

MEGRIM – STÓRKJAFTA

Lepidorhombus whiffiagonis

GENERAL INFORMATION

Megrim is a demersal species on a sandy or muddy substrate, occurring at depths ranging from 40-400 m, but is most common at 100-200 m. Its distribution is confined to the relatively warm waters south and west of Iceland. In Icelandic waters the females can reach 70 cm in length, but males just about 60 cm. Size at sexual maturity differs between the sexes. At the length of 32 cm about half the males have reached maturity, females reach that level at 42 cm.

THE FISHERY

Main fishing grounds for megrim are in the southeast, south and southwest of Iceland, with smaller fishing grounds in the west of the island. There is no target fishery for megrim in Iceland, it is only taken as bycatch, particularly in demersal seine and *Nephrops* trawl. Seiners dominate the coastal fishery, while trawlers catch them deeper and further offshore. Megrim fishing grounds in 2010-2018, as reported by mandatory electronic logbooks are shown on Figure 1.

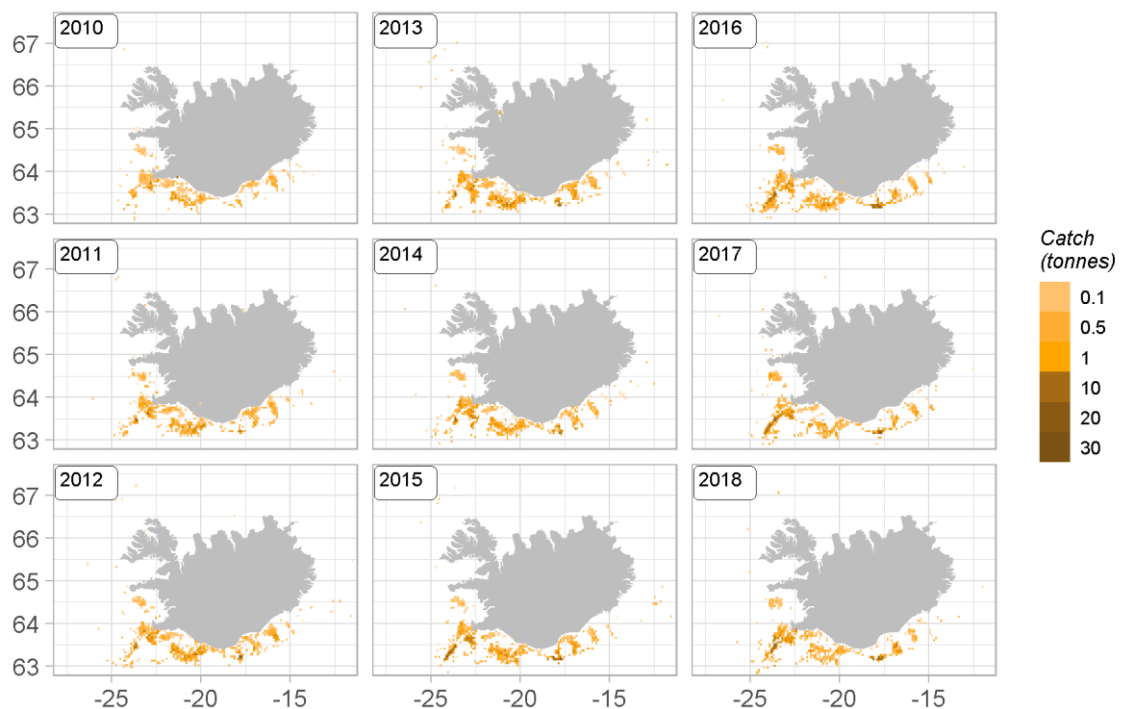


Figure 1. Megrim. Geographical distribution of the Icelandic fishery since 2010. Reported catch from logbooks.

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

According to logbook entries, the main fishing grounds of megrim have been in the southwest waters of Iceland with over half the catch in most years (Figure 2). Spatial distribution of Icelandic megrim fishery is relatively stable, with around 90% caught off the south coast. In recent years, reported catches have been increasing as megrim was inadequately reported in logbooks before 2009 (Figure 2).



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

Mynd 2. Stórkjaftra. Útbreiðsla veiða á íslensku veiðisvæði frá árinu 2000 samkvæmt aflaskýrslum. Öll veiðarfæri samanlagt.

Megrím is caught in relatively deep water for a flatfish, with most of the catch (50-80%) taken between 100-250 meters depth (Figure 3).

Megrím in Icelandic fishing grounds are mainly caught in demersal seine and *Nephrops* trawl (Figure 4, Table 1). Catch in demersal seine has been decreasing in the past few years, while catches in *Nephrops* trawl and more recently in bottom trawl have increased. In 2018, approximately 50% of landed megrim was fished in *Nephrops* trawl and 40% in bottom trawl. Since 2000, the number of boats landing annually over one tonne of megrim has remained relatively similar between years (Table 1).

