



SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL AND STACFIS SHRIMP ASSESSMENT MEETING – SEPTEMBER 2024

Division 3M Northern shrimp (*Pandalus borealis*) – Interim Monitoring Update

By

J.M. Casas Sánchez

CN Instituto Español de Oceanografía-CSIC, Apdo. 1552, 36200 Vigo, Spain
e-mail:mikel.casas@ieo.csic.es

Abstract

This document updates some of the indices for northern shrimp (*Pandalus borealis*) harvested within NAFO Divisions 3M. The last assessment for this resource was completed in September 2023 where the Scientific Council recommended that the shrimp fishery, after closing in 2022, be kept closed in 2024 due to the low values of the biomass estimated (below B_{lim}) in the summer survey in 2023.

In 2024 due to the moratorium the catches and effort of the directed shrimp fishery is expected to be zero. The total and female biomass indices estimated from EU survey were 979 and 835 tons, increasing by 7% and 8% respectively compared to 2023. These values are between the lowest estimated in the historical survey series, confirming the downward trend started in 2020 and the depletion state of the stock. Although the abundance in 2024 of age 2 (2022-year class), estimated from the main gear and small bag attached on the cod-end increased by 83 % and 264% respectively over the previous year, it remains at very low levels showing the weakness of the 2022-year class.

The stock is below B_{lim} and it is again since 2021 in the collapse zone defined by the NAFO PA framework. To be consistent with the precautionary approach, fishing mortality should be kept as close to zero as possible when a stock is in the collapse zone. Therefore, considering the decline of the stock and the poor prospects for recruitment to the fishable stock in the coming years, Scientific Council advises that the fishing mortality and catch be set as close to zero as possible by 2025 and 2026.

UE Bottom Trawl Research Survey Trends

Summer multi-species research surveys have been conducted onboard the Spanish vessels R/V Cornide de Saavedra since 1988 and R/V Vizconde de Eza since 2003. From 1988 to 2002 the indexes estimated by the R/V Cornide de Saavedra were calibrated and transformed to the R/V Vizconde de Eza following the Warren's method (Casas *et al.*, 2004). Fishing sets of 30 minute duration, with a tow speed of 3 knots, were randomly allocated to strata covering the Flemish Cap Bank to a depth of 1462 m since 2004, with the number of sets in a stratum proportional to its size (Figure 1). Both vessels used the same gear (Lofoten) with a codend mesh size of 35 mm. In order to obtain information about the juvenile fraction of the stock, since 2001 a small bag with 10 mm mesh size was attached to the cod-end of the Lofoten gear. Different sensors (SIMRAD ITI, SCANMARK, MARPORT) were employed along the historical surveys to monitor the net geometry. Details of the survey design and fishing protocols are outlined in (Casas, 2008).

In 2024 the survey was carried out from July 6 to July 31. As previous years, the area prospected in Flemish Cap was spread up to 1450 meters. The haul number carried out in the traditional 19 strata with depths minor than 740 m was of 120. The area with depths higher than 740 m was sampled by means of 61 additional hauls proportionally distributed in the new 13 strata.



The evolution of the shrimp stock (Table 1 and figure 2) show how the increase of biomass produced from 1988 to 1992, coincided with a period of time where there was not a directed fishery to shrimp and the cod stock began to decline. With the beginning of the shrimp fishery in 1993 the biomass declined up to 1997. After that from 1998 to 2008 the stock recovered reasonably well although with high annual variability (historical maximums in 2002 and 2005 were followed by years with lower biomass but at a relative high level). In 2009 the biomass markedly decreased with values close to the lowest of the historical series in that year. In 2010 despite of the biomass increase about 77% compared to 2009 this was still among the lowest in the total of the historical series. From 2011 to 2014 the total and female biomass decreased successively and were recorded the lowest values in the historical series showing the worsening and depletion state of the shrimp stock. Since 2015 the biomass indexes increased year after year, and they were above B_{lim} from 2018. In 2020 the shrimp fishery was resumed, and the female biomass experienced some decrease but remained above B_{lim} . In 2021 the total and female biomass decreased for the second consecutive year and they were below B_{lim} . This downward trend and depletion state were confirmed in 2022 (862 t and 705 t), 2023 (912 t and 774 t) and 2024 (979 t and 835 t).

