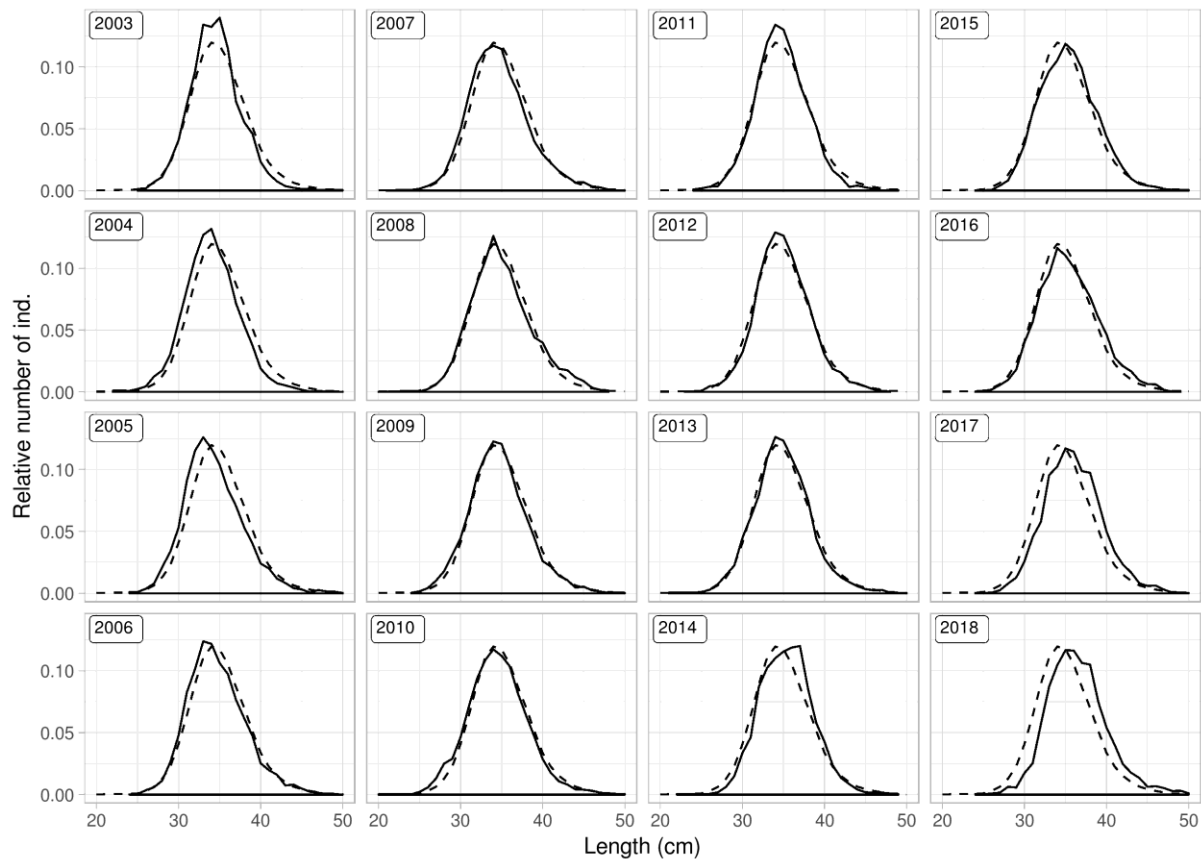


Figure 9. Lemon sole. Length distribution from landed catch. The dotted line represents the mean length distribution for all years.

Mynd 9. Þykkvalúra. Lengdardreifing aflasýna frá árinu 2003 með meðal lengdardreifingu fyrir öll árin (punktalína).

SURVEY DATA

The Icelandic spring groundfish survey (hereafter spring survey, IS-SMB), which has been conducted annually in March since 1985, covers the most important distribution area of the lemon sole. In addition, the Icelandic autumn groundfish survey (hereafter autumn survey, IS-SMH) was commenced in 1996. However, a full autumn survey was not conducted in 2011 due to a labour dispute.

The spring survey is considered to measure changes in abundance/biomass better than the autumn survey. It may not, however, adequately cover the main recruitment grounds for lemon sole as the main nursery areas are thought to be in shallow water in habitats unsuitable for demersal trawling. In addition to these two major surveys, a designated flatfish survey with beam trawl was started in 2016 and will be expanded in 2018 to cover most of the recruitment grounds of lemon sole and other flatfish species. The plan is to incorporate this survey in the stock assessment for lemon sole in the future.