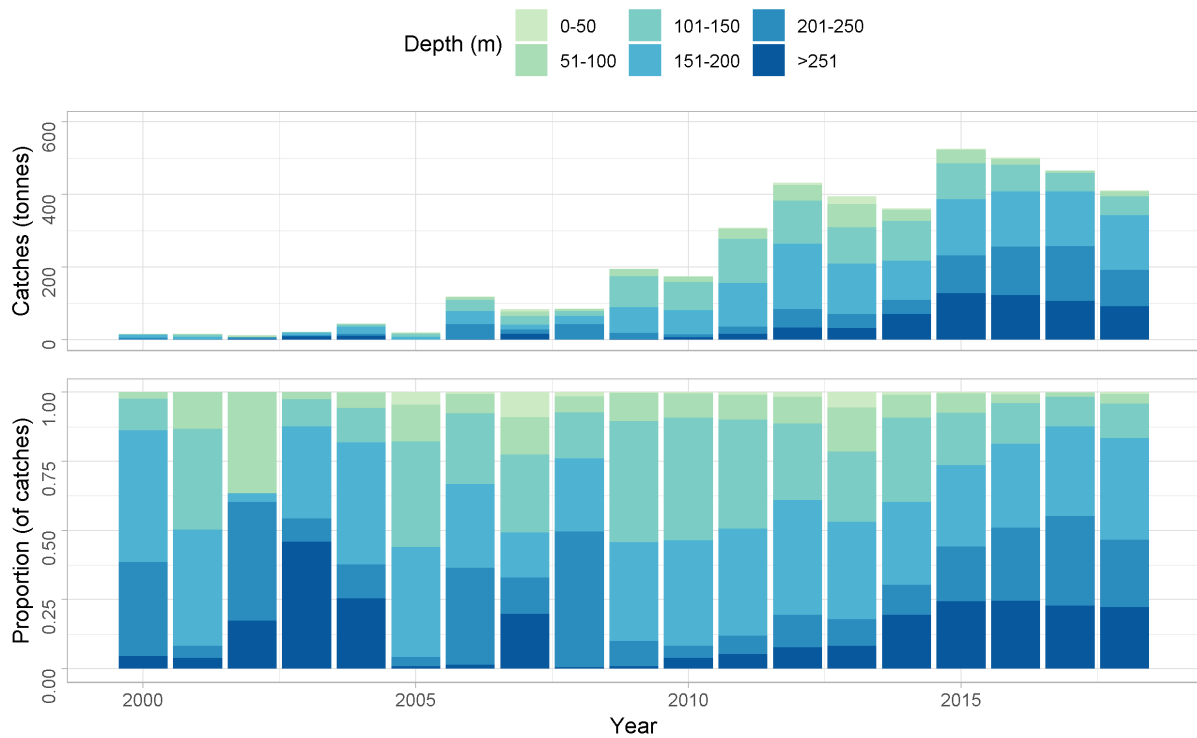


Figure 3. Megrim. Depth distribution catches according to logbooks.

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

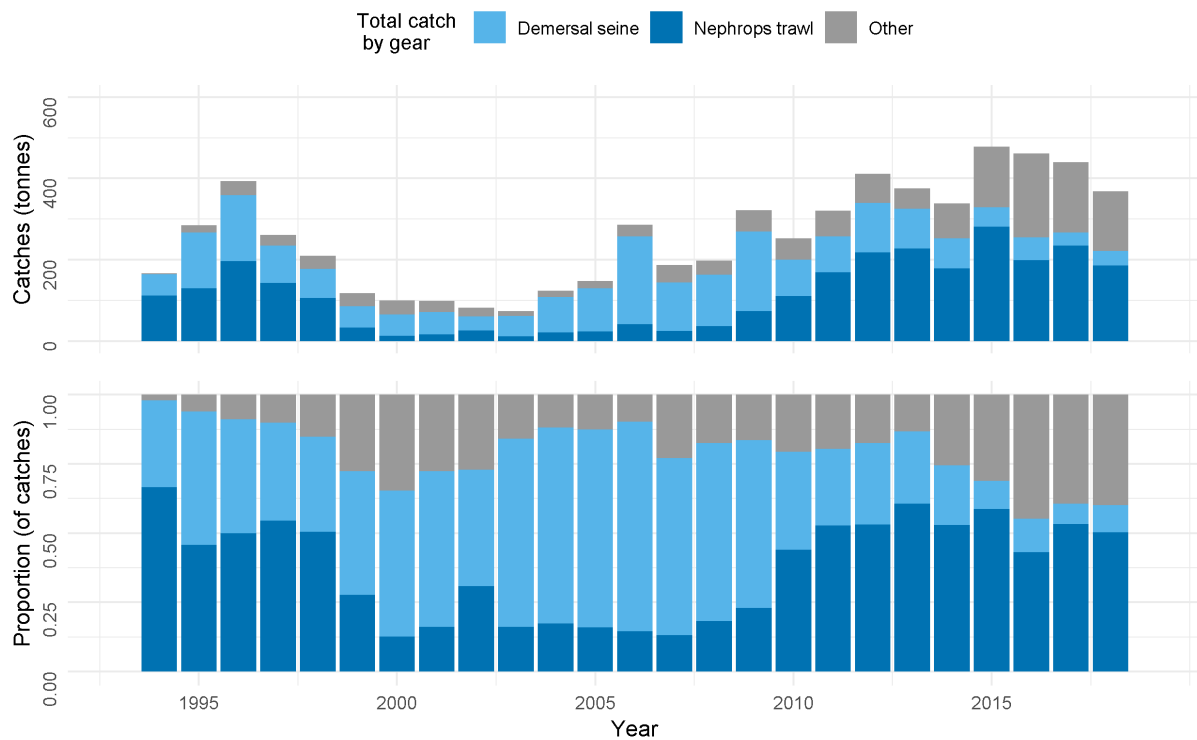


Figure 4. Megrim. Total catch (landings) by fishing gear since 2000, according to statistics from the Directorate of Fisheries.

Mynd 4. Stórkjafra. Landaður afli eftir veiðarfærum frá árinu 2000, samkvæmt aflaskráningarkerfi Fiskistofu.

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

Tafla 1. Stórkjafra. Fjöldi íslenskra skipa sem landað hafa yfir 1000 kg af stórkjöftu og allur landaður afli eftir veiðarfærum.

YEAR	NUMBER OF VESSELS			CATCHES (TONNES)			
	<i>Seiners</i>	<i>Nephrops Trawlers</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Demersal seine</i>	<i>Nephrops trawl</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Sum</i>
2000	8	4	7	53	12	31	96
2001	12	6	7	56	15	26	97
2002	7	9	6	33	23	20	76
2003	10	4	3	50	7	11	68
2004	13	4	4	85	21	14	120
2005	15	5	8	106	22	18	146
2006	17	9	7	216	40	28	284
2007	13	5	9	119	23	45	187
2008	19	7	8	126	36	34	196
2009	23	7	10	191	72	53	316
2010	17	11	12	89	110	52	251
2011	12	14	10	89	169	62	320
2012	17	14	9	134	171	104	409
2013	12	13	8	98	228	50	376
2014	9	14	10	74	171	82	327
2015	8	12	14	48	279	152	479
2016	11	10	17	55	190	215	460
2017	15	8	7	32	235	173	440
2018	8	9	13	36	185	147	368

The number of vessels accounting for 95% of the annual catches of megrim in Icelandic waters, increased with increased catches in 1994-1996 from about 30 to 80 vessels (Figure 5). From 1996-2003, a drop in the number of vessels coincided with reduced catches. Since 2005, less than 30 vessels have accounted for 95% of annual catches (Figure 5).

