

Stock Annex: Ling (*Molva molva*) in Division 5.a (Iceland grounds)

Stock specific documentation of standard assessment procedures used by ICES.

Stock: Ling

Working Group: Working Group on Biology and Assessment of Deep-sea Fisheries Resources (WGDEEP)

Created:

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A. General

A.1. Stock definition

WGDEEP 2006 indicated: *‘There is currently no evidence of genetically distinct populations within the ICES area. However, ling at widely separated fishing grounds may still be sufficiently isolated to be considered management units, i.e. stocks, between which exchange of individuals is limited and has little effect on the structure and dynamics of each unit. It was suggested that Iceland (5.a), the Norwegian Coast 2), and the Faroes and Faroe Bank (5.b) have separate stocks, but that the existence of distinguishable stocks along the continental shelf west and north of the British Isles and the northern North Sea (Subareas 4, 6, 7 and 8) is less probable. Ling is one of the species included in a recently initiated Norwegian population structure study using molecular genetics, and new data may thus be expected in the future’.*

WGDEEP 2007 examined available evidence on stock discrimination and concluded that available information is not sufficient to suggest changes to current ICES interpretation of stock structure.

A.2. Fishery

The fishery for ling in 5.a has not changed substantially in recent years. Around 150 longliners annually report catches of ling, around 70 gillnetters and a similar number of trawlers. Most of ling in 5.a is caught on longlines and the proportion caught by that gear has increased since 2000 to around 65% in 2010. At the same time the proportion caught by gillnets has decreased from 20–30% in 2000–2001 to 4–8% in 2008–2010. Catches in trawls have varied less and have been at around 20%.

Most of the ling caught in 5.a by Icelandic longliners is caught at depths less than 300 meters and less than 500 meters by trawlers. The main fishing grounds for ling in 5.a as observed from logbooks are on the south, southwestern and western part of the Icelandic shelf.

In the 1950s until 1970 the total landings of Ling in 5.a amounted to 10 000 to 16 000 tonnes annually of which more than half was usually caught by foreign fleets. This changed with the extension of the Icelandic EEZ in the early 1970s when total landings fell to 4000–8000 tonnes of which the Icelandic fleet caught the main share. Between 1980 and 2000 catches varied between 3200 to 5800 tonnes

A.3. Ecosystem aspects

Ling in Icelandic waters is mainly found on the continental shelf and slopes of southeast, south, and west of Iceland at depths of 0–1000 m, but mainly but is mainly caught in the fisheries at depths around than 200–500 m. On the Icelandic shelf, the species is a southern stock, i.e. is a ‘warm-water’ species. With the warming of the continental shelf around Iceland, especially along the western and north-western part of the shelf that started around the year 2000 (Figure 1) an increase in ling biomass and distributional range has been observed. This has also been observed for other ‘warm-water’ species such as tusk, anglerfish and lemon sole. Therefore the increases in temperature may have been a driver for the increase in biomass of Ling in 2000 to 2009. Similarly the decrease in catches in the early seventies compared to the 1950s and 60s may be partly driven by cooling of the shelf in that period.

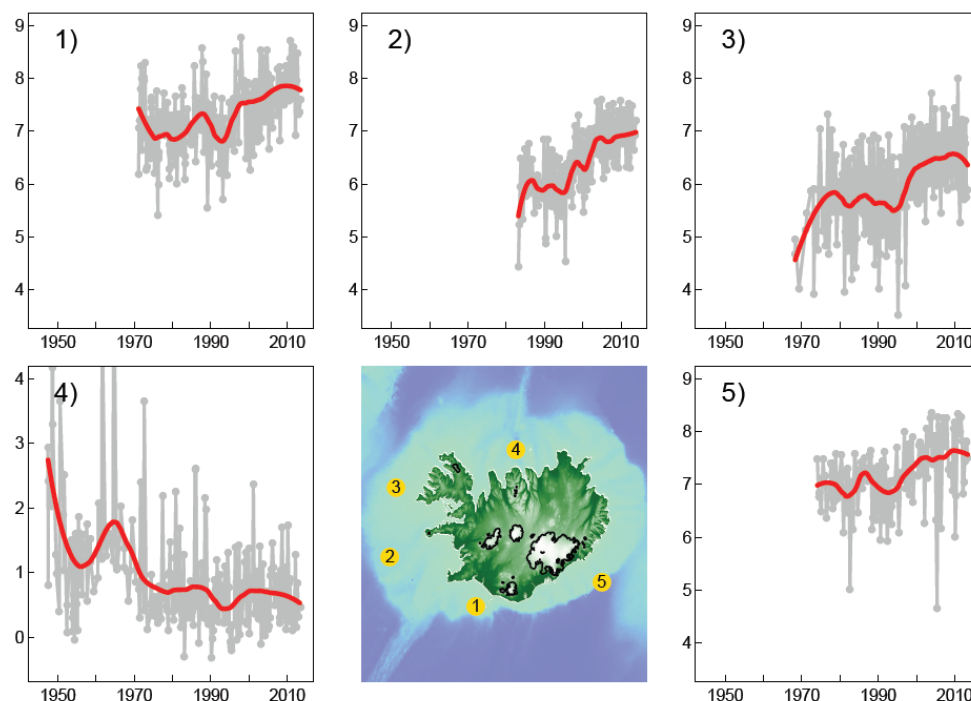


Figure 1. Changes in bottom temperature at five locations on the Icelandic shelf.

A.4. Management

The Ministry of Fisheries is responsible for management of the Icelandic fisheries and implementation of the legislation. The Ministry issues regulations for commercial fishing for each fishing year, including an allocation of the TAC for each of the stocks subject to such limitations. Below is a short account of the main feature of the management system and where applicable emphasis will be put on ling.

A system of transferable boat quotas was introduced in 1984. The agreed quotas were based on the Marine Research Institute's TAC recommendations, taking some socio-economic effects into account, as a rule to increase the quotas. Until 1990, the quota year corresponded to the calendar year but since then the quota, or fishing year, starts on September 1 and ends on August 31 the following year. This was done to meet the needs of the fishing industry. In 1990, an individual transferable quota (ITQ) system was established for the fisheries and they were subject to vessel catch quotas. The ITQ system allows free transferability of quota between boats. This transferability can either

be on a temporary (one year leasing) or a permanent (permanent selling) basis. This system has resulted in boats having quite diverse species portfolios, with companies often concentrating/specializing on particular group of species. The system allows for some but limited flexibility with regards converting a quota share of one species into another within a boat, allowance of landings of fish under a certain size without it counting fully in weight to the quota, and allowance of transfer of unfished quota between management years. The objective of these measures is to minimize discarding, which is effectively banned. Since 2006/2007 fishing season, all boats operate under the TAC system.

At the beginning, only few commercial exploited fish species were included in the ITQ system, but many other species have gradually been included. Ling in 5.a was included in the ITQ-system in the 2001/2002 quota year.

Landings in Iceland are restricted to particular licensed landing sites, with information being collected on a daily basis time by the Directorate of Fisheries in Iceland (the enforcement body). All fish landed has to be weighted, either at harbour or inside the fish processing factory. The information on each landing is stored in a centralized database maintained by the Directorate and is available in real time on the Internet (www.fiskistofa.is). The accuracy of the landings statistics are considered reasonable.

All boats operating in Icelandic waters have to maintain a logbook record of catches in each haul/set. The records are available to the staff of the Directorate for inspection purposes as well as to the stock assessors at the Marine Research Institute.

With some minor exceptions it is required by law to land all catches. Consequently, no minimum landing size is in force. To prevent fishing of small fish various measures such as mesh size regulation and closure of fishing areas are in place.

A system of instant area closure is in place for many species. The aim of the system is to minimize fishing on juveniles. An area is closed temporarily (for 2 weeks) for fishing if on-board inspections (not 100% coverage) reveal that more than a certain percentage of the catch is composed of fish less than the defined minimum length.

B. Data

B.1. Commercial catch

Icelandic ling catches in tonnes by month, area and gear are obtained from Statistical Iceland and Directorate of Fisheries. Catches are only landed in authorized ports where all catches are weighed and recorded. The distribution of catches is obtained from logbook statistic where location of each haul, effort, depth of trawling and total catch of ling is given. Logbook statistics are available since 1991. Landings of Norwegian and Faroese vessels are given by the Icelandic Coast Guard and reported to the Directorate of Fisheries.