The biomass and abundance estimated in 2024 EU survey were mainly represented by female (Figure 3); Young specimens (mainly males) increased by 32% in number compared to 2023 but remain well below average.

Considering the abundance at age 2 as indicator of recruitment, the number of shrimps of two years old in the EU survey from the main gear and from the juvenile bag were estimated and the index average-weighted (Table 2, Figure 4). Since 2005, both indices showed low values indicating the succession of weak year classes. In 2020 the abundance at age 2 (around 15 mm CL) increased significantly compared to 2019 suggesting the emergence of a relative strong year-class (2018). However, in 2021 the 2018-year class (age 3) was not as strong as expected and the following year classes “2019-2021” (age 2 at 2021, 2022 and 2023 respectively) were very much lower indicating the weakness of the that year classes (Figure 4a).

Although the abundance at age 2, estimated this year from the main gear increased by 83% compared to 2023, the estimated values remains very low and show the weakness of 2022 year class.

The youngest specimens (age 1, around 11 mm CL) do not appear in the catches of the main gear but they were present in the small mesh size bag attached on the cod-end increasing the abundance by 151% compared to 2023 (Figure 4b). However, the estimated values remain very low showing the weakness of 2023 year class.

Fishery and Management

Catch trends

The fishery for northern shrimp at Flemish Cap began in the spring of 1993 and has since continued with estimated annual catches (as estimated by STACFIS, Table 3 and Figure 5) of approximately 26 000 t to 48 000 tons in the years 1993 through 1996. After 1996 the catches were lower and rising slowly from 26 000 t in 1997 to 53 000 t in 2000 and 2001. There was 50 000 t taken in 2002. The catch increased in 2003, reaching the highest value in the catches series (64 000 t), declining in the following years to about 1 766 t in 2010. Since 2011 following the NAFO SC recommendation no effort was directed to shrimp fishery in Flemish Cap and in 2020 the NAFO Scientific Council advised to resume the shrimp fishery with catches not exceeding the 2009 level (5 448 t). In 2020 the effort directed to shrimp (around 19 days) was very low with testimonial catches of 79 t. In 2021 the catches recorded from STATLANT and biologist expert were 5 905 t carried out during approximately 479 days of fishing. These catches differ slightly from those estimated by the CESAG working group (5 703 t). Since 2022 the shrimp fishery was in moratorium and there was not recorded catches for shrimp.

Exploitation rate

Considering the Exploitation rate estimated as nominal catches divided by the EU survey biomass index of the same year (Table 4 and Figure 6), this was high in the years 1994-1997 when biomass was generally lower. In the years 1998-2004 the catch rate has been rather stable at a lower level. From 2005 to 2008 despite the exploitation rate remained stable at relative low values (between 1.9-1.5), the UE survey indexes estimated decreased year after year. This trend continued in the following years despite the moratorium established on 3M shrimp stock from 2011. Since 2015 there has been a change in the downward trend and the survey indexes

increased successively. In 2020, the fishery was resumed but the effort directed to shrimp fisheries and catches were residual resulting in a very low exploitation rate (0.01). In 2021 the exploitation rate increased notably (3.2) due to the increase in catches and the decrease in the UE survey index. With the moratorium established since 2022 the current exploitation rate is expected to be close to zero.

Effort and TAC regulation

The shrimp fishery in 3M is actually managed by effort regulation and new information of catch rates and the posterior standardizing CPUE are needed to provide annual indices of stock biomass related with the stock exploitation.

From 2011 meeting, Scientific Council (NAFO 2011) noted the stock was at very low level in the time series: bellow B_{lim} and remaining in a state of impaired recruitment. Therefore, Scientific Council recommended that fishing mortality be set as close to zero as possible. In 2019 after five years of continuous increases of biomass the stock was well above B_{lim} and NAFO SC advised to resume the fishery in 2020 with catches not to exceed 2009 level (5 448 t). Finally at the annual meeting in September 2019, NAFO FC agreed to re-open the shrimp fishery by regulating the effort with 2640 days.

From EU Survey summer in 2021-2024 the female biomass decreased by 70%-88% compared to 2020. This decrease confirms the downward trend that began in 2020 and that places the stock well below B_{lim} in 2022-2024. Considering the strong decline of the stock and the poor prospects about the future recruitments in the fishable stock the next years, Scientific Council is concerns that the stock will remain at low levels and advises that the catch for 2025 and 2026 be set as close to zero as possible.