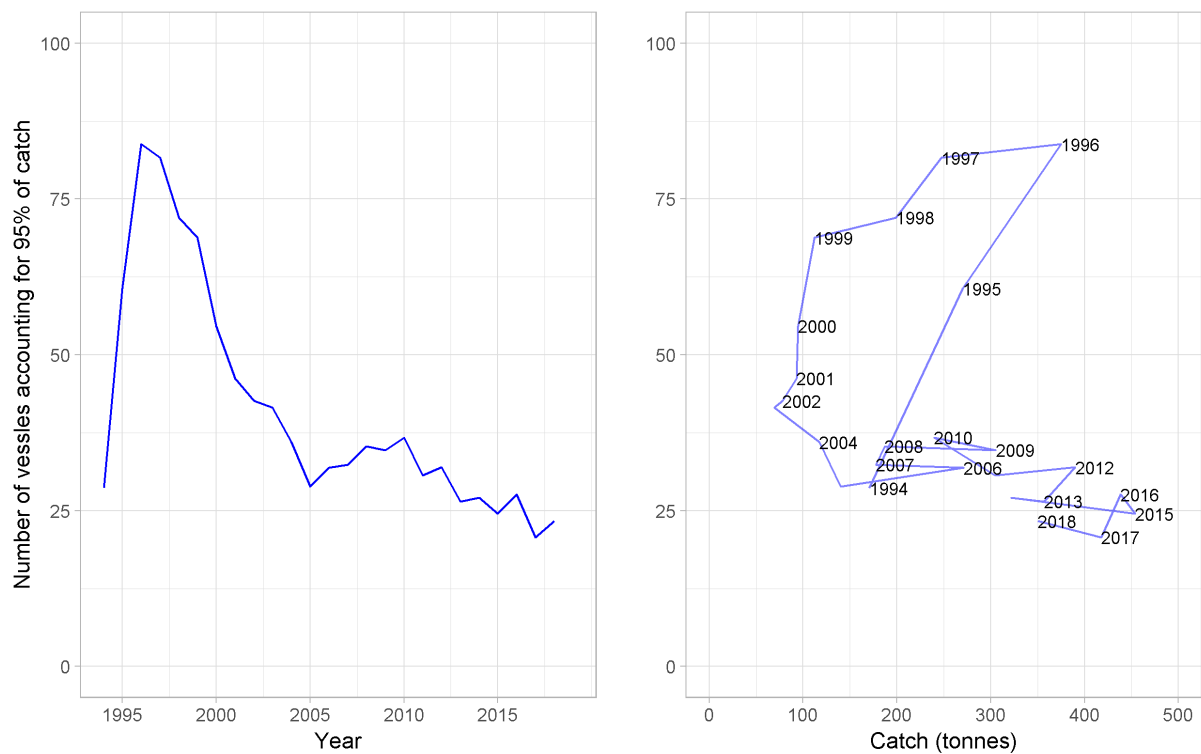


Figure 5. Megrim. Number of vessels (all gear types) accounting for 95% of the total catch annually since 1994. Left: Plotted against year. Right: Plotted against total catch. Data from the Directorate of Fisheries.

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

AGE DISTRIBUTION OF LANDED MEGRIM

Although only being caught as bycatch, samples are collected from landed catch (Table 2, Figure 6). The landings are mostly 7-12 years old fish, with 8-11 years olds amounting to over 70% of the numbers in most recent years.

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

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

Year	<i>Demersal seine</i>		<i>Nephrops trawl</i>		<i>Demersal trawl</i>	
	Samples	Otoliths	Samples	Otoliths	Samples	Otoliths
2010	9	225	8	200	0	0
2011	8	200	15	401	0	0
2012	12	299	19	475	2	50
2013	11	275	12	300	4	100
2014	4	100	4	95	0	0
2015	5	124	9	225	1	25
2016	3	75	5	125	1	25
2017	2	50	7	175	0	0
2018	2	50	3	75	1	25

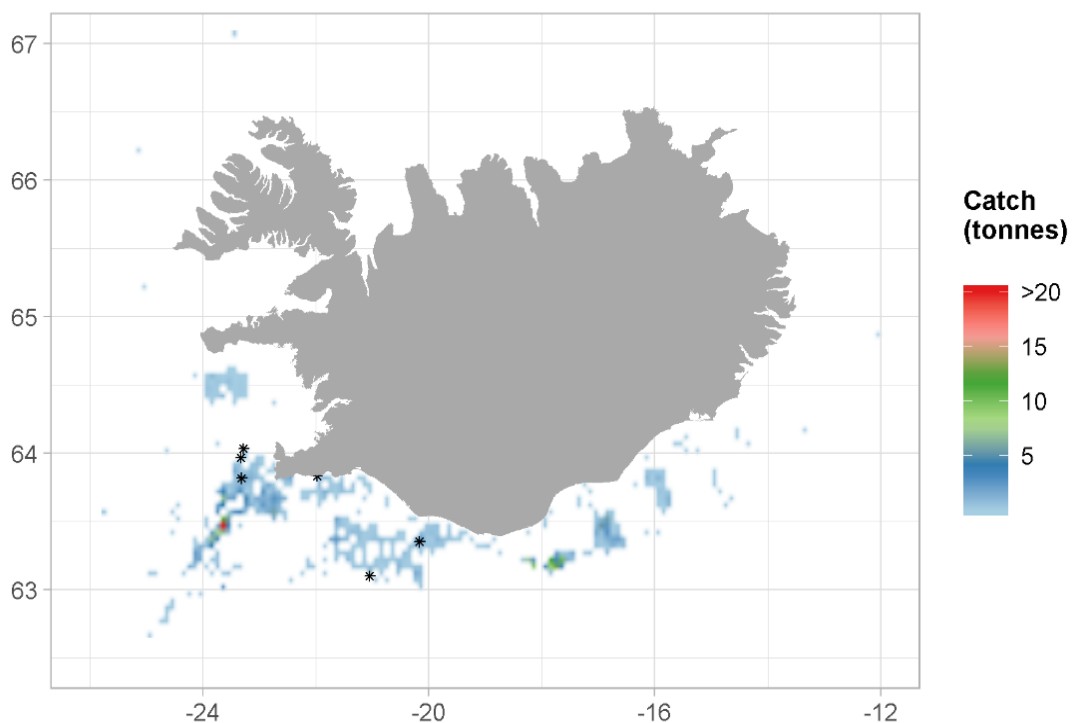


Figure 6. Megrim. Fishing grounds in 2018 as reported in logbooks (colours) and positions of samples taken from landings (asterisks).