Discard is banned in the Icelandic demersal fishery. Based on limited data discard rates in the Icelandic longline fishery for ling are estimated very low (<1% in either numbers or weight) (WGDEEP-2011, WD02). Measures in the management system such as converting quota share from one species to another are used by the fleet to a large extend and this is thought to discourage discards in mixed fisheries.

B.2. Biological

Biological data from the commercial longline and trawl fleet catches are collected from landings by scientists and technicians of the Marine Research Institute (MRI) in Iceland.

The biological data collected are length (to the nearest cm), sex and maturity stage (if possible since most ling is landed gutted), and otoliths for age reading. Most of the fish that otoliths were collected from were also weighed (to the nearest gramme). Biological sampling is also collected directly on board on the commercial vessels during trips by personnel of the Directorate of Fisheries in Iceland or from landings (at harbour). These are only length samples.

The general process of the sampling strategy is to take one sample of ling for every 180 tonnes landed. Each sample consists of 150 fishes. Otoliths are extracted from 20 fish which are also length measured and weighed gutted. In most cases ling is landed gutted so it not possible to determine sex and maturity. If ling is landed un-gutted, the un-gutted weight is measured and the fish is sexed and maturity determined. The remaining 130 in the sample are only length measured. Age reading of ling from commercial catches ended in 1998, the reason was uncertainty in ageing and cost saving. However ageing was resumed in 2013 and is expected to continue, the main focus being on otoliths from catches and surveys in the current year but older otoliths will be as or if resources are available.

At 60 cm around 10% of ling in 5.a is mature, at 75 cm 50% of ling is mature and at 100 cm more or less every ling is mature. Ling is a relatively slow growing species, mean length in catch is around 80 cm which according to available ageing means that it is approximately eight years old.

No information is available on natural mortality of ling in 5.a but in the assessment it is assumed to be $M=0.15$.

The biological data from the fishery is stored in a database at the Marine Research Institute. The data are used for description of the fishery.

B.3. Surveys

Two bottom-trawl surveys, conducted by the Marine Research Institute in 5.a, are considered representative for ling are the Icelandic Groundfish Survey (IGS or the Spring Survey) and the Autumn Groundfish Survey (AGS or the Autumn Survey). The Spring Survey has been conducted annually in March since 1985 on the continental shelf at depths shallower than 500 m and has a relatively dense station-net (approx. 550 stations). The Autumn Survey has been conducted in October since 1996 and covers larger area than the Spring Survey. It is conducted on the continental shelf and slopes and extends to depths down to 1500 m. The number of stations is about 380 so the distance between stations is often greater. The main target species in the Autumn Survey are Greenland halibut (*Reinhardtius hippoglossoides*) and deep-water redfish (*Sebastes mentella*). Though the signals in the autumn survey for ling are similar to those in the spring survey the number of specimens caught in the autumn survey is low, ranging between 20 to 260, therefore the autumn survey is not used for tuning in the assessment model.

The text in the following description of the surveys is mostly a translation from Björnsson *et al.* (2007). Where applicable the emphasis has been put on ling.

B.3.1. Spring survey in 5.a

From the commencing of the Spring Survey the stated aim has been to estimate abundance of demersal fish stocks, particularly the cod stock with increased accuracy and thereby strengthening the scientific basis of fisheries management. That is, to get fisheries independent estimates of abundance that would result in increased accuracy

in stock assessment relative to the period before the Spring Survey. Another aim was to start and maintain dialogue with fishermen and other stakeholders.

To help in the planning, experienced captains were asked to map out and describe the various fishing grounds around Iceland and then they were asked to choose half of the tow-stations taken in the survey. The other half was chosen randomly.

B.3.1.1. Timing, area covered and tow location

It was decided that the optimal time of the year to conduct the survey would be in March, or during the spawning of cod in Icelandic waters. During this time of the year, cod is most easily available to the survey gear as diurnal vertical migrations are at minimum in March (Pálsson, 1984). Previous survey attempts had taken place in March and for possible comparison with that data it made sense to conduct the survey in March.

The total number of stations was decided to be 600 (Figure 2). The reason of having so many stations was to decrease variance in indices but was inside the constraints of what was feasible in terms of survey vessels and workforce available. With 500–600 tow-stations the expected CV of the survey would be around 13%.

The survey covers the Icelandic continental shelf down to 500 m and to the EEZ-line between Iceland and Faroe Islands. Allocation of stations and data collection is based on a division between Northern and Southern areas. The Northern area is the colder part of Icelandic waters where the main nursery grounds of cod are located, whereas the main spawning grounds are found in the warmer Southern area. It was assumed that 25–30% of the cod stock (in abundance) would be in the southern area at the survey time but 70–75% in the north. Because of this, 425 stations were allocated in the colder northern area and 175 stations were allocated in the southern area. The two areas were then divided into ten strata, four in the south and six in the north.

Stratification in the survey and the allocation of stations was based on pre-estimated cod density patterns in different “statistical squares” (Pálsson *et al.*, 1989). The statistical squares were grouped into ten strata depending on cod density. The number of stations allocated to each stratum was in proportion to the product of the area of the stratum and cod density. Finally the number of stations within each stratum was allocated to each statistical square in proportion to the size of the square. Within statistical squares, stations were divided equally between fishermen and fishery scientist at the MRI for decisions of location. The scientist selected random position for their stations, whereas the fishermen selected their stations from their fishing experience. Up to 16 stations are in each statistical square in the Northern area and up to seven in the Southern area. The captains were asked to decide the towing direction for all the stations.

B.3.1.2. Vessels, fishing gear and fishing method

In the early stages of the planning it was apparent that consistency in conducting the survey on both spatial and temporal scale was of paramount importance. It was decided to rent commercial stern trawlers built in Japan in 1972–1973 to conduct the survey. Each year, up to five trawlers have participated in the survey each in a dedicated area (NW, N, E, S, SW). The ten Japan-built trawlers were all build on the same plan and were considered identical for all practical purposes. The trawlers were thought to be in service at least until the year 2000. This has been the case and most of these trawlers still fish in Icelandic waters but have had some modifications since the start of the survey, most of them in 1986–1988.

The survey gear is based on the trawl that was the most commonly used by the commercial trawling fleet in 1984–1985. It has relatively small vertical opening of 2–3 m. The headline is 105 feet, fishing line is 63 feet, footrope 180 feet and the trawl weight 4200 kg (1900 kg submerged).

Length of each tow was set 4 nautical miles and towing speed at approx. 3.8 nautical miles per hour. Minimum towing distance so that the tow is considered valid for index calculation is 2 nautical miles. Towing is stopped if wind is more than 17–21 m/sec, (8 on Beaufort scale).

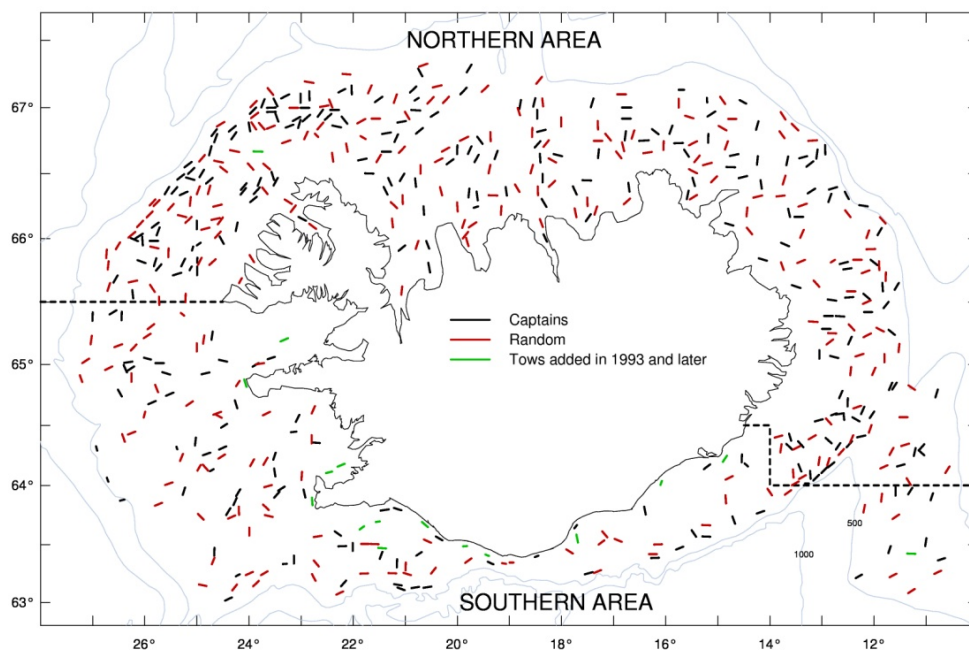


Figure 2. Stations in the Spring Survey in March. Black lines indicate the tow-stations selected by captains of commercial trawlers, red lines are the tow-stations selected randomly, and green lines are the tow-stations that were added in 1993 or later. The broken black lines indicate the original division of the study area into Northern and Southern area. The 500 and 1000 m depth contours are shown.