Shrimp predation by cod and redfish (Figure 7)

From 2015 to 2019, the incipient recovery of the shrimp stock coincided with the decline of redfish and cod stocks suggesting that the historic evolution of shrimp biomass may also not be related only to fishing mortality. Accordance to this, studies based in multispecies model developed in Gadget which covers the main commercial stocks in Flemish Cap over the period 1988-2012 (Pérez-Rodríguez et al. 2016) and 1988-2016 (Pérez-Rodríguez and D. González-Troncoso 2018), suggested that, predation by redfish and cod, together with fishing have been the main factors driving the shrimp stock to the collapse. Although in 2021 the decrease in shrimp biomass coincided with the decrease in the populations of redfish (23%) and cod (34%) and therefore it could be caused mainly by the effect of fishing on shrimp in 2021, from 2022 with the restoration of the moratorium on the shrimp fishery, the low values of the shrimp biomass estimated correspond again with increases in the biomass of cod.

Conclusions

Although the Female biomass index increased by 8% in 2024, the stock continues at a very low level and well below B_{lim} in the collapse zone defined by the NAFO PA framework. The abundance at age 2 since 2021 remains among the lowest of the series and reveal the weaknesses of the last yearly classes and the recruitment process.

The low value of shrimp biomass in 2024 was again related with the increase of cod stock (their most important predator).

The new information from EU Survey summer in 2024 confirm the worsening of the shrimp stock that continues inside of the collapse zone and the poor prospects for recruitment in a short time in the fishable stock. To be consistent with the precautionary approach, Scientific Council advises that the fishing mortality and catch should be kept as close to zero as possible by 2025 and 2026.

References

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Pérez-Rodríguez, A. and D. González-Troncoso. 2018. Update of the Flemish Cap multispecies model GadCap as part of the EU SC05 project: "Multispecies Fisheries Assessment for NAFO". NAFO SCR Doc.18/024, Serial No.N6808.

Table 1. Total and Female Biomass (tons) of shrimp estimated by swept area method in the years 1988-2024 on EU Flemish Cap surveys.

Year	Total Biomass (t)	Total Mean Catch per tow (kg)	Female Biomass (t)	Female Mean Catch per tow (kg)
1988	5615	6.98	4525	5.63
1989	2252	2.80	1359	1.69
1990	3405	4.23	1363	1.69
1991	11352	14.12	6365	7.91
1992	24508	30.48	15472	19.24
1993	11673	14.52	6923	8.61
1994 ¹	3879	4.82	2945	3.66
1995	7276	9.05	4857	6.04
1996	10461	13.01	5132	6.38
1997	7449	9.26	4885	6.07
1998 ²	39367	48.95	11444	14.23
1999	24692	30.70	13669	17.00
2000	19003	23.63	10172	12.65
2001	27204	33.83	13336	16.58
2002	36510	45.40	17091	21.25
2003	21087	26.22	11589	14.41
2004	20182	25.10	12081	15.02
2005	30675	38.14	14381	17.88
2006	16235	20.19	11359	14.27
2007	17046	21.20	12843	15.97
2008	11092	13.79	8630	10.73
2009	2797	3.48	1764	2.19
2010	4894	6.09	3819	4.31
2011	1621	2.02	1132	1.39
2012	1055	1.31	791	0.98
2013	844	1.05	691	0.86
2014	900	1.12	716	0.89
2015	1551	1.93	1079	1.34
2016	2520	3.08	1982	2.46
2017	2885	3.54	2304	2.86
2018	4394	5.31	4051	4.90
2019	9273	11.53	8486	10.55
2020	6734	8.37	6048	7.52
2021	2101	2.61	1792	2.23
2022	861	1.07	705	0.88
2023	912	1.13	774	0.96
2024	979	1.22	835	1.04

Table 2. Abundance indices at age 1 and 2 from the EU survey main gear (Lofoten) and small mesh size bag attached on the cod-end (juvenile bag). Each series was standardized to its mean.