Figure 10, shows both a recruitment index based on abundance of lemon sole smaller than 20 cm, and trends in various biomass indices. Survey length disaggregated abundance indices are shown in Figures 11-12, abundance and changes in spatial distribution in Figures 13-15.

Total biomass index and the biomass index for lemon sole larger than 30 cm (harvestable part of the stock) has been variable in recent years, with large fluctuations between years (Figure 10). The index for lemon sole larger than 39 cm has been increasing recently. The index of juvenile abundance (<20 cm) has decreased in the last five years after large peak in 2011 which was observed only in spring survey. The result from the shorter autumn survey are by and large similar to those observed from the spring survey, except for the juvenile abundance index that shows a different pattern than the spring survey.

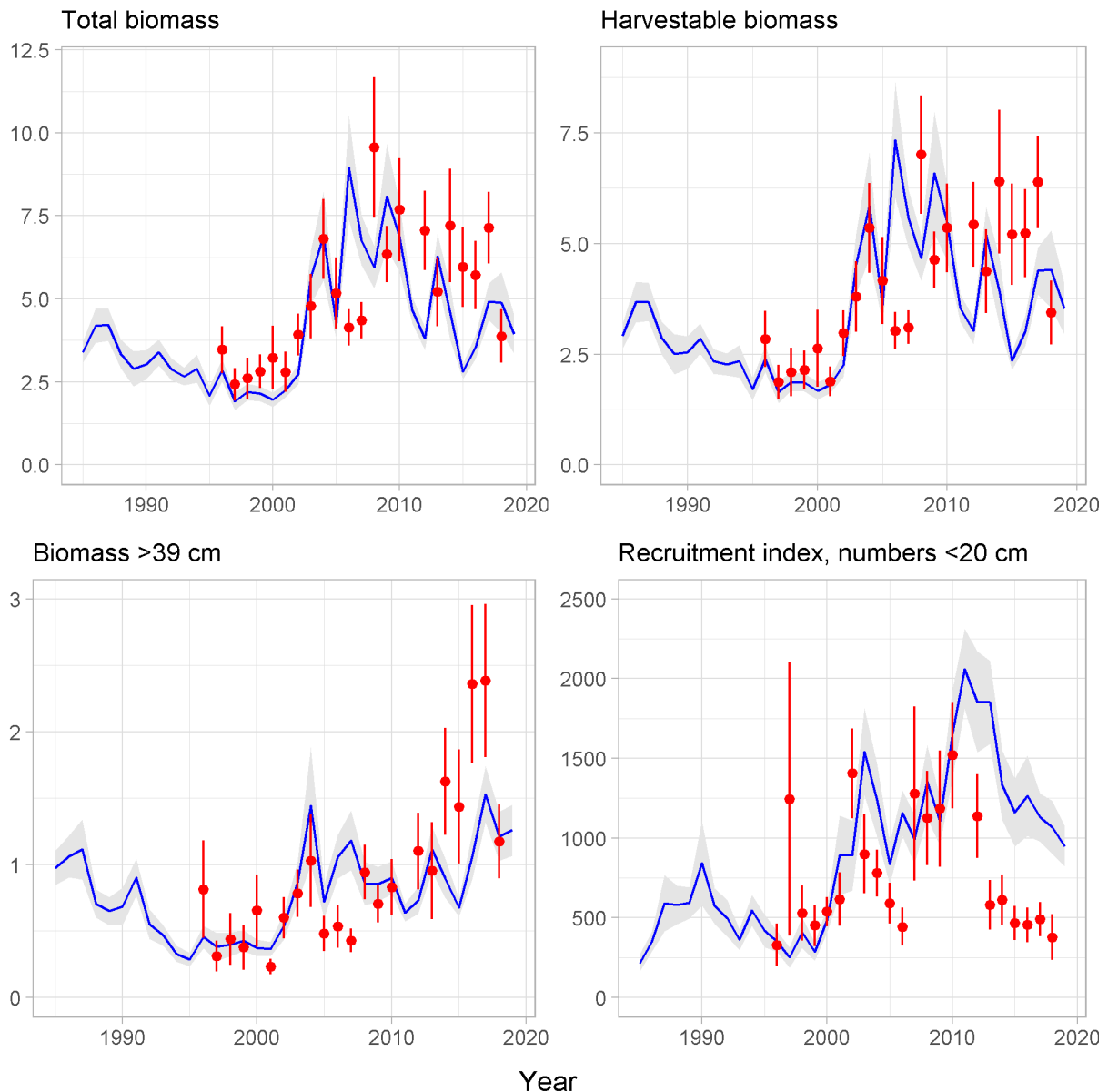


Figure 10. Lemon sole. Total biomass indices (upper left) and harvestable biomass indices (≥ 30 cm, upper, right), biomass indices of larger individuals (≥ 39 cm, lower left) and juvenile abundance indices (≤ 20 cm, lower right) from the spring survey (blue) from 1985 and autumn survey (red) from 1996, along with the standard deviation.

Mynd 10. Pykkvalúra. Stofnvísitala (efri til vinstri), vísitala veiðistofns (≥ 30 cm, efri til hægri) og vísitala stærri einstaklinga (≥ 39 cm, neðri til vinstri) og nýliðunarávísitala (≤ 20 cm, neðri til hægri), úr stofnmælingu botnfiska að vori (blátt) frá árinu 1985 og hausti (rautt) frá árinu 1996, ásamt staðalfrávik.

Like in samples from the commercial catch, the size distribution in the spring survey has been stable, with little variation over time (Figure 11). Data from the autumn survey tells a similar story (Figure 12).