Mynd 6. Stórkjafra. veiðisvæði við Ísland árið 2018 samkvæmt afladagbókum (litir) og staðsetningar sýna úr lönduðum afla (stjörnur).

LENGTH DISTRIBUTION OF LANDED MEGRIM

Length distribution of landed megrim was relatively stable in 2003-2009, with average length ranging between 47 and 49 cm in most years (Figure 7). Since 2010 landings of larger megrim (50 cm and larger) have been increasing.

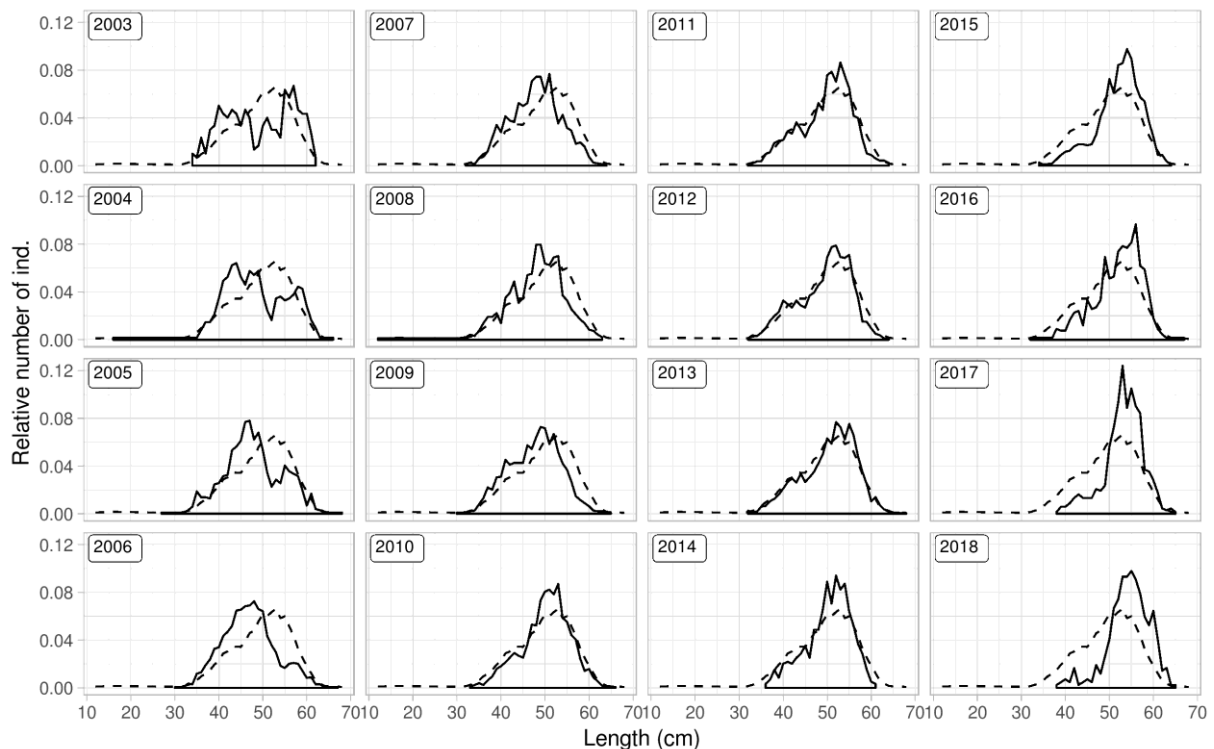


Figure 7. Megrim. Length distribution from landed catch. The dotted line represents the mean length distribution for all years.

Mynd 7. Stórkjafsta. Lengdardreifing aflasýna frá árinu 2003 með meðallengdardreifingu 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 megrim fishery. 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 and therefore the results for 2011 are not presented. The spring survey is considered to measure changes in abundance/biomass better than the autumn survey.

Figure 8 shows both a recruitment index based on abundance of megrim smaller than 30 cm, and trends in various biomass indices. Survey length disaggregated abundance indices are shown in Figures 9-10, abundance and changes in spatial distribution in Figures 11-14.

Total biomass index and the biomass index for megrim larger than 40 cm (harvestable part of the stock) increased steadily between 2000 and 2007 but has since been relatively stable (Figure 8). The index of megrim larger than 53 cm has been increasing for the last two decades, suggesting a decrease in fishing mortality. The index of juvenile abundance (<30 cm) has been low for the last seven years.