Year	Lofoten gear				Juvenile bag			
	Age 1		Age 2		Age 1		Age 2	
	('00000)	Av. Pond.	('00000)	Av. Pond.	('000)	Av. Pond.	('000)	Av. Pond.
1996	0	0.00	3424	1.17				
1997	0	0.00	695	0.24				
1998				0.00				
1999	13	0.15	4735	1.62				
2000	94	1.07	1148	0.39				
2001	27	0.14	3711	1.29	380	0.06	1361	0.29
2002	1806	9.52	11004	3.81	6044	1.00	2125	0.45
2003	146	0.77	13869	4.81	48165	7.95	0	0.00
2004			27415	9.50	2314	0.38	41818	8.91
2005			1792	0.62	9515	1.57	3741	0.80
2006			809	0.28	953	0.16	7498	1.60
2007			282	0.10	5123	0.85	3824	0.81
2008			473	0.16	5916	0.98	4969	1.06
2009	6	0.03	1514	0.52	1504	0.25	3011	0.64
2010	77	0.40	1106	0.38	6102	1.01	954	0.20
2011	2	0.01	611	0.21	1050	0.17	2440	0.52
2012			216	0.07	42	0.01	160	0.03
2013	10	0.05	63	0.02	195	0.03	102	0.02
2014	0	0.00	242	0.08	239	0.04	56	0.01
2015			1111	0.39	61	0.01	427	0.09
2016	2	0.01	230	0.08	1592	0.26	390	0.08
2017			676	0.23	6669	1.10	1411	0.30
2018			1048	0.36	327	0.05	552	0.12
2019	9	0.05	1010	0.35	31594	5.21	3536	0.75
2020			1449	0.50	5912	0.98	25332	5.40
2021			125	0.04	4729	0.78	6582	1.40
2022	0	0.00	61	0.02	2836	0.47	894	0.19
2023			140	0.05	1198	0.20	322	0.07
2024			256	0.09	3007	0.50	1171	0.25

Table 4. Exploitation Rate of Shrimp (Div. 3M) as Nominal Catches (tons) divided by UE Survey Female Index (tons).

Year	Nominal Catches	UE Survey Female Index	Exploitation Rate
1993	25611	6923	3.7
1994	24579	2945	8.3
1995	33471	4857	6.9
1996	48299	5132	9.4
1997	26028	4885	5.3
1998	30321	11444	2.6
1999	43439	13669	3.2
2000	52867	10172	5.2
2001	53389	13336	4.0
2002	50214	17091	2.9
2003	63970	11589	5.5
2004	45757	12081	3.8
2005	27479	14381	1.9
2006	18595	11359	1.6
2007	20741	12843	1.6
2008	13985	8630	1.6
2009	5448	1764	3.1
2010	1988	3819	0.5
2011*	0	1132	0.0
2012*	0	791	0.0
2013*	0	691	0.0
2014*	0	716	0.0
2015*	0	1079	0.0
2016*	0	1982	0.0
2017*	0	2304	0.0
2018*	0	4051	0.0
2019*	0	8486	0.0
2020	79	6048	~0.01
2021	5905	1792	3.3
2022*	0	705	0.0
2023*	0	774	0.0
2024*	0	835	0.0