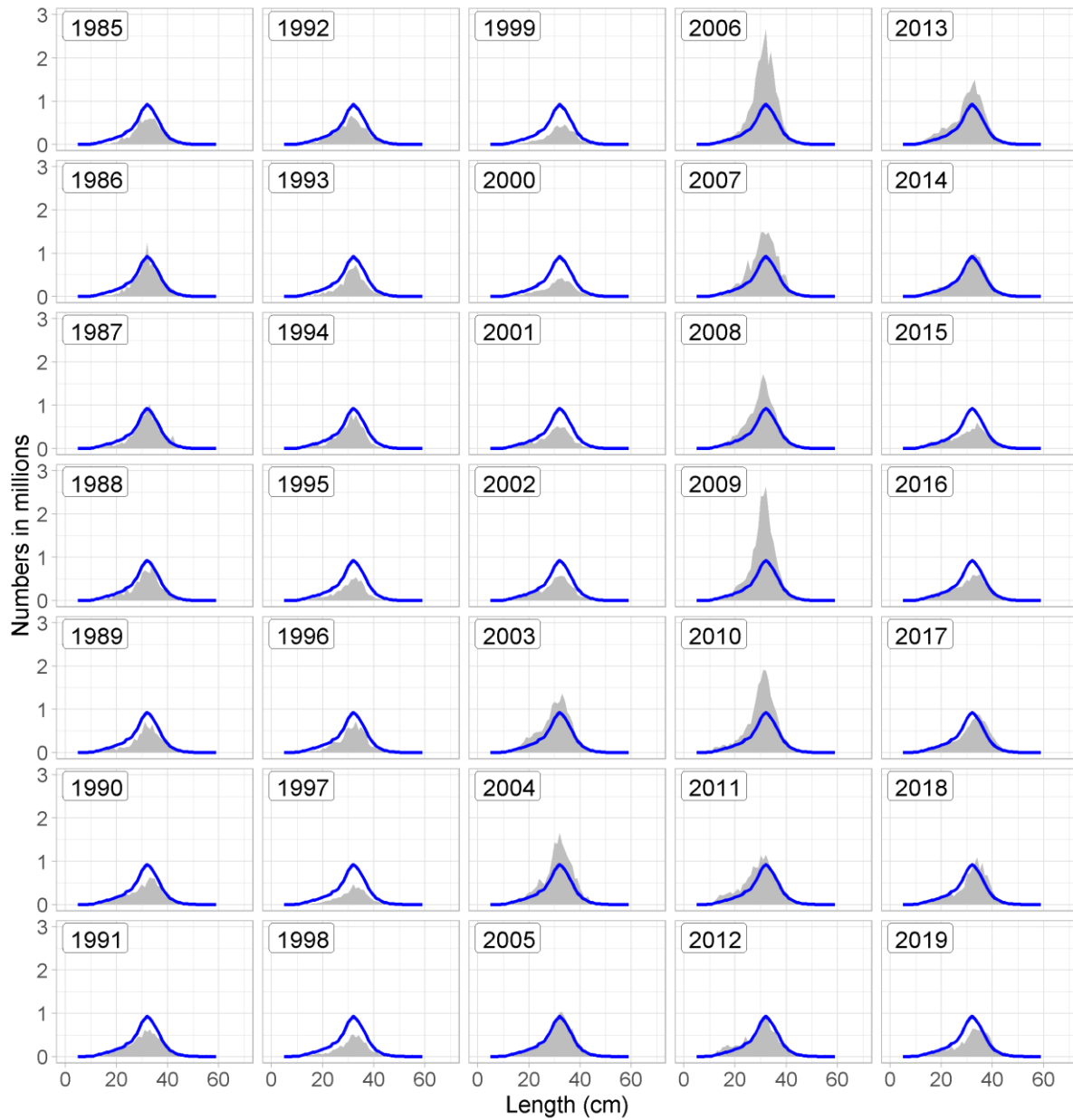


Figure 11. Lemon sole. Length disaggregated abundance indices from the spring survey. The blue line shows the mean for all years.

Mynd 11. Pykkvalúra. Lengdarskiptar vísitölur úr stofnmælingu botnfiska að vori ásamt meðaltali allra ára (blá lína).