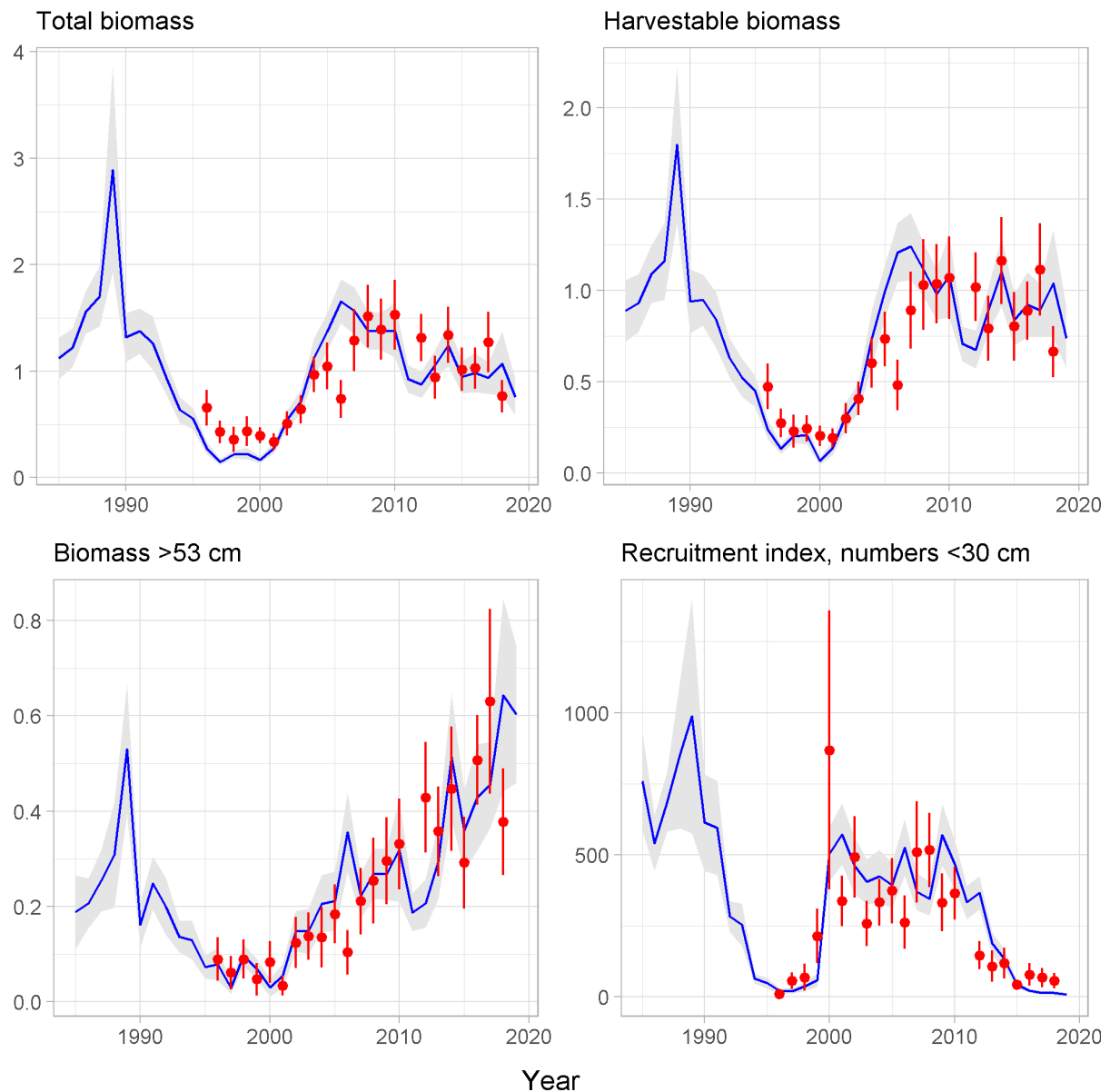


Figure 8. Megrím. Total biomass indices (upper left) and harvestable biomass indices (>40 cm) (upper, right), biomass indices of larger ind. (>53cm) (lower left) and juvenile abundance indices (<30 cm) (lower right) from the spring survey (blue) from 1985 and autumn survey (red) from 1996, along with the standard deviation.

Mynd 8. Stórkjafta. Stofnviðitala (efri til vinstri), viðitala veiðistofns (40 cm og stærri, efri til hægri) og viðitala stærri einstaklinga (53 cm og stærri, neðri til vinstri) og nýliðunarviðitala (neðri til hægri), úr stofnmælingu botnfiska að vori (blátt) frá árinu 1985 og hausti (rautt) frá árinu 1996, ásamt staðalfrávik.

From the onset of the spring survey until 1993 there were little changes in the general length distribution of megrim and the average length of measured fish ranged between 36 and 39 cm (Figure 9). In the 1994-1999 surveys there were relatively more larger fish, increasing the average length to 44 cm in 1998. In the survey of 2000 there was a sudden change in the length distribution of megrim with relatively high number of small individuals and the average length fell down to 26.5 cm. This is seen as a sudden increase in recruitment in 2000 (Figure 8). Although the recruitment continued to be high the following years, the length distribution gradually shifted towards larger fish with increase in average length reaching over 50 cm in 2018 and 2019. Comparable changes in length distribution of megrim are also seen in the autumn survey (Figure 10).