B.3.1.3. Later changes in vessels and fishing gear

The trawlers used in the survey have been changed somewhat since the beginning of the survey. The changes include alteration of hull shape (bulbous bow), the hull extended by several meters, larger engines, and some other minor alterations. These alterations have most likely changed the qualities of the ships but it is very difficult to quantify these changes.

The trawlers are now considered old and it is likely that they will soon disappear from the Icelandic fleet. Some search for replacements is ongoing. In recent years, the MRI research vessels have taken part in the Spring Survey after elaborate comparison studies. The RV Bjarni Sæmundsson has surveyed the NW-region since 2007 and RV Árni Friðriksson has surveyed the Faroe-Iceland ridge in recent years and will in 2010 survey the SW-area.

The trawl has not changed since the start of the survey. The weight of the otter-boards has increased from 1720–1830 kg to 1880–1970 kg. The increase in the weight of the otter-boards may have increased the horizontal opening of the trawl and hence

decreased the vertical opening. However, these changes should be relatively small as the size (area) and shape of the otter-boards is unchanged.

B.3.1.4. Later changes in trawl-stations

Initially, the numbers of trawl stations surveyed was expected to be 600 (Figure 2). However, this number was not covered until 1995. The first year 593 stations were surveyed but in 1988 the stations had been decreased down to 545 mainly due to bottom topography (rough bottom that was impossible to tow), but also due to drift ice that year. In 1989–1992, between 567 and 574 stations were surveyed annually. In 1993, 30 stations were added in shallower waters as an answer to fishermen's critique.

In short, until 1995 between 596 and 600 stations were surveyed annually. In 1996 14 stations that were added in 1993 were omitted. Since 1991 additional tows have been taken at the edge of the survey area if the amount of cod has been high at the outermost stations.

In 1996, the whole survey design was evaluated with the aim of reduce cost. The number of stations was decreased to 532 stations. The main change was to omit all of the 24 stations from the Iceland-Faroe Ridge. This was the state of affairs until 2004 when in response to increased abundance of cod on the Faroe-Iceland ridge 9 stations were added. Since 2005 all of the 24 stations omitted in 1996 have been surveyed each year.

In the early 1990s there was a change from Loran C positioning system to GPS. This may have slightly changed the positioning of the stations as the Loran C system was not as accurate as the GPS.

B.3.2. Autumn survey in 5.a

The Icelandic Autumn Survey has been conducted annually since 1996 by the MRI. The objective is to gather fishery-independent information on biology, distribution and biomass of demersal fish species in Icelandic waters, with particular emphasis on Greenland halibut (*Reinhardtius hippoglossoides*) and deep-water redfish (*Sebastes mentella*). This is because the Spring Survey does not cover the distribution of these deep-water species. Secondary aim of the survey is to have another fishery-independent estimate on abundance, biomass and biology of demersal species, such as cod (*Gadus morhua*), haddock (*Melanogrammus aeglefinus*) and golden redfish (*Sebastes marinus*), in order to improve the precision of stock assessment.

B.3.2.1. Timing, area covered and tow location

The Autumn Survey is conducted in October as it is considered the most a suitable month in relation to diurnal vertical migration, distribution and availability of Greenland halibut and deep-sea redfish. The research area is the Icelandic continental shelf and slopes within the Icelandic Exclusive Economic Zone to depths down to 1500 m. The research area is divided into a shallow-water area (0–400 m) and a deep-water area (400–1500 m). The shallow-water area is the same area covered in the Spring Survey. The deep-water area is directed at the distribution of Greenland halibut, mainly found at depths from 800–1400 m west, north and east of Iceland, and deep-water redfish, mainly found at 500–1200 m depths southeast, south and southwest of Iceland and on the Reykjanes Ridge.

B.3.2.2. Preparation and later alterations to the survey

Initially, a total of 430 stations were divided between the two areas. Of them, 150 stations were allocated to the shallow-water area and randomly selected from the Spring Survey station list. In the deep-water area, half of the 280 stations were randomly positioned in the area. The other half were randomly chosen from logbooks of the commercial bottom-trawl fleet fishing for Greenland halibut and deep-water redfish in 1991–1995. The locations of those stations were, therefore, based on distribution and pre-estimated density of the species.

Because MRI was not able to finance a project in order of this magnitude, it was decided to focus the deep-water part of the survey on the Greenland halibut main distributional area. For this reason, important deep-water redfish areas south and west of Iceland were omitted. The number and location of stations in the shallow-water area were unchanged.

The number of stations in the deep-water area was therefore reduced to 150. A total of 100 stations were randomly positioned in the area. The remaining stations were located on important Greenland halibut fishing grounds west, north and east of Iceland and randomly selected from a logbook database of the bottom-trawl fleet fishing for Greenland halibut 1991–1995. The number of stations in each area was partly based on total commercial catch.

In 2000, with the arrival of a new research vessel, MRI was able finance the project according to the original plan. Stations were added to cover the distribution of deep-water redfish and the location of the stations selected in a similar manner as for Greenland halibut. A total of 30 stations were randomly assigned to the distribution area of deep-water redfish and 30 stations were randomly assigned to the main deep-water redfish fishing grounds based on logbooks of the bottom-trawl fleet 1996–1999.

In addition, 14 stations were randomly added in the deep-water area in areas where great variation had been observed in 1996–1999. However, because of rough bottom which made it impossible to tow, five stations have been omitted. Finally, 12 stations were added in 1999 in the shallow-water area, making total stations in the shallow-water area 162. Total number of stations taken since 2000 has been around 381 (Figure 3).

The RV “Bjarni Sæmundsson” has been used in the shallow-water area from the beginning of the survey. For the deep-water area MRI rented one commercial trawler 1996–1999, but in 2000 the commercial trawler was replaced by the RV “Árni Friðriksson”.

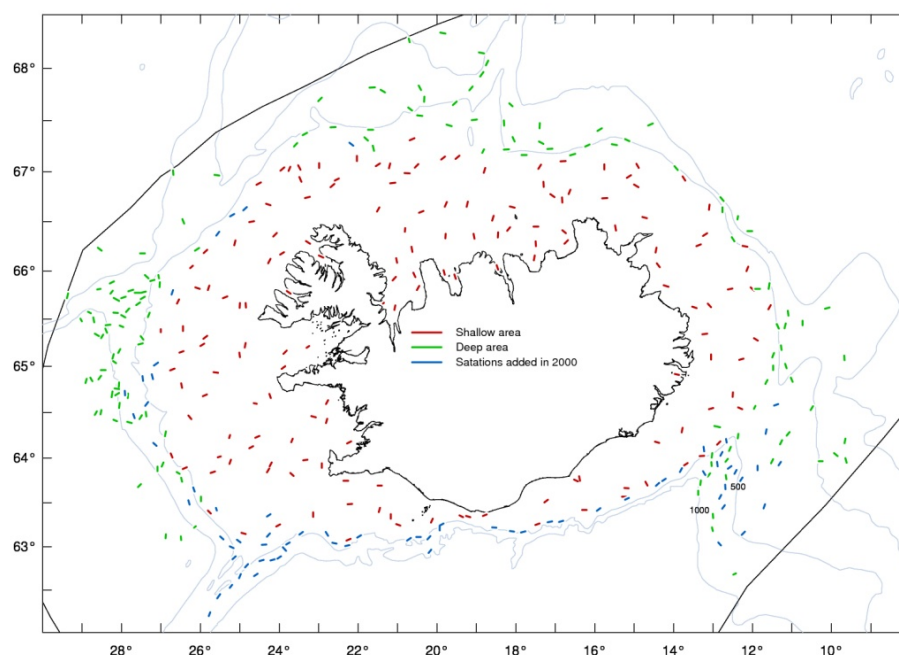


Figure 3. Stations in the Autumn Groundfish Survey (AGS). RV “Bjarni Sæmundsson” takes stations in the shallow-water area (red lines) and RV “Árni Friðriksson” takes stations in the deep-water areas (green lines), the blue lines are stations added in 2000.