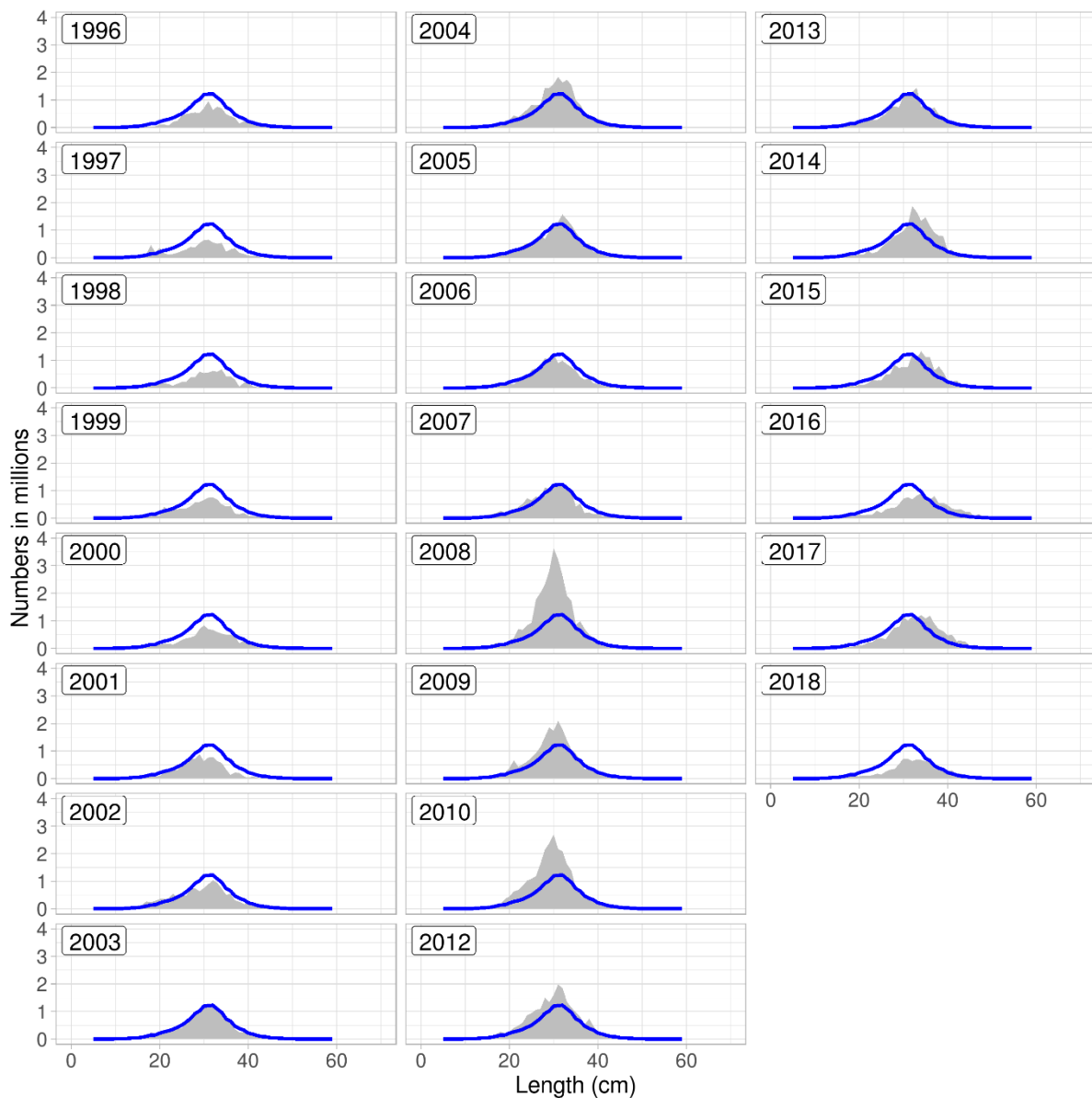


Figure 12. Lemon sole. Length disaggregated abundance indices from the autumn survey. The blue line shows the mean for all years.

Mynd 12. Þykkvalúra. Lengdarskiptar vísitölur úr stofnmælingu botnfiska að hausti ásamt meðaltali allra ára (blá lína).

Lemon sole were mostly caught on the main fishing grounds in the southwest and west part of the country in the spring survey in 2019, while considerable amount was also caught deep of the southeast coast (Figure 13). The coldest waters off the northeast and east coast