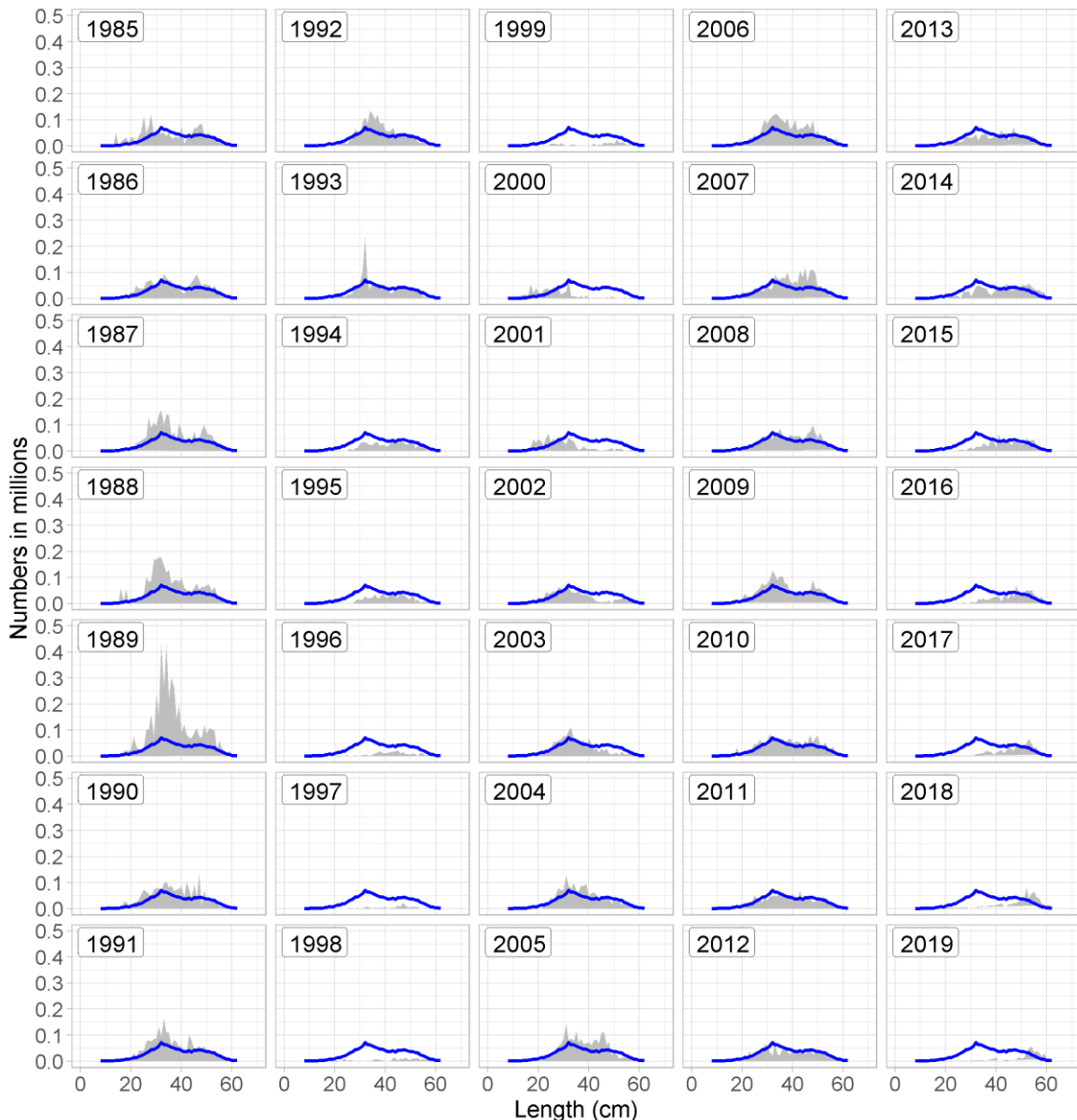


Figure 9. Megrim. Length disaggregated abundance indices from the spring survey. The blue line shows the mean for all years

Mynd 9. Stórkjafra. Lengdarskiptar vísitölur úr stofnmælingu botnfiska að vori frá 1985 ásamt meðaltali allra ára (blá lína).

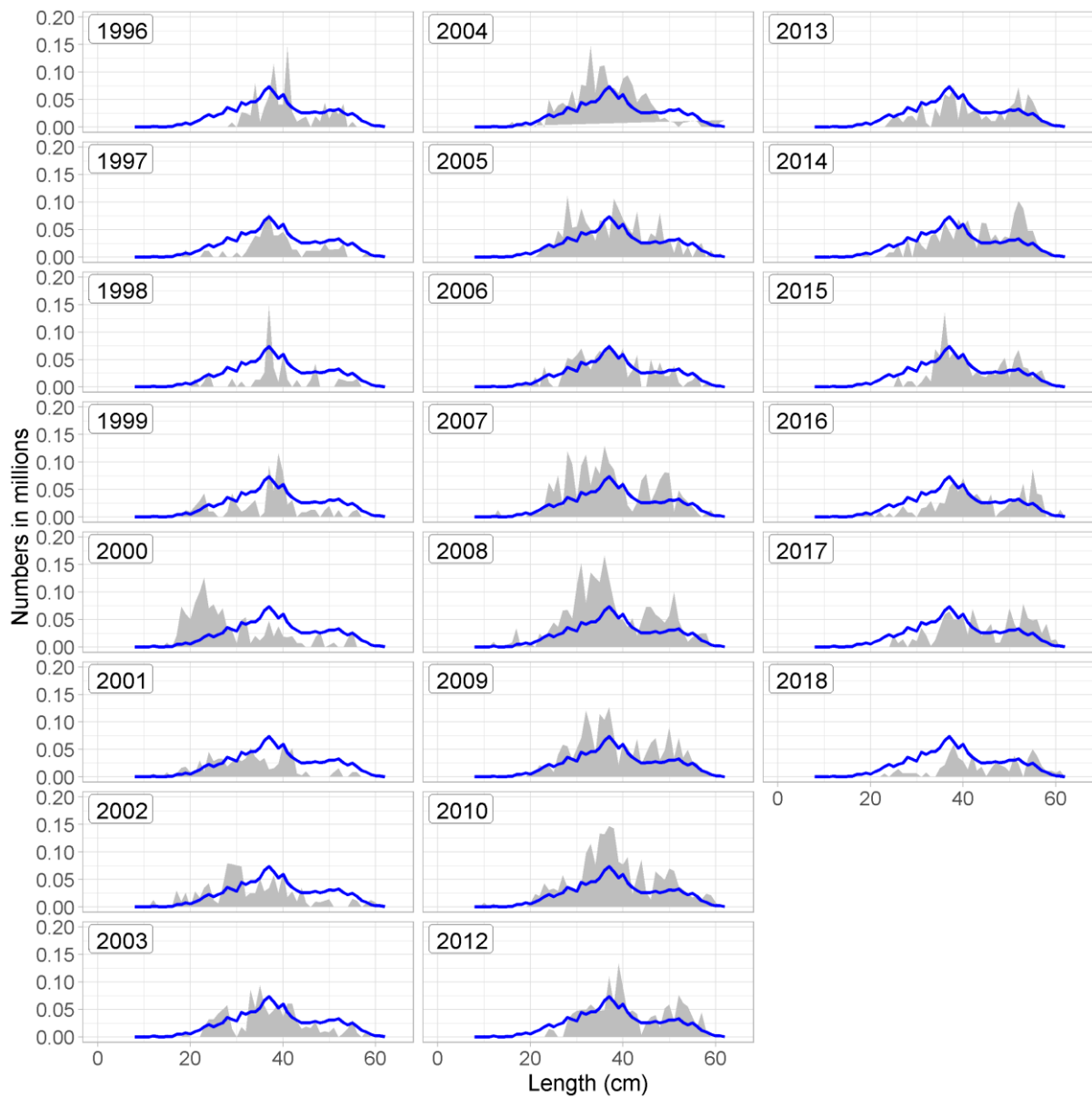


Figure 10. Megrím. Length disaggregated abundance indices from the autumn survey. The blue line shows the mean for all years.