B.3.2.3. Fishing gear

Two types of the bottom survey trawl “Gulltoppur” are used for sampling: “Gulltoppur” is used in the shallow water and “Gulltoppur 66.6m” is used in deep waters. The trawls were common among the Icelandic bottom-trawl fleet in the mid-1990s and are well suited for fisheries on cod, Greenland halibut and redfish.

“Gulltoppur”, the bottom trawl used in the shallow water, has a headline of 31.0 m, and the fishing line is 19.6 m. The deep-water trawl, “Gulltoppur 66.6m” has a headline of 35.6 m and the fishing line is 22.6 m.

The towing speed is 3.8 knots over the bottom. The trawling distance is 3.0 nautical miles calculated with GPS when the trawl touches the bottom until the hauling begins (i.e. excluding setting and hauling of the trawl).

B.3.3. Data sampling

The data sampling in the spring and autumn surveys is quite similar. In short there is more emphasis on stomach content analysis in the Autumn Survey than the Spring Survey. For ling, the sampling procedure is the same in both surveys except ling is weighed un-gutted and stomach content analysed in the autumn survey.

B.3.3.1. Length measurements and counting

All fish species are measured for length. For the majority of species including ling, total length is measured to the nearest cm from the tip of the snout to the tip of the longer lobe of the caudal fin. At each station, the general rule, which also applies to ling, is to measure at least 4 times the length interval of a given species. Example: If the continuous length distribution of ling at a given station is between 15 and 45 cm, the length interval is 30 cm and the number of measurements needed is 120. If the catch of ling at this station exceeds 120 individuals, the rest is counted.

Care is taken to ensure that the length measurement sampling is random so that the fish measured reflect the length distribution of the haul in question.

B.3.3.2. Recording of weight, sex and maturity stages

Sex and maturity data has been sampled for ling from the start of both surveys. Ling is weighted as un-gutted in the Autumn Survey.

B.3.3.3. Otolith sampling

For ling a minimum of five otoliths in the spring and autumn surveys is collected and a maximum of 25. Otoliths are sampled at a four fish interval so that if in total 40 lings are caught in a single haul, 10 otoliths are sampled.

B.3.3.4. Stomach sampling and analysis

Stomach samples of ling are routinely sampled in the Autumn Survey.

B.3.3.5. Information on tow, gear and environmental factors

At each station/haul relevant information on the haul and environmental factors, are filled out by the captain and the first officer in cooperation with the cruise leader.

Tow information

General: Year, Station, Vessel registry no., Cruise ID, Day/month, Statist. Square, Sub-square, Tow number, Gear type no., Mesh size, Briddles length (m).

Start of haul: Pos. N, Pos. W, Time (hour:min), Tow direction in degrees, Bottom depth (m), Towing depth (m), Vert. opening (m), Horizontal opening (m).

End of haul: Pos. N, Pos. W, Time (hour:min), Warp length (fm), Bottom depth (m), Tow length (naut. miles), Tow time (min) , Tow speed (knots).

Environmental factors: Wind direction, Air temperature °C, Wind speed, Bottom temperature °C, Sea surface, Surface temperature °C, Towing depth temperature °C, Cloud cover, Air pressure, Drift ice.

B.3.2.4. Data processing

B.3.2.4.1. Abundance and biomass estimates at a given station

As described above the normal procedure is to measure at least 4 times the length interval of a given species. The number of fish caught of the length interval L_1 to L_2 is given by:

$$P = \frac{n_{measured}}{n_{counted} + n_{measured}} \quad (1)$$

$$n_{L_1-L_2} = \sum_{i=L_1}^{i=L_2} \frac{n_i}{P} \quad (2)$$

Where $n_{measured}$ is the number of fished measured and $n_{counted}$ is the number of fish counted.

Biomass of a given species at a given station is calculated as:

$$B_{L_1-L_2} = \sum_{i=L_1}^{i=L_2} \frac{n_i \alpha L_i^\beta}{P} \quad (3)$$

Where L_i is length and α and β are coefficients of the length–weight relationship.

B.3.2.4.2. Index calculation

For calculation of indices the Cochran method is used (Cochran, 1977). The survey area is split into subareas or strata and an index for each subarea is calculated as the mean number in a standardized tow, divided by the area covered multiplied with the size of the subarea. The total index is then a summed up estimates from the subareas.

A ‘tow-mile’ is assumed to be 0.00918 square nautical mile. That is the width of the area covered is assumed to be 17 m ($17/1852=0.00918$). The following equations are a mathematical representation of the procedure used to calculate the indices:

$$\bar{Z}_i = \frac{\sum_i Z_i}{N_i} \quad (4)$$

Where \bar{Z}_i is the mean catch (number or biomass) in the i -th stratum, Z_i is the total quantity of the index (abundance or biomass) in the i -th stratum and N_i the total number of tows in the i -th stratum. The index (abundance or biomass) of a stratum (I_i) is:

$$I_i = \bar{Z}_i \left(\frac{A_i}{A_{tow}} \right) \quad (5)$$

And the sample variance in the i -th stratum:

$$\sigma_i^2 = \left(\frac{\sum_i (Z_i - \bar{Z}_i)^2}{N_i - 1} \right) \left(\frac{A_i}{A_{tow}} \right) \quad (6)$$

where A_i is the size of the i -th stratum in square nautical miles (nm^2) and A_{tow} is the size of the area surveyed in a single tow in nm^2 .

The index in a given region:

$$I_{region} = \sum_{region} I_i \quad (7)$$

The variance is:

$$\sigma_i^2 = \sum_{region} \sigma_i^2 \quad (8)$$

And the coefficient of variation is:

$$CV_{region} = \frac{\sigma_{region}^2}{I_{region}} \quad (9)$$

The subareas or strata used in the Icelandic groundfish surveys (same strata division in both surveys) are shown in Figure 3. The division into strata is based on the so-called BORMICON areas and the 100, 200, 400, 500, 600, 800 and 1000 m depth contours.

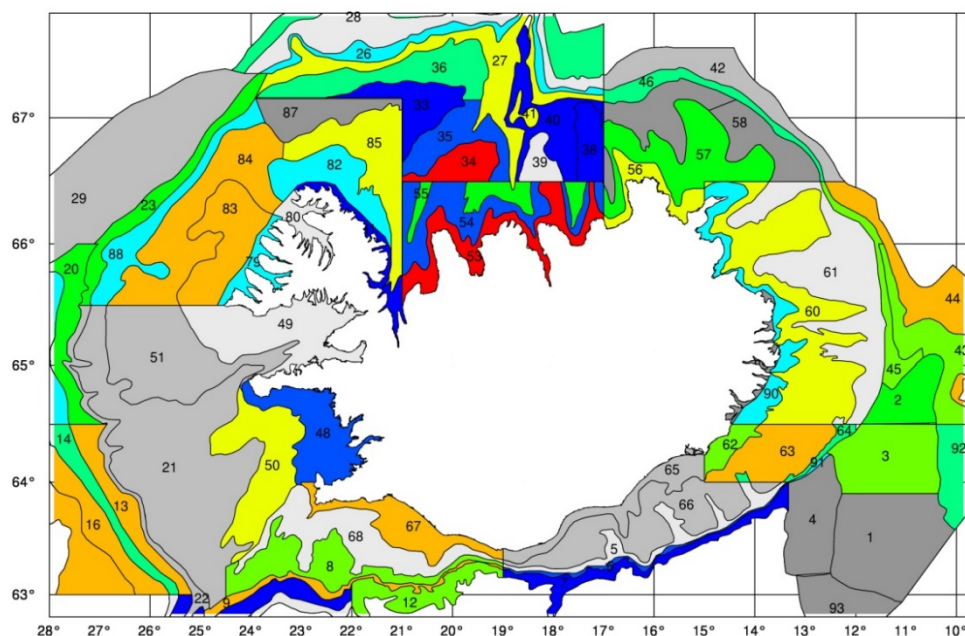


Figure 4. Subareas or strata used for calculation of survey indices in Icelandic waters.