are almost devoid of lemon sole. Spatial distribution of lemon sole in the spring survey has been relatively stable since the survey was started in 1985 (Figure 14). The increase in estimated biomass after 2002 occurred more or less evenly in all areas, although in years with exceptionally high biomass estimates (i.e. 2006 and 2009) the increase was mostly in the SW area.

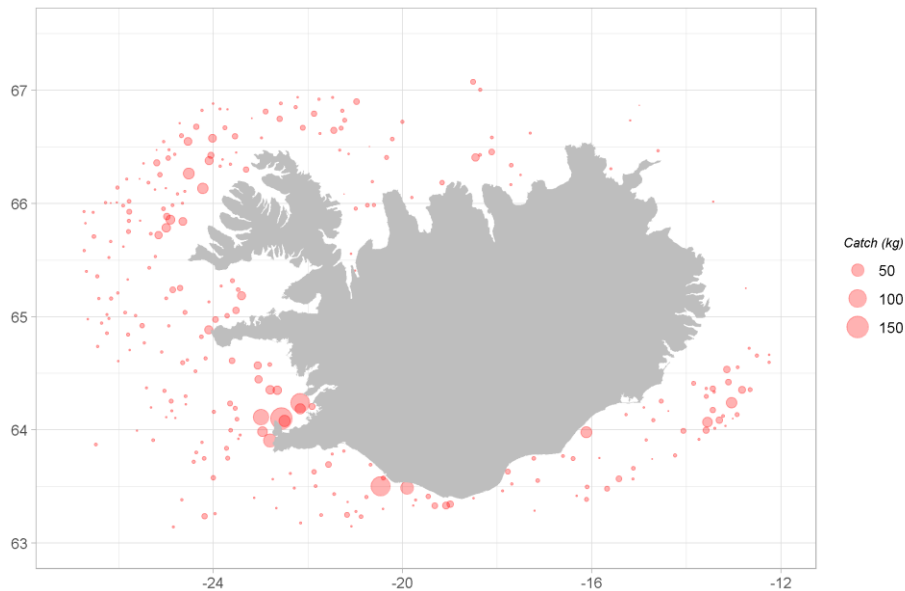


Figure 13. Lemon sole. Spatial distribution in the spring survey in 2019.

Mynd 13. Þykkvalúra. Útbreiðsla í stofnmælingu botnfiska að vori 2019.