Mynd 10. Stórkjafa. Lengdarskiptar vísitölur úr stofnmælingu botnfiska að hausti frá 1996 ásamt meðaltali allra ára (blá lína).

Megrim were mostly caught off the southern part of the country in the spring survey in 2019, particularly in the SW area (Figure 11). Spatial distribution of the biomass index of megrim in the spring survey has been relatively stable since 2007, with highest proportion of megrim caught in the SW area (Figure 12).

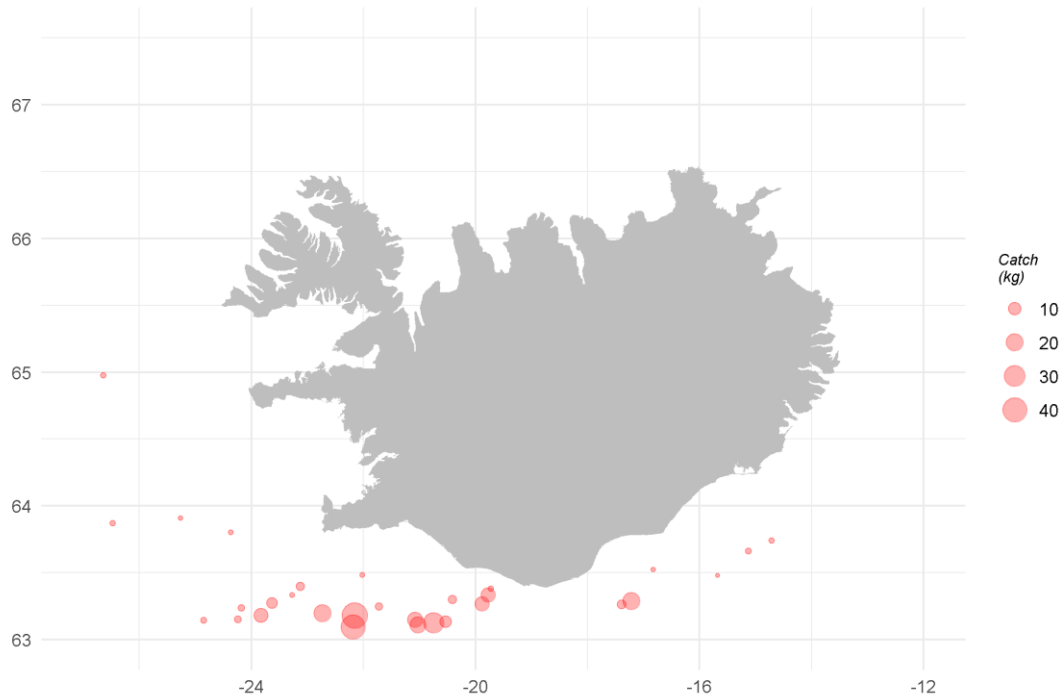


Figure 11. Megrim. Spatial distribution in the spring survey in 2019

Mynd 11. Stórkjafta. Útbreiðsla í stofnmælingu botnfiska að vori 2019.

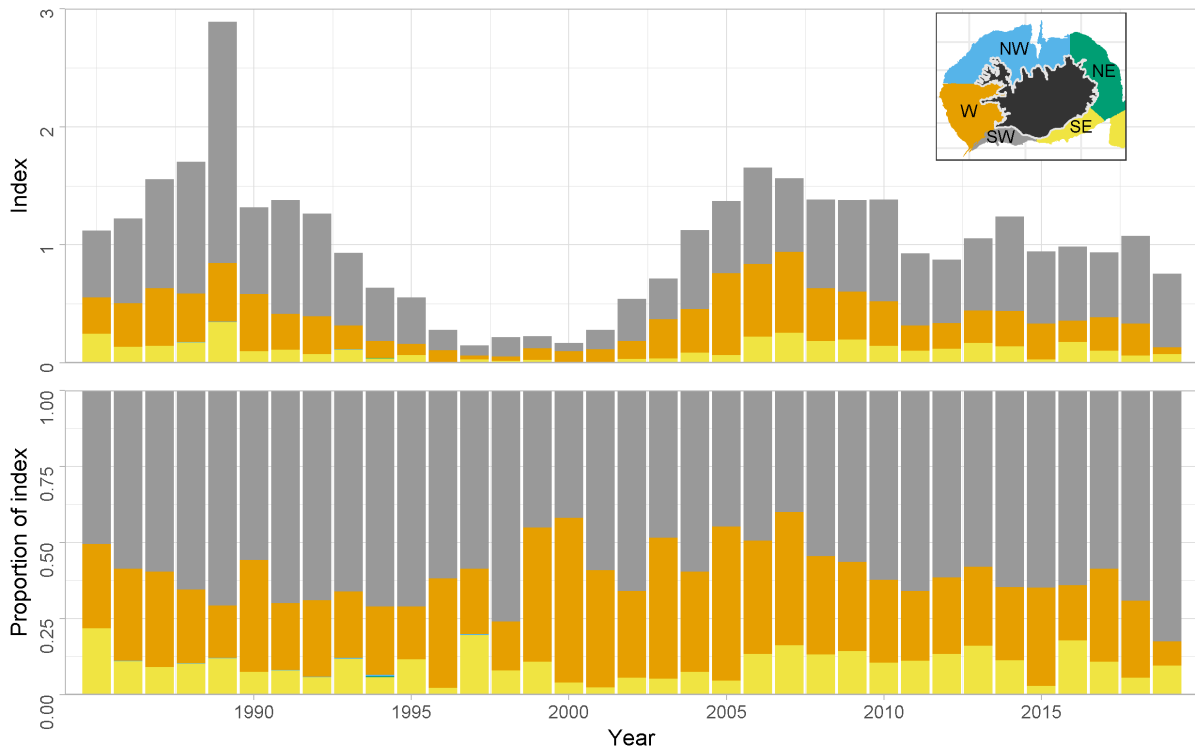


Figure 12. Megrim. Spatial distribution of biomass indices from the spring survey.