B.4. Commercial cpue

Data used to estimate cpue for ling in Division 5.a since 1991 are obtained from logbooks of the Icelandic trawl and longline fleet. Non-standardized cpue and effort is calculated for each year which is simply the sum of all catch divided by the sum of number of hooks. The cpue estimates are not used in the assessment of ling in 5.a.

B.5. Other relevant data

C. Assessment: data and method

Model used: Gadget

Software used: Gadget

Gadget is shorthand for the "Globally applicable Area Disaggregated General Ecosystem Toolbox", which is a statistical model of marine ecosystems. Gadget (previously known as BORMICON and Fleksibest). Gadget is an age-length structured forward-simulation model, coupled with an extensive set of data comparison and optimisation routines. Processes are generally modelled as dependent on length, but age is tracked in the models, and data can be compared on either a length and/or age scale. The model is designed as a multi-area, multi-area, multifleet model, capable of including predation and mixed fisheries issues; however it can also be used on a single species basis. Gadget models can be both very data- and computationally intensive, with optimisation in particular taking a large amount of time. Worked examples, a detailed manual and further information on Gadget can be found on www.hafro.is/gadget. In addition the structure of the model is described in Björnsson and Sigurdsson (2004), Begley and Howell (2004), and a formal mathematical description is given in Frøysa *et al.* (2002).

Gadget is distinguished from many stock assessment models used within ICES (such as XSA) in that Gadget is a forward simulation model, and is structured by both age and length. It therefore requires direct modelling of growth within the model. An important consequence of using a forward simulation model is that the plus groups (in both age and length) should be chosen to be large enough that they contain few fish, and the exact choice of plus group does not have a significant impact on the model.

Setup of a Gadget run

There is a separation of model and data within Gadget. The simulation model runs with defined functional forms and parameter values, and produces a modelled population, with modelled surveys and catches. These surveys and catches are compared against the available data to produce a weighted likelihood score. Optimisation routines then attempt to find the best set of parameter values.

Simulation model

In a typical Gadget model the simulated quantity is the number of individuals, N_{alsyt} , at age $a = 3 \dots 25$, in a length-group l , representing lengths ranging between 20 and 180 cm in 1 cm length-groups, at year y which is divided into quarters $t = 1 \dots 4$. The length of the time-step is denoted Δt . The population is governed by the following equations:

$$\begin{aligned} N_{aly,t+1} &= \sum_{l'} G_l^{l'} [(N_{al'y,t} - C_{fal't})e^{-M_a \Delta t}] && \text{if } t < 4 \\ N_{a+1,l,y+1,1} &= \sum_{l'} G_l^{l'} [(N_{al'y,4} - C_{fal'y,4})e^{-M_a \Delta t}] && \text{if } t = 4 \text{ and } a < 25 \\ N_{a,l,y+1,1} &= \sum_{l'} G_l^{l'} (N_{al'y,4} - C_{fal'y,4} + N_{a-1,l'y,4} - C_{f,a-1,l'y,4})e^{-M_a \Delta t} && \text{if } t = 4 \text{ and } a = 20 \end{aligned} \quad (1)$$

Where $G_l^{l'}$ is the proportion in length-group l that has grown $l' - l$ length-groups in Δt , C_{falsyt} denotes the catches by fleet $f \in \{S, T, G, L\}$, S and C denote the spring survey, trawl, gillnet and longline fleets respectively (The survey fleet catches are given a nominal catch to allow for survey age and length distribution predictions.), M_a the natural mortality-at-age a (A short note on notation, here l is used interchangeably as either the length-group or the midpoint of the length interval for that particular length-group, depending on the context.).

Growth

Growth in length is modelled as a two-stage process, an average length update in Δt and a growth dispersion around the mean update (Stefansson 2005). Average length update is modelled by calculating the mean growth for each length group for each time-step, using a parametric growth function. In the current model a simplified form of the von Bertalanffy function has been employed to calculate this mean length update.

$$\Delta l = (l_\infty - l)(1 - e^{-k \Delta t})$$

where l_∞ is the terminal length and k is the annual growth rate.

Then the length distributions are updated according to the calculated mean growth by allowing some portion of the fish to have no growth, a proportion to grow by one length group and a proportion two length groups etc. How these proportions are

selected affects the spread of the length distributions but these two equations must be satisfied:

$$\sum_i p_{il} = 1$$

and

$$\sum_i i p_{il} = \Delta l$$

Here Δl is the calculated mean growth and p_{il} is the proportion of fish in length group l growing i length groups. Here the growth is dispersed according to a beta-binomial distribution parametrised by the following equation:

$$G_l^{ll'} = \frac{\Gamma(n+1)}{\Gamma((l'-l)+1)} \frac{\Gamma((l'-l)+\alpha)\Gamma(n-(l'-l)+\beta)}{\Gamma(n-(l'-l)+1)\Gamma(n+\alpha+\beta)} \frac{\Gamma(\alpha+\beta)}{\Gamma(\alpha)\Gamma(\beta)}$$

Where α is subject to

$$\alpha = \frac{\beta \Delta l}{n - \Delta l}$$

where n denotes the maximum length group growth and $(l'-l)$ the number of length-groups grown.

Recruitment and initial abundance

Gadget allows for a number of relationships between stock recruitment and the size of the spawning stock to be defined. However in this model the number of recruits each year, R_y is estimated directly from the data.

Recruitment enters to the population according to:

$$N_{1l0yt'} = R_y p_l$$

where t' denotes the recruitment time-step, p_l is the proportion in length-group l that is recruited which is determined by a normal density with mean according to the growth model and variance σ_y^2 . When more data are available the number of recruits, R_y is estimated directly.

A simple formulation of initial abundance in numbers is used for each age group in length-group l

$$N_{als11} = \nu_a q_l$$

where ν_a is the initial number-at-age a in the initial year and q_l the proportion at length-group l which is determined by a normal density with a mean according to the growth model in use and variance σ_a^2 .

Fleet operations

Catches are simulated based on reported total landings and a length based suitability function for each of the fleets (commercial fleets and surveys). Total landings are assumed to be known and the total biomass is simply offset by the landed catch. The catches for length-group l , fleet f at year y and time-step t are calculated as

$$C_{flsyt} = E_{ft} \frac{S_f(l) N_{lsyt} W_{ls}}{\sum_{s'} \sum_{l'} S_f(l') N_{l's'yt} W_{l's'}}$$

where E_{ft} is the landed biomass at time t and $S_f(l)$ is the suitability of length-group l by fleet f defined as:

$$S_f(l) = \frac{1}{1 + e^{(-b_f(l-l_{50,f}))}}$$

The weight, W_{sl} , at length-group l is calculated according to the following stock component specific length - weight relationship:

$$W_{sl} = \mu_s e^{\omega_s l}$$

Observation model

A significant advantage of using an age-length structured model is that the modelled output can be compared directly against a wide variety of different data sources. It is not necessary to convert length into age data before comparisons. Gadget can use various types of data that can be included in the objective function. Length distributions, age length keys, survey indices by length or age, cpue data, mean length and/or weight at age, tagging data and stomach content data can all be used.

Importantly this ability to handle length data directly means that the model can be used for stocks such as ling in 5.a where age data are sparse. Length data can be used directly for model comparison. The model is able to combine a wide selection of the available data by using a maximum likelihood approach to find the best fit to a weighted sum of the datasets.

In Gadget, data are assimilated using a weighted log—likelihood function. Here three types of data enter the likelihood, length based survey indices, length distributions from survey and commercial fleets and age-length distribution from the survey and commercial fleets.