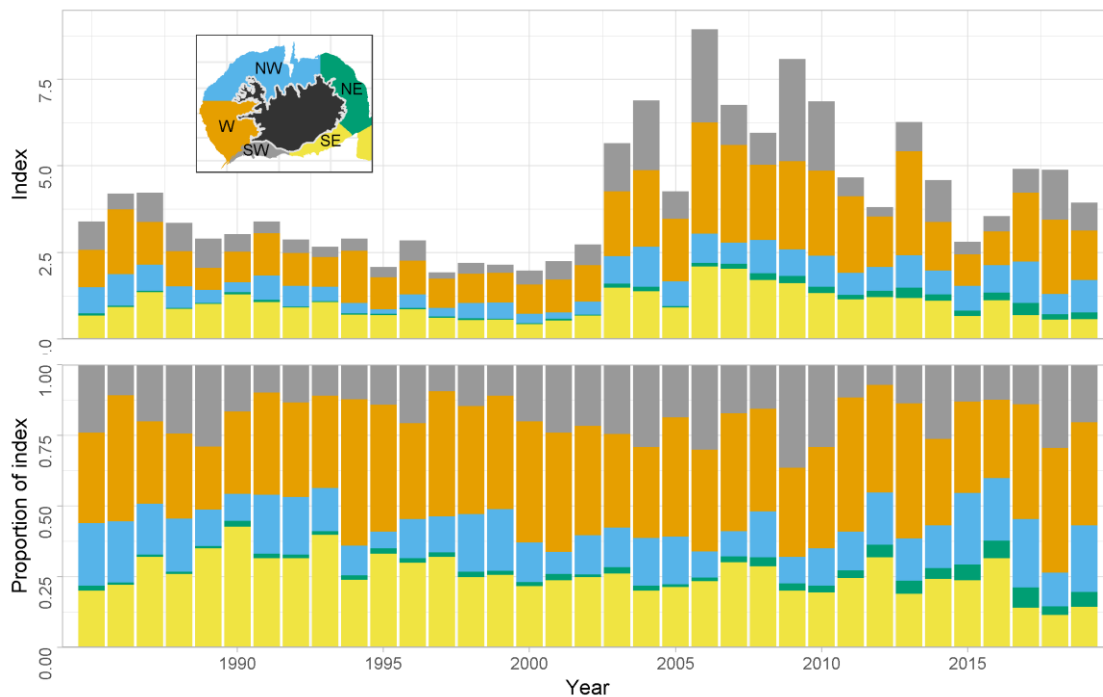


Figure 14. Lemon sole. Spatial distribution of biomass index from the spring survey.

Mynd 14. Þykkvalúra. Dreifing lífmassavísitölu í stofnmælingu botnfiska að vori.

Lemon sole were mainly caught in the west and northwest of the country in the autumn survey in 2018 with some lemon sole also caught in the southeast (Figure 15). The majority of lemon sole in the autumn survey has been caught in the west and northwest of the country. In the last two years of the survey, there has been a slight increase in the abundance of lemon sole in the W and NW areas, but decrease in the SE area (Figure 16).

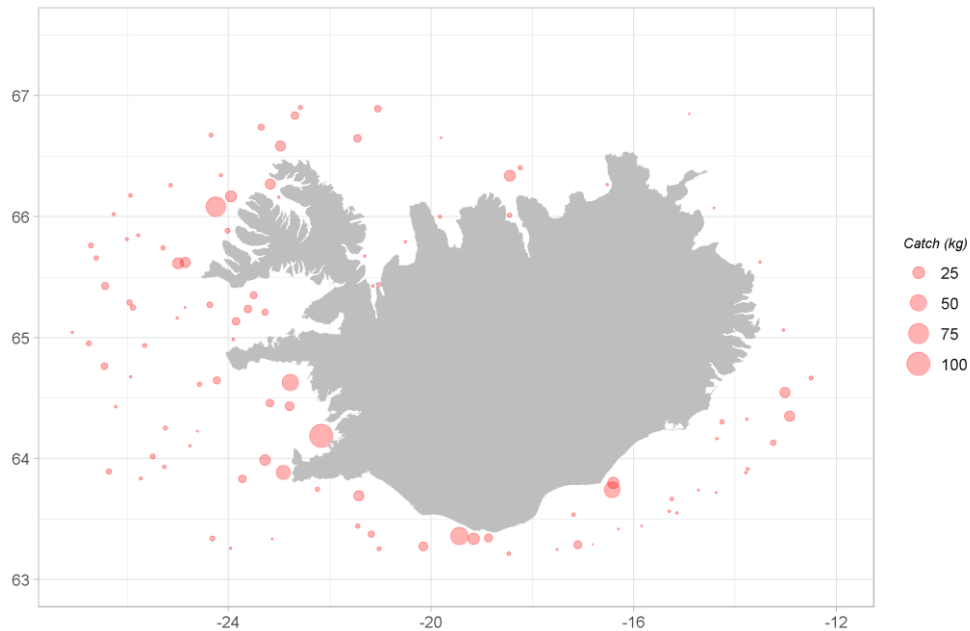


Figure 15. Lemon sole. Spatial distribution in the autumn survey in 2018.