*moratorium on fishing shrimp in 3M

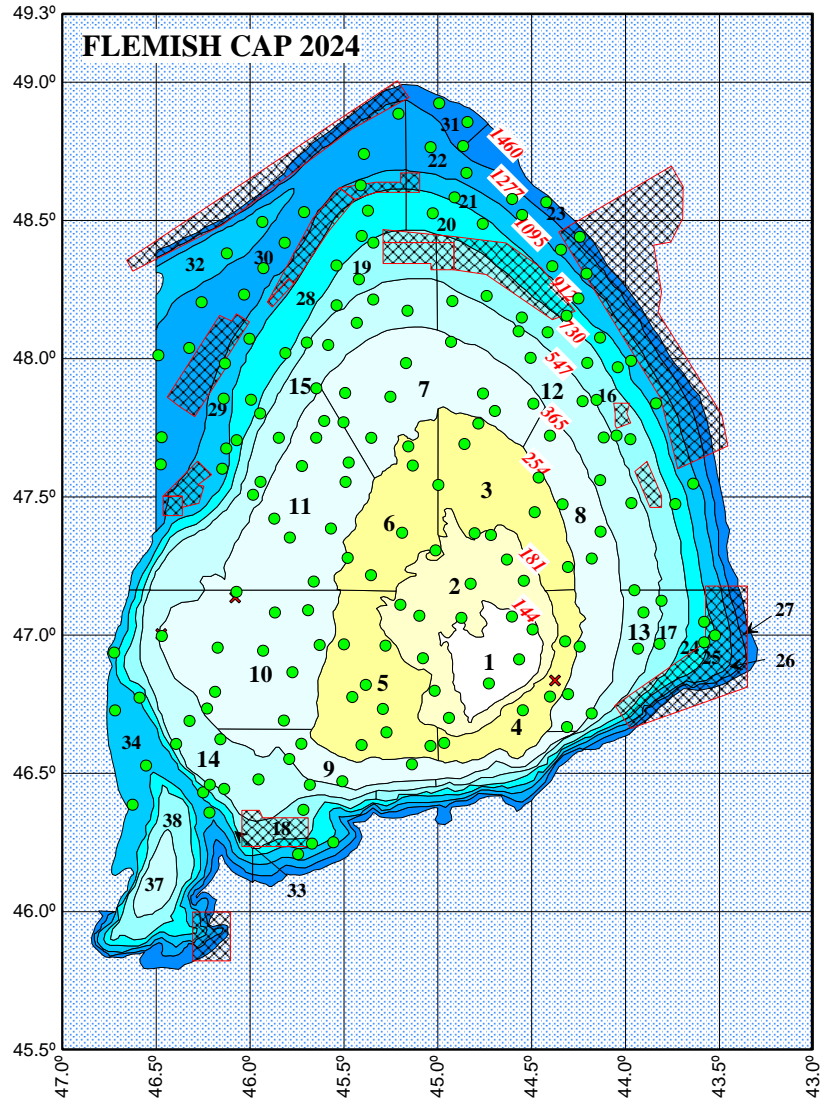


Figure 1. Chart with the positions of the hauls carried out in EU Flemish Cap survey 2024.

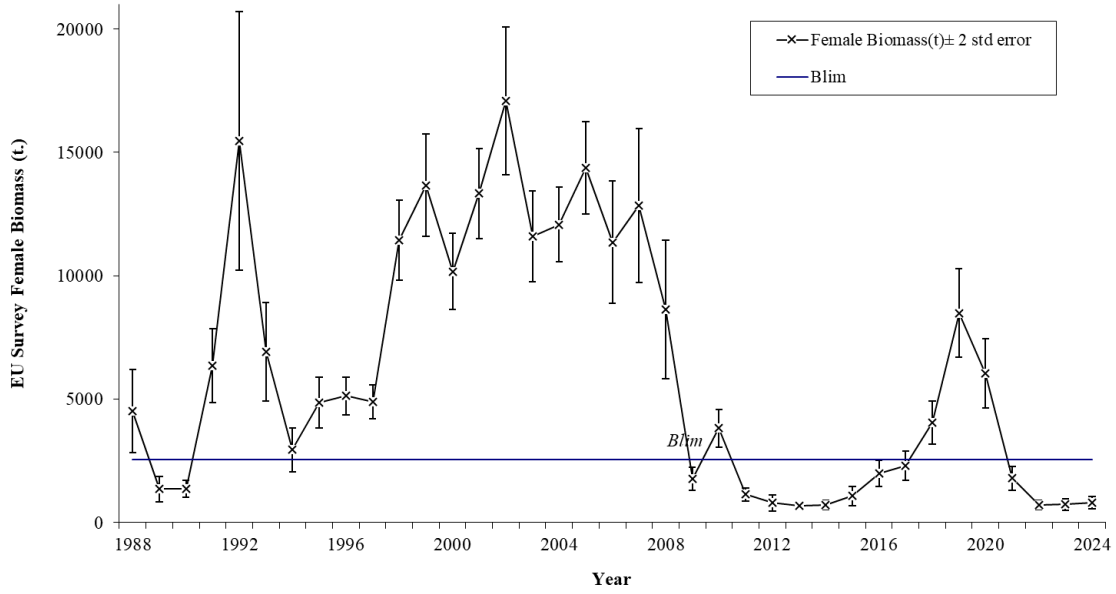


Figure 2. EU survey female shrimp biomass in the years 1988-2024 on Flemish Cap and B_{lim} proxy of 3M shrimp stock.