Survey indices

For each length range g the survey index is compared to the modelled abundance at year y and time-step t using:

$$l_{gf}^{SI} = \sum_y \sum_t (\log I_{gfy} - (\log q_f + \log \widehat{N}_{gyt}))^2 \quad (\text{eq 1})$$

Where

$$\widehat{N}_{gyt} = \sum_{l \in g} \sum_a \sum_s N_{alsyt}$$

Fleet data

Length distributions are compared to predictions using

$$l_f^{LD} = \sum_y \sum_t \sum_l ({}^L \pi_{lyt} - {}^L \hat{\pi}_{lyt})^2 \quad (\text{eq 2})$$

where f denotes the fleet where data were sampled from and

$$\pi_{lyt} = \frac{\sum_a \sum_s O_{alsyt}}{\sum_a \sum_{l'} \sum_s O_{alsyt}}$$

and

$$\hat{\pi}_{lyt} = \frac{\sum_a \sum_s N_{alsyt}}{\sum_a \sum_{l'} \sum_s N_{alsyt}}$$

i.e. the observed and modelled proportions in length-group l respectively at year y and time-step t . Similarly age - length data are compared using 1 cm length groups:

$$l_f^{AL} = \sum_y \sum_t \sum_a \sum_l \sum_s (\pi_{falsyt} - \hat{\pi}_{falsyt})^2$$

where

$$\pi_{al yt} = \frac{\sum_s O_{alsyt}}{\sum_a \sum_{l'} \sum_s O_{alsyt}}$$

and

$$\hat{\pi}_{al yt} = \frac{\sum_s N_{alsyt}}{\sum_a \sum_{l'} \sum_s N_{alsyt}}$$

(eq 3)

Iterative re-weighting

The total objective function used the modelling process combines equations eq 1 to eq 3 using the following formula:

$$l^T = \sum_g w_{gf}^{SI} l_{g,S}^{SI} + \sum_{f \in \{S,T,G,L\}} (w_f^{LD} l_f^{LD} + w_f^{AL} l_f^{AL}) + w^M l^M$$

where $f = S, T, G, L$ or C denotes the spring survey, trawl, gillnet and longline fleets respectively (See subsection and w 's are the weights assigned to each likelihood components.

The weights, w_i , are necessary for several reasons. First of all it is used to prevent some components from dominating the likelihood function. Another would be to reduce the effect of low quality data. It can be used as an a priori estimates of the variance in each subset of the data.

Assigning likelihood weights is not a trivial matter, has in the past been the most time consuming part of a Gadget model. Commonly this has been done using some form of 'expert judgement'. General heuristics have recently been developed to estimate these weights objectively. Here the iterative re-weighting heuristic introduced by Stefansson (2003), and subsequently implemented in Taylor (2007), is used.

The general idea behind the iterative re-weighting is to assign the inverse variance of the fitted residuals as component weights. The variances, and hence the final weights, are calculated according the following algorithm:

1. Calculate the initial sums of squares (SS) given the initial parametrization for all likelihood components. Assign the inverse SS as the initial weight for all likelihood components.
2. For each likelihood component, do an optimization run with the initial SS for that component set to 10000. Then estimate the residual variance using the resulting SS of that component divided by the degrees of freedom (df^*), i.e.

$$\hat{\sigma}^2 = \frac{SS}{df^*}.$$

3. After the optimization set the final weight for that all components as the inverse of the estimated variance from the step above (weight = $1/\hat{\sigma}^2$).

The number of non-zero data-points (df^*) is used as a proxy for the degrees of freedom. While this may be a satisfactory proxy for larger datasets it could be a gross overestimate of the degrees of freedom for smaller datasets. In particular, if the survey indices are weighed on their own while the yearly recruitment is estimated they could

be over-fitted. In general, problem such as these can be solved with component grouping that is in step 2 the likelihood components that should behave similarly, such as survey indices representing similar age ranges, should be heavily weighted and optimized together. In the ling model this kind of grouping is used.

Optimisation

The model has three alternative optimising algorithms linked to it, a wide area search **simulated annealing** (Corana *et al.*, 1987), a local search **Hooke and Jeeves algorithm** (Hooke & Jeeves 1961) and finally one based on the Boyden-Fletcher-Goldfarb-Shanno algorithm hereafter termed **BFGS**.

The simulated annealing and Hooke-Jeeves algorithms are not gradient based, and there is therefore no requirement on the likelihood surface being smooth. Consequently neither of the two algorithms returns estimates of the Hessian matrix. Simulated annealing is more robust than Hooke and Jeeves and can find a global optima where there are multiple optima but needs about 2-3 times the order of magnitude number of iterations than the Hooke and Jeeves algorithm.

BFGS is a quasi-Newton optimisation method that uses information about the gradient of the function at the current point to calculate the best direction to look for a better point. Using this information the BFGS algorithm can iteratively calculate a better approximation to the inverse Hessian matrix. In comparison to the two other algorithms implemented in Gadget, BFGS is very local search compared to simulated annealing and more computationally intensive than the Hooke and Jeeves. However the gradient search in BFGS is more accurate than the stepwise search of Hooke and Jeeves and may therefore give a more accurate estimation of the optimum. The BFGS algorithm used in Gadget is derived from that presented by Bertsekas (1999).

The model is able to use all three algorithms in a single optimisation run, attempting to utilise the strengths of all. Simulated annealing is used first to attempt to reach the general area of a solution, followed by Hooke and Jeeves to rapidly home in on the local solution and finally BFGS is used for fine-tuning the optimisation. This procedure is repeated several times to attempt to avoid converging to a local optimum.

The total objective function to be minimised is a weighted sum of the different components. The estimation can be difficult because of some or groups of parameters are correlated and therefore the possibility of multiple optima cannot be excluded. The optimisation was started with simulated annealing to make the results less sensitive to the initial (starting) values and then the optimisation was changed to Hooke and Jeeves when the 'optimum' was approached and then finally the BFGS was run in the end.

Model settings

Population is defined by 1 cm length groups, from 20–180 cm and the year is divided into four quarters. The age range is 2 to 20 years, with the oldest age treated as a plus group. Recruitment happens in the first and was set at age 2. The length-at-recruitment is estimated and mean growth is assumed to follow the von Bertalanffy growth function estimated by the model.

Weight Length relationship is obtained from spring survey data.

Natural mortality was assumed to be 0.15 year⁻¹.

The commercial landings are modelled as three fleets, longline, trawl and gillnet, starting in 1982 with a selection patterns described by a logistic function and the total

catch in tonnes specified for each quarter. The survey (1985 onwards), on the other hand is modelled as one fleet with constant effort and a nonparametric selection pattern that is estimated for each length group (one 10 cm length group).

Data used for the assessment are described below

Length disaggregated survey indices (10 cm increments, except the smallest 20–50cm and the largest 90–180cm) from the Icelandic groundfish survey in March 1985–onwards.

Length distribution from the Icelandic commercial catch since 1982. The sampling effort was though relatively limited until the 1990s.

Landings data divided into 4 month periods per year (quarters).

Age–length data from the survey and from the commercial fleets.

Description	period	by quarter	area	Likelihood component
Length distribution of landings	1982+	All	Iceland	ldist.catch
Longline, trawl, gillnet				
Length distribution of Icelandic GFS	1985+	1 st quarter	Iceland	ldist.survey
Abundance index of Icelandic GFS of 20–49 cm individuals	1985+	1 st quarter	Iceland	si2049
Abundance index of Icelandic GFS of 50–69 cm individuals	1985+	1 st quarter	Iceland	Si5069
Abundance index of Icelandic GFS of 70–180 cm individuals	1985+	1 st quarter	Iceland	Si70180
Age–length key of the landings	See stock section	All	Iceland	alkeys.longline, alkeys.trawl, alkeys.gillnet
Age–length key of the Icelandic GFS	See stock section	1 st quarter	Iceland	alkeys.survey

Description of the likelihood components weighting procedure

Component	Description	Group	Quarters	Type
Bounds	Keeps estimates inside bounds	NA	All	8
Understocking	Makes sure there is enough biomass	NA	All	2
Si2049	Survey Index 20–39 cm	Sind	1	1
Si5079	Survey Index 40–59 cm	Sind	1	1
Si70180	Survey Index 60–100 cm	Sind	1	1
Ldist.survey	Length distribution from the spring survey	Survey	1	3
Alkeys.survey	Age–length data from the spring survey	Survey	1	3
Alkeys.longline	Age–length data from the longline fleet	Longline	All	3
Ldist.longline	Length distribution the longline fleet	Longline	All	3
Alkeys.trawl	Age–length data from the trawl	Comm	All	3

	fleet			
Ldist.trawl	Length distribution the trawl fleet	Comm.	All	3
Alkeys.gillnet	Age-length data from the gillnet fleet	Comm	All	3
Ldist.gillnet	Length distribution the gillnet fleet	Comm	All	3

The parameters estimated are:

The number of fish by age when simulation starts (ages 3 to 12) - 9 parameters. Older ages are assumed to be a fraction of age 12;

Recruitment each year (1982 and onwards);

Parameters in the growth equation; Linf is constant at 200 cm and K is estimated;

Parameter β that models the transition from one length class to the next;

Length-at-recruitment (mean length and SD) 2 parameters;

The selection pattern of:

- Separate selection curve (logistic) for the commercial fleets (longline, trawl and gillnet) -6 parameters.
- Icelandic Spring survey - 2 parameters (logistic curve).