Mynd 15. Þykkvalúra. Útbreiðsla í stofnmælingu botnfiska að hausti árið 2018.

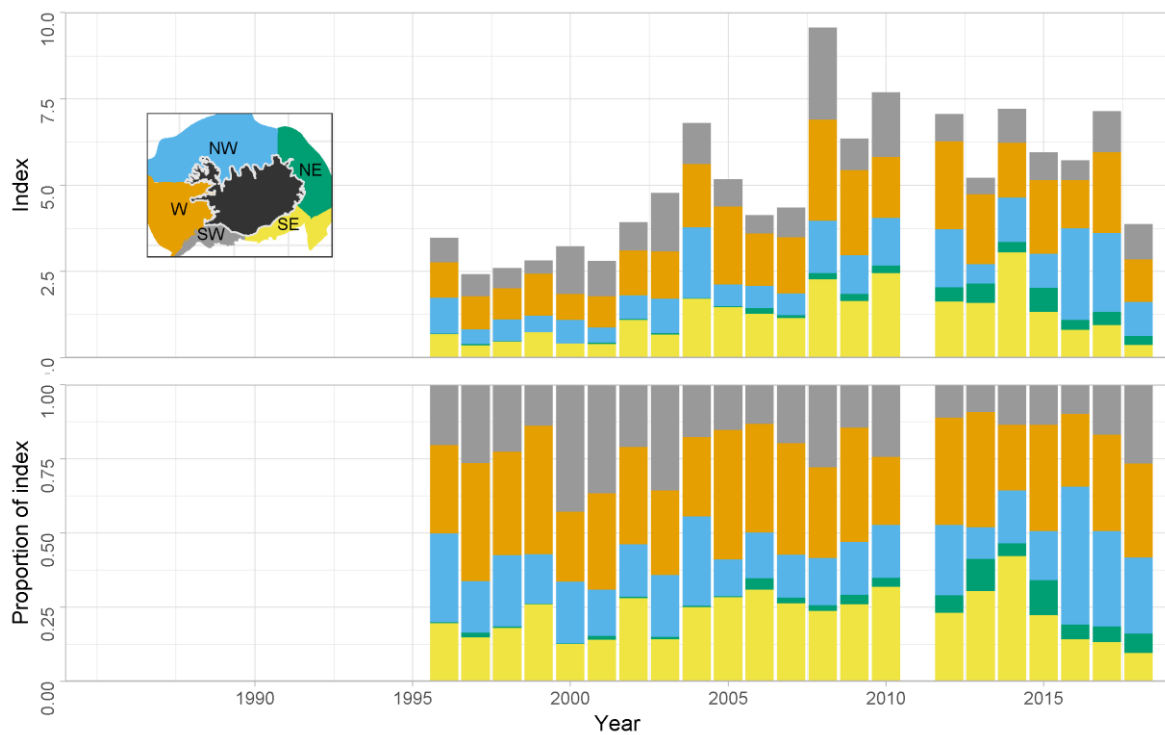


Figure 16. Lemon sole. Spatial distribution of biomass index from the autumn survey.

Mynd 16. Þykkvalúra. Dreifing lífmassavísitölu í stofnmælingu botnfiska að hausti.

MANAGEMENT

The Ministry of Industries and Innovation is responsible for management of the Icelandic fisheries and implementation of legislation. Lemon sole was included in the ITQ system in the 1999/2000 quota year and as such subjected to TAC limitations.

Between 2005 and 2009, TAC was set higher than recommended by Marine Research Institute (MRI), but this practice stopped in the 2010/2011 quota year (Table 3). No formal management plan exists for this stock.