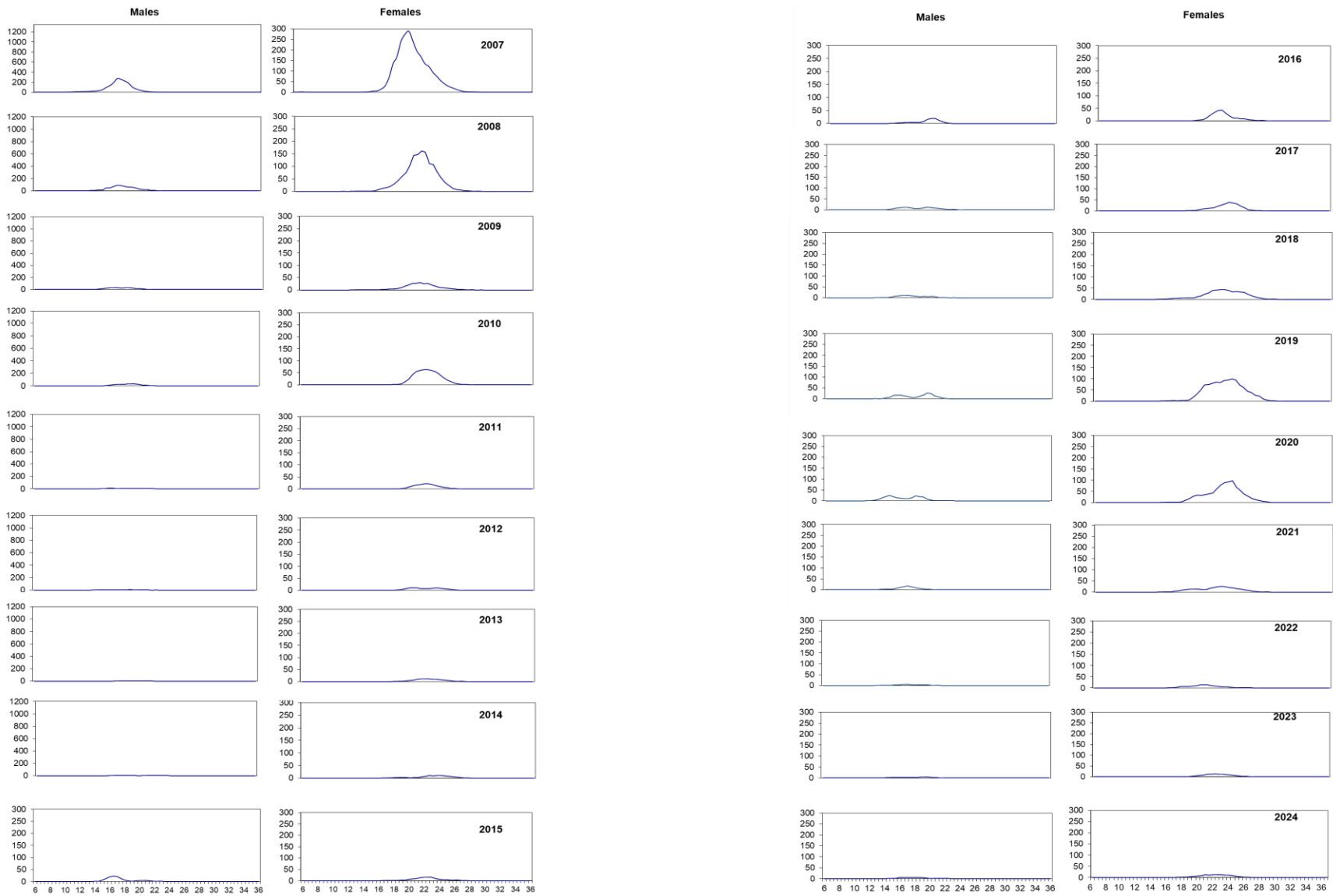


Figure 3. Shrimp size distribution from Flemish Cap 2007 -2024 surveys. Y-Axis=Frequency (10^6), X-Axis=Carapace Length (mm).