D. Short-Term Projection

Short-term forecasts for ling in 5.a can be done in gadget using the settings described below.

Model used: Gadget: Age-length forward projection

Software used: GADGET (script: run.sh)

Initial stock size: abundance-at-age and mean length for ages 3 to 20+

Maturity: Fixed maturity ogive, estimated outside the model

F and M before spawning: NA

Weight-at-age in the stock: modelled in GADGET with VB parameters and length-weight relationship that is estimated outside the model.

Weight-at-age in the catch: modelled in GADGET with VB parameters and length-weight relationship

Exploitation pattern: Landings: logistic selection parameters estimated by GADGET. Fleet proportions set as last three years average

Intermediate year assumptions: Catch in first quarter known, catches in quarters 2, 3 and 4 assumed to be equal to last years.

Stock recruitment model used: Mean of last three years. As recruitment is estimated at age three in the assessment but ling does not appear in the catches until the age of 5 the recruitment assumptions are not important.

Procedures used for splitting projected catches: driven by selection functions and provide by GADGET. Fleet proportions set as last three years average

E. Medium-Term Projections

Short-term forecasts for ling in 5.a can be done in gadget using the settings described below.

Model used: Gadget: Age-length forward projection

Software used: GADGET (script: run.sh)

Initial stock size: abundance-at-age and mean length for ages 3 to 20+

Maturity: Fixed maturity ogive, estimated outside the model

F and M before spawning: NA

Weight-at-age in the stock: modelled in GADGET with VB parameters and length-weight relationship that is estimated outside the model.

Weight-at-age in the catch: modelled in GADGET with VB parameters and length-weight relationship

Exploitation pattern: Landings: logistic selection parameters estimated by GADGET. Fleet proportions set as last three years average

Intermediate year assumptions: Catch in first quarter known, catches in quarters 2, 3 and 4 assumed to be equal to last years.

Stock recruitment model used: Mean of last three years.

Procedures used for splitting projected catches: driven by selection functions and provide by GADGET. Fleet proportions set as last three years average

Uncertainty models used:

To estimate the uncertainty in the model parameters and derived quantities a specialised bootstrap for disparate datasets is used. The approach is based on spatial subdivisions that can be considered to be i.i.d. Refer to Elvarsson (2014) for further details. The bootstrapping approach consists of the following:

- The base data are stored in a standardized database:
 - Time aggregation: 3 months
 - Spatial aggregation: subdivision
 - Further dis-aggregation is based on a range of categories including fishing gear, fishing vessel class, sampling type (e.g. harbour, sea and survey).
- To bootstrap the data, the list of subdivisions, depicted in figure E1, required for the model is sampled (with replacement) and stored. For a multi-area model one would conduct the re-sampling of subdivisions within each area of the model.
- The list of resampled subdivisions is then used to extract data (with replacement so the same dataset may be repeated several times in a given bootstrap sample).
- For a single bootstrap Gadget model, the same list of resampled subdivisions is used to extract each likelihood dataset i.e. length distributions, survey indices and age-length frequencies are extracted from the same spatial definition.

- A Gadget model is fitted to the extracted bootstrap dataset using the estimation procedure described above.
- The re-sampling process is repeated until the desired number of bootstrap samples are extracted, which in this case the total sample size is 100.

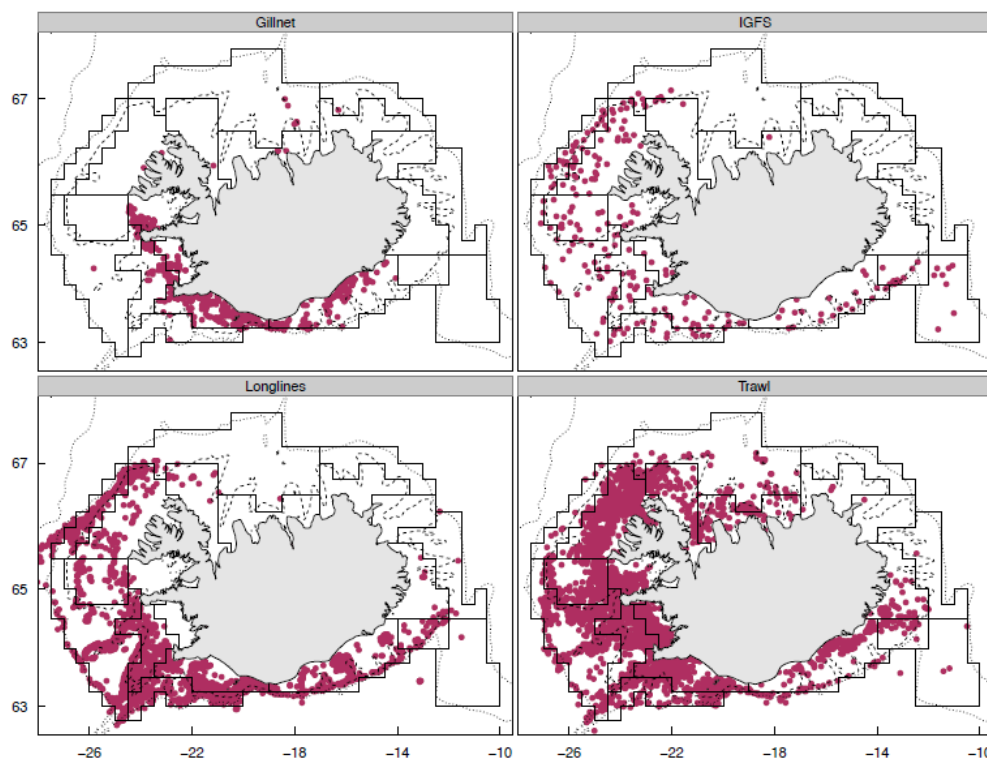


Figure E1. Locations of ling catches in 5.a in 2012 by commercial and survey fleets relative to the spatial subdivisions on the Icelandic continental shelf.

When re-sampling, data are forced to remain in the correct year and time--step so re-sampling is based on sampling spatially the elementary data units within a given modelled unit of time and space. Thus, within a modelled spatial unit the bootstrap is a re-sampling of subdivisions. This implicitly assumes data contained within each area of the model to be independent and identically distributed. Independence is justified by the definition of subdivisions. Furthermore treating them as they were from the same distribution, i.e. bootstrap replicates, appears to have little negative effect when compared to more traditional methods (Taylor, 2002).

The entire estimation procedure is repeated for each bootstrap sample. In particular, since the estimation procedure includes an iterative re-weighting scheme, this re-weighting is repeated for every bootstrap sample. The point of this is that the bootstrap procedure is no longer conditional on the weights. The procedure as a whole is quite computationally intensive but can easily be run in parallel, e.g. on a computer cluster.

In stark contrast to this, Hessian--based approaches usually only compute the Hessian at the final solution. Thus, they completely omit the effect of re-weighting likelihood components when estimating uncertainty. Such methods are thus conditional on the weights obtained in a pre-estimation stage.

F. Long term Projections

Model used: Gadget

Software used: Gadget

Yield-per-recruit analysis

Commonly an analysis of the yield-per-recruit is being used to derive an approximate value for F_{MSY} . Yield-per-recruit is calculated by following one year class through the fisheries calculating total yield from the year class as function of fishing mortality of fully recruited fish. In the model, the selection of the fisheries is length based so only the largest individuals of recruiting year classes are caught reducing mean weight of the survivors, more as fishing mortality is increased. This is to be contrasted to age based yield-per-recruit where the same weights-at-age are assumed in the landings independent of the fishing mortality even when the catch weights are much higher than the mean weight in the stock. In general YPR-curves estimated as in Gadget give a more conservative estimates (lower) of $F_{0.1}$ and F_{max} . One thing worth noting is the fact that F_{max} is generally at least F_{MSY} .