Figure 17 shows net transfers of lemon sole in the Icelandic ITQ-system. From 2003-2008 there was a net transfer of other species to lemon sole quota (positive values in Figure 17). However, from 2009-2014, there was little transfer from other species, until three years ago when considerable amounts were transferred to lemon sole from other species. Net transfer of lemon sole quota for a given fishing year is usually in the range of -6 to 6% (Figure 17).

Table 3. Lemon sole. Recommended TAC, national TAC set by the Ministry, and landings (tonnes).

Tafla 3. Þykkvalúra. Tillögur Hafrannsóknastofnunar um hámarksafla, ákvörðun stjórnvalda um aflamark og landaður afli (tonn).

FISHING YEAR	REC. TAC	NATIONAL TAC	CATCH
1999/00	1400	1400	1406
2000/01	1400	1400	1411
2001/02	1400	1400	1028
2002/03	1600	1600	1059
2003/04	1600	1600	2065
2004/05	1600	1600	2549
2005/06	1600	1800	2518
2006/07	1600	2000	2918
2007/08	1600	2200	2654
2008/09	1800	2200	2682
2009/10	1800	2200	1955
2010/11	1800	1800	1733
2011/12	1800	1800	1803
2012/13	1400	1400	1464
2013/14	1600	1600	1427
2014/15	1600	1600	1758
2015/16	1300	1300	1724
2016/17	1087	1087	1471
2017/18	1304	1304	1778
2018/19	1565	1565	
2019/20	1341		

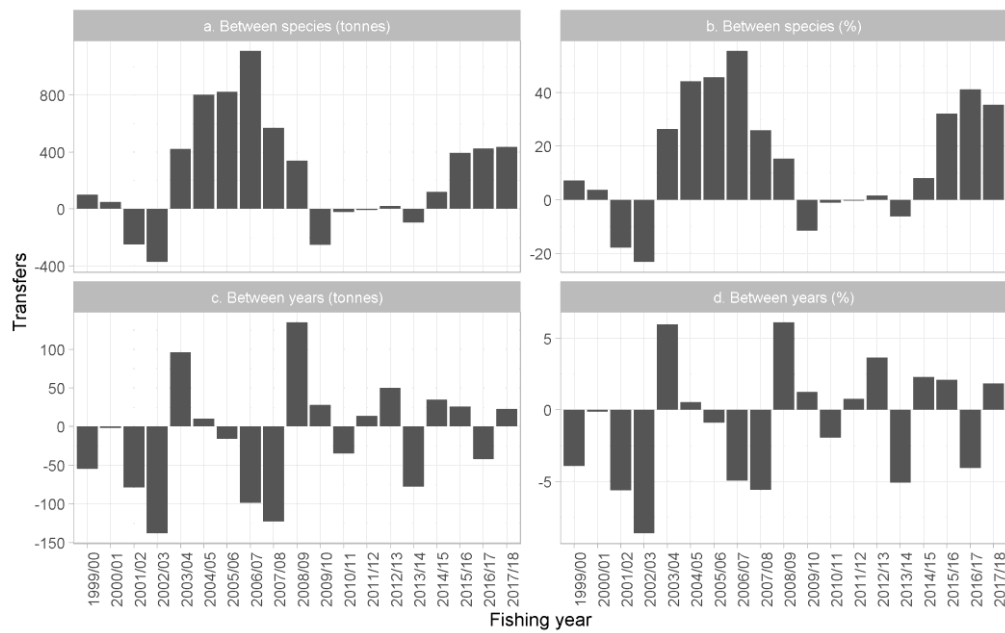


Figure 17. Lemon sole. Net transfers of quota to and from lemon sole in the Icelandic ITQ system by fishing year. Between species (upper): Positive values indicate a transfer of other species to lemon sole, but negative values indicate a transfer of lemon sole quota to other species. Between years (lower): Net transfer of quota in a given fishing year.

Mynd 17. Þykkvalúra. Nettó tilfærsla á kvóta eftir fiskveiðiárum. Tilfærsla milli tegunda (efri myndir): Jákvæð gildi tákna tilfærslu á kvóta annarra tegunda yfir á þykkvalúru en neikvæð gildi tilfærslu þykkvalúrukvóta á aðrar tegundir. Tilfærsla milli ára (neðri myndir): Nettó tilfærsla kvóta á viðkomandi fiskveiðiári.