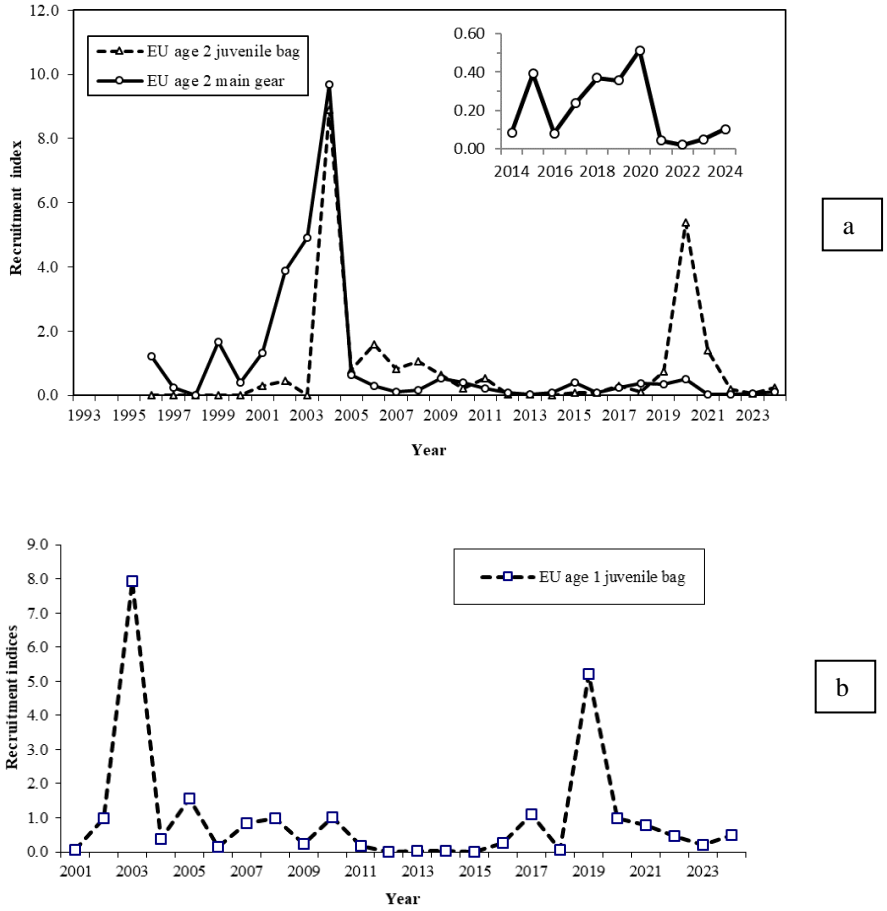


Figure 4. Abundance indexes at age 2 (a) and age 1 (b) obtained in EU Flemish Cap surveys from Lofoten gear (black line) and juvenile bag (dotted line).

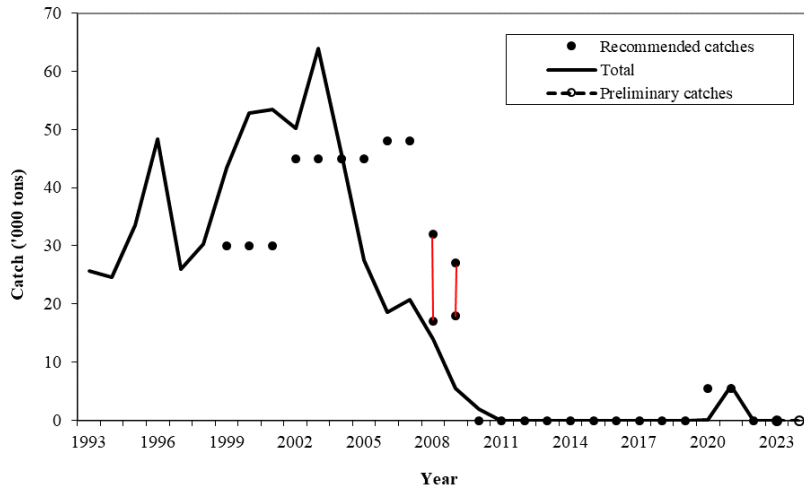


Figure 5. Trends in NAFO Div. 3M northern shrimp (*Pandalus borealis*) catch (tons) and recommended catches over the period 1993-2024