Mynd 12. Stórkjafta. Dreifing lífmassavísitölu í stofnmælingu botnfiska að vori.

In the autumn survey of 2018, the general distribution was similar to the spring survey (Figure 13). The same is true for the spatial distribution of megrim in the autumn survey since 1996 (Figure 14), where most of the biomass has been measured in the SW area, followed by the W and SE areas.

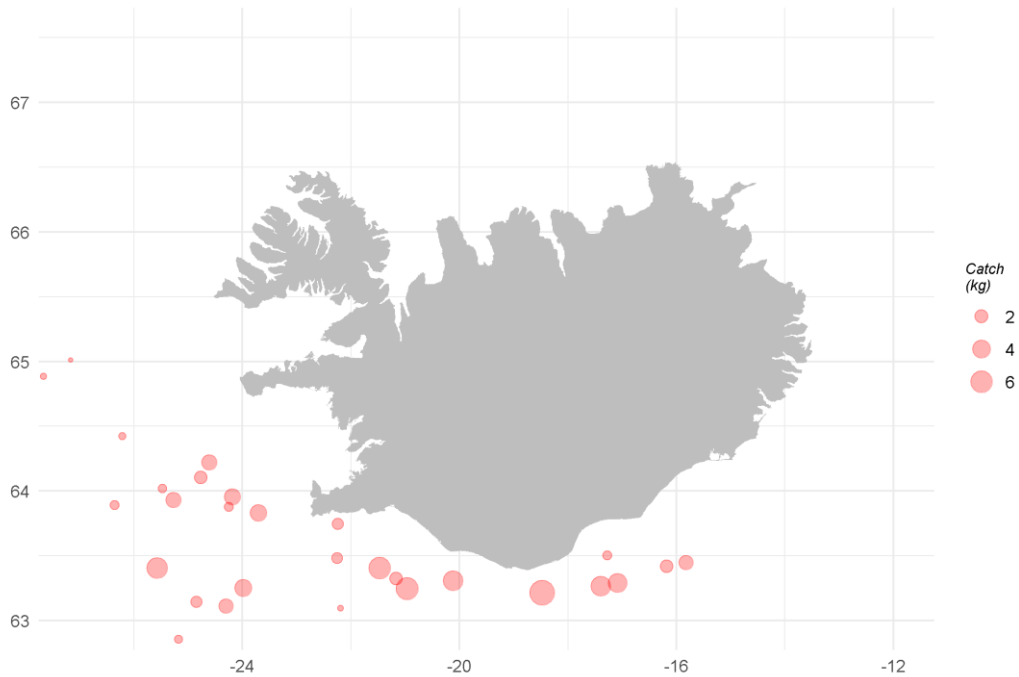


Figure 13. Megrim. Spatial distribution of megrim in 2018 in the autumn survey.

Mynd 13. Stórkjafa. Útbreiðsla í stofnmælingu botnfiska að hausti árið 2018.

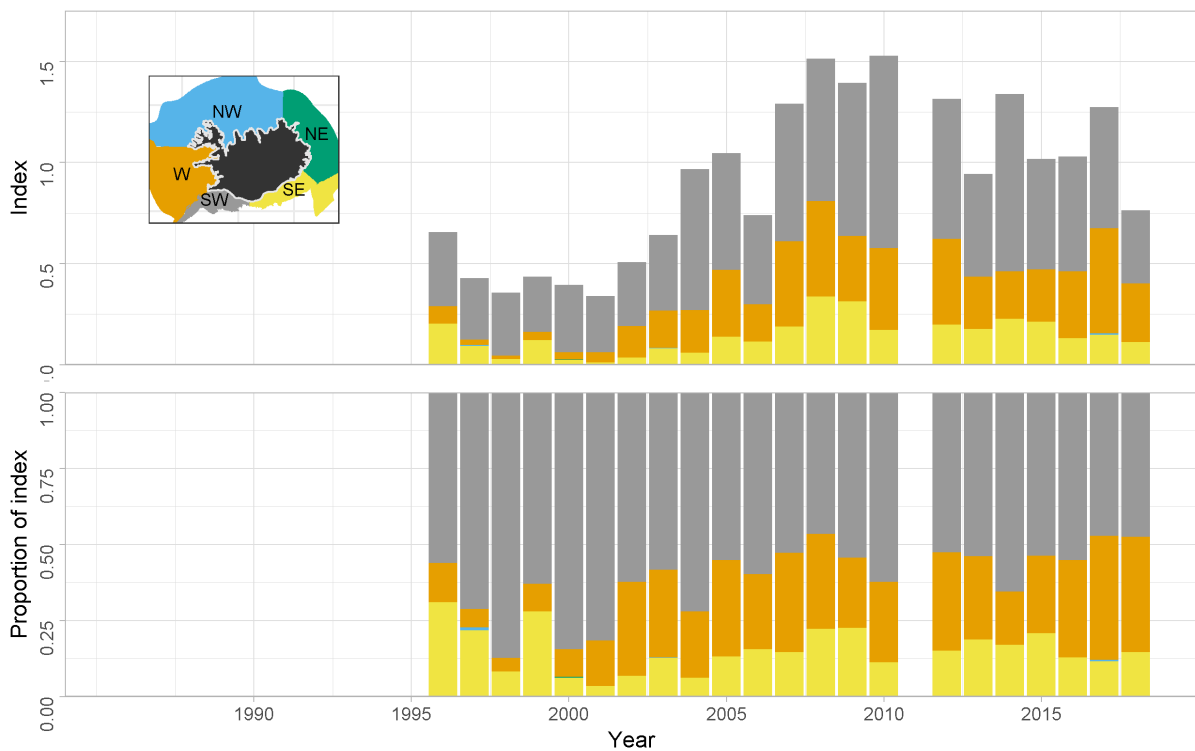


Figure 14. Megrim. Spatial distribution of biomass indices from the autumn survey.

Mynd 14. Stórkjafa. Dreifing lífmassavísitölu í stofnmælingu botnfiska að hausti.

MANAGEMENT

Megrim is only caught as a bycatch and usually in small quantities. The Marine and Freshwater Research Institute (MFRI) has therefore not made any recommendation on TAC for megrim.