To estimate F_{MSY} the stock status was projected forward by 100 years under varying fishing mortalities. For each bootstrap model estimate (See section E in this Annex) the stock status is projected 10 times, resulting in a total of 1000 samples. Recruitment is calculated by an AR(1) model based on estimates of autocorrelation in recruitment between 1982–2003. Using this period is deemed more conservative as the recent spike in recruitment in 2004–2010 may have been a one off. The variation in recruitment was modelled as an autoregressive process with lag 1:

$$\bar{R}_y = \bar{R}_{y-1} + \epsilon_y$$

where ϵ_y is a mean zero gaussian with variance σ^2 .

From the simulation annual total landings $^F l_y$ by F were calculated after the 100 years. This is done to ensure that the stock has reached an equilibrium under the new fishing mortality regime. Average annual landings and 95% quantiles were used to determine the yield by F .

G. Biological Reference Points

	TYPE	VALUE	TECHNICAL BASIS
MSY	MSY Btrigger	9 500 t	As Bpa
Approach	FMSY	0.24	Based on long-term projections
	Blim	8 100 t	Lowest estimated SSB in the time-series
Precautionary	Bpa	9 500 t	As 97.5% quantile of Blim
Approach	Flim	NA	Explain
	Fpa	NA	Explain

At WKDEEP-2014 a forward stochastic simulations were presented. In the simulations annual total landings $^F l_y$ by F were calculated after 100 years. This is done to ensure that the stock had reached an equilibrium under the new fishing mortality regime. Average annual landings and 95% quantiles were used to determine the yield by F . The equilibrium yield curve is shown in figure G1, where the maximum yield, under the recruitment assumptions, is 5306 thousand tons with a 95% interval of 4776 and 6059 thousand tons.

F_{msy} was estimated to be 0.24, with a 95% confidence interval of 0.22 to 0.28. For comparison the median value for F_{max} from a yield-per-recruit analysis is 0.25 while the confidence interval is the same. Equilibrium spawning-stock biomass is shown in figure G2. The spawning stock at MSY, B_{msy} , is estimated at 29 959 thousand tons at $F=0.24$ with an upper quantile of 32 408 thousand tons and lower quantile of 18 801 thousand tons. It was proposed that B_{pa} was set as the 97.5% quantile of the bootstrap estimates of B_{lim} (lowest estimated SSB) and then to set B_{pa} as $B_{Trigger}$. B_{lim} is estimated as 8.1 kt and $B_{pa}/B_{Trigger}$ as 9.5 kt.

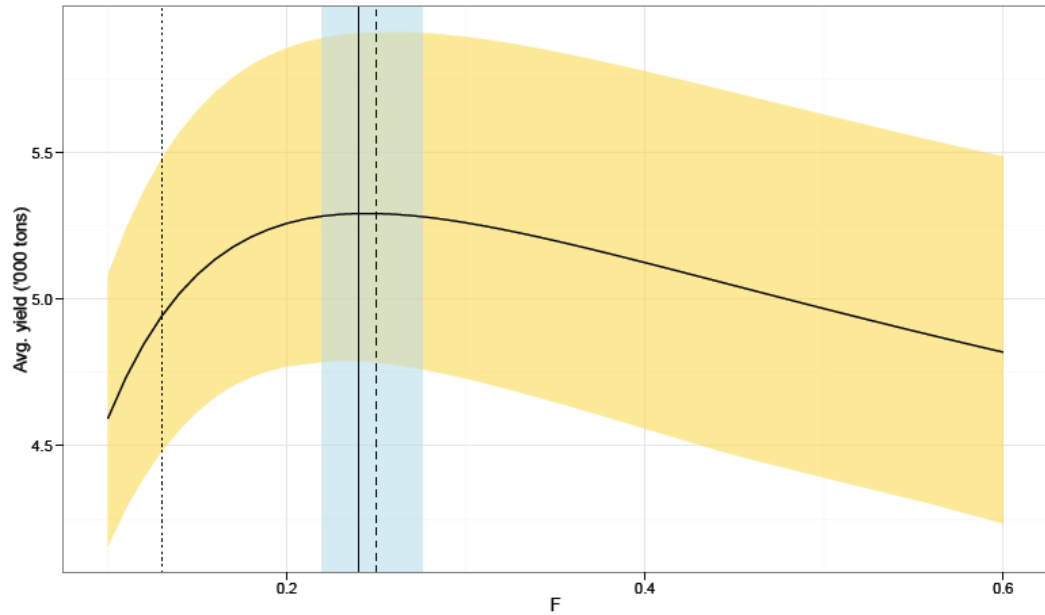


Figure G1. Equilibrium catch curve for ling in 5.a as a function of F . Solid black line indicate the equilibrium catch, solid horizontal line the F_{MSY} , broken horizontal line the median F_{MAX} , yellow the 95% confidence region for the catch and light blue region the 95% confidence region for F_{MSY} .

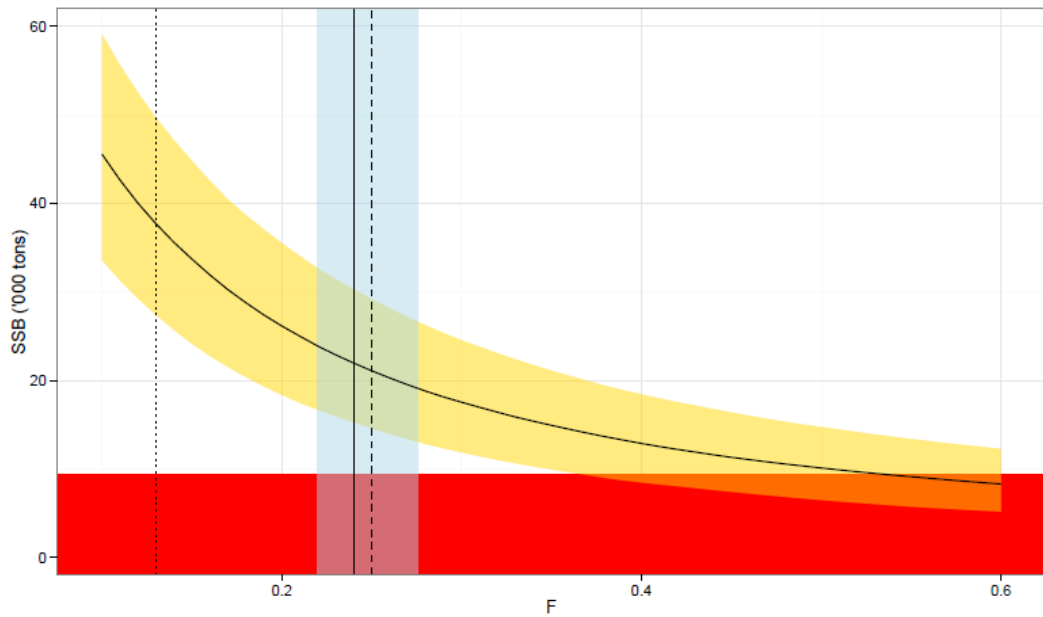


Figure G2. Equilibrium spawning-stock biomass as a function of F . Solid black line indicate the equilibrium biomass, solid horizontal line the F_{MSY} , broken horizontal line the median F_{MAX} , yellow the 95% confidence region for the biomass and light blue region the 95% confidence region for F_{MSY} . Red area is B_{PA} ($B_{Trigger}$)

H. Other Issues

H.1. Historical overview of previous assessment methods

Before 2007 ling in the NE-Atlantic was assessed as a single management unit.

Between 2007 to 2012 ling in 5.a was assessed based on trends in survey indices from the Icelandic spring and autumn survey. Supplementary information included relevant information from the fishery such as length distributions, maturity data, effort, cpue and analysis of changes in spatial and temporal distribution.

In 2012 the stock was assessed as a category 3 stock in the ICES-DLS framework and the basis for the ICES advice was

$$F_{proxy} = \frac{Yield}{Index}$$

The rationale for the advice was: For this stock the F_{proxy} of 1.5 is applied as a factor of the average of the most recent survey biomass estimates (average of 2011 and 2012), resulting in catch advice of no more than 12 000 t. i.e. to base the catches in 2013 and 2014 on 1.5 the survey biomass in 2012.