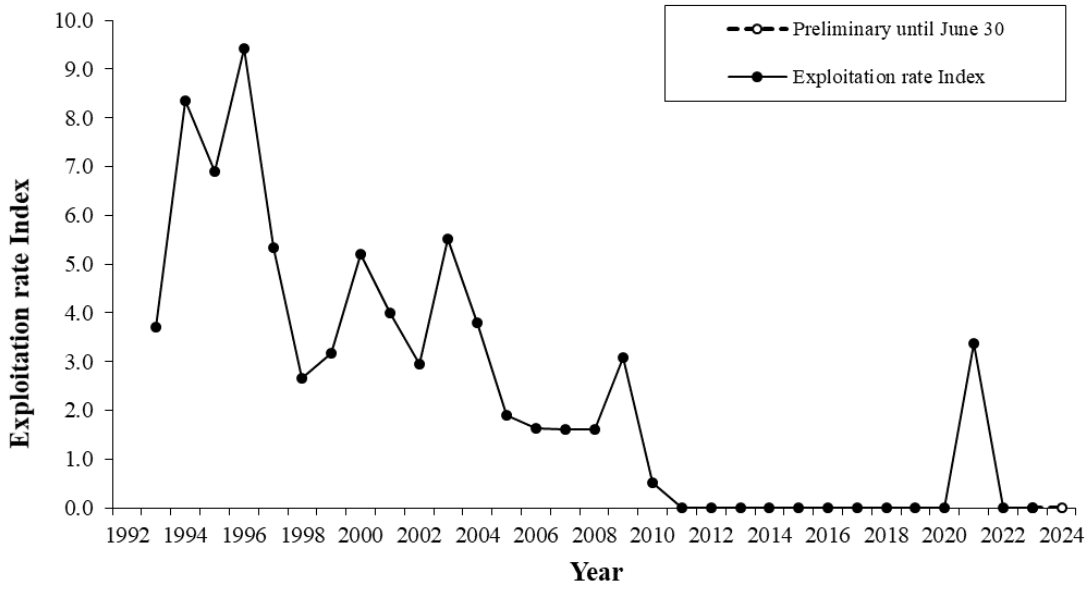


Figure 6. Exploitation rates as nominal catch divided by the EU survey female biomass index of the same year.

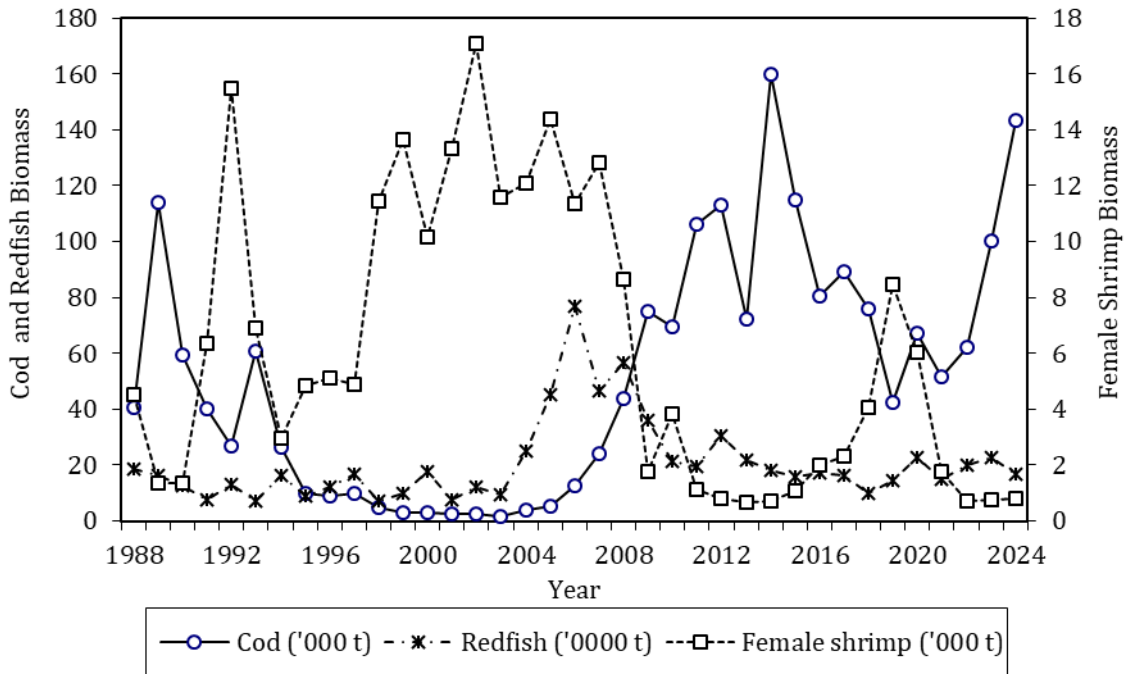


Figure 7. Cod, Redfish and Female shrimp biomass from EU trawl surveys on Flemish Cap, 1988-2024.