

Blue whiting (*Micromesistius poutassou*) in subareas 1–9, 12, and 14 (Northeast Atlantic and adjacent waters)

ICES advice on fishing opportunities

ICES advises that when the long term management strategy agreed by the European Union, the Faroe Islands, Iceland, and Norway is applied, catches in 2019 should be no more than 1 143 629 tonnes.

Stock development over time

Fishing mortality (F) has increased from a historical low in 2011 to above F_{MSY} since 2014. Spawning-stock biomass (SSB) decreased since 2017 but remains well above $MSY B_{trigger}$. Recruitments (R) in 2017 and 2018 are estimated to be low, following a period of high recruitments.

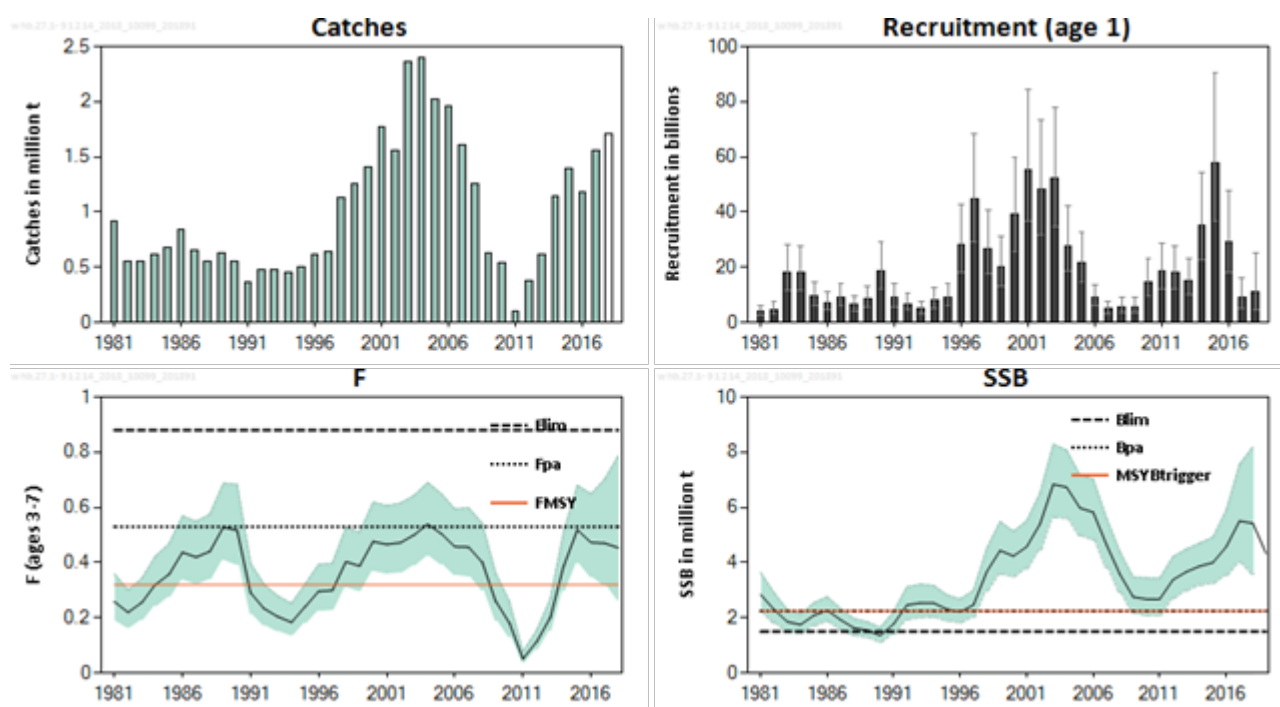


Figure 1 Blue whiting in subareas 1–9, 12, and 14. Summary of the stock assessment. Catches for 2018 (not shaded) are preliminary. For this stock, $F_{MGT} = F_{MSY}$ and $SSB_{MGT} = B_{pa}$; therefore, the horizontal lines representing these points in the graph would overlap.

Stock and exploitation status

ICES assesses that fishing pressure on the stock is above F_{MSY} but below F_{pa} and F_{lim} ; and spawning-stock size is above $MSY B_{trigger}$ and above B_{pa} and B_{lim} .

Table 1 Blue whiting in subareas 1–9, 12, and 14. State of the stock and fishery relative to reference points.

		Fishing pressure				Stock size			
		2016	2017	2018		2017	2018	2019	
Maximum sustainable yield	F_{MSY}	✗	✗	✗	Above	✓	✓	✓	Above trigger
Precautionary approach	F_{pa}, F_{lim}	✓	✓	✓	Harvested sustainably	✓	✓	✓	Full reproductive capacity
Management plan	F_{MGT}	✗	✗	✗	Above	✓	✓	✓	Above

Catch scenarios

Table 2 Blue whiting in subareas 1–9, 12, and 14. The basis for the catch scenarios.

Variable	Value	Notes
$F_{\text{ages 3–7}} (2018)$	0.45	Catch constraint, based on preliminary 2018 catches
SSB (2019)	4326857 tonnes	From forecast
$R_{\text{age 1}} (2019\text{--}2020)$	14580847 thousands	GM (1981–2017)
Total catch (2018)	1712874 tonnes	Preliminary 2018 catches as estimated by ICES, based on declared quotas and expected uptake

Table 3 Blue whiting in subareas 1–9, 12, and 14. Annual catch scenarios. All weights are in tonnes.

Basis	Total catch (2019)	$F_{\text{total}} (2019)$	SSB (2020)	% SSB change *	% Catch change **	% Advice change ***
ICES advice basis						
Long-term management strategy ($F = F_{\text{MSY}}$)	1143629	0.32	3752236	-13	-33	-18
Other scenarios						
MSY approach: F_{MSY}	1143629	0.32	3752236	-13	-33	-18
$F = 0$	0	0	4850444	12	-100	-100
F_{pa}	1725357	0.53	3201021	-26	1	24
F_{lim}	2476742	0.88	2499796	-42	45	79
$\text{SSB} (2020) = B_{\text{lim}}$	3587714	1.75	1500171	-65	110	159
$\text{SSB} (2020) = B_{\text{pa}}$	2747920	1.04	2250714	-48	60	98
$\text{SSB} (2020) = \text{MSY } B_{\text{trigger}}$	2747920	1.04	2250714	-48	60	98
$F = F_{2018}$	1528542	0.45	3386825	-22	-11	10
$\text{SSB} (2020) = \text{SSB} (2019)$	544778	0.140	4325259	0	-68	-61
Catch (2019) = Catch (2018)	1712874	0.53	3212778	-26	0	23
Catch (2019) = Catch (2018) -20 %	1370342	0.40	3536701	-18	-20	-1
Catch (2019) = Advice (2018) -20 %	1109872	0.31	3784400	-13	-35	-20

* SSB 2020 relative to SSB 2019.

** Catch in 2019 relative to catch in 2018 (1 712 874t, ICES estimate).

***Advice value for 2019 relative to advice value for 2018.

The advised catch is lower than last year's advice due to the low recruitment in 2017 and 2018 and decreasing biomass in addition to a downwards revision in the estimate of SSB in recent years.

Basis of the advice

Table 4 Blue whiting in subareas 1–9, 12, and 14. The basis of the advice.

Advice basis	Long-term management strategy
Management plan	A long-term management strategy was agreed by the European Union, the Faroe Islands, Iceland, and Norway in 2016 (Anon, 2016). ICES has evaluated the strategy and found it to be precautionary (ICES, 2016a).

Quality of the assessment

Since 2016, the assessment has used a preliminary estimate of catch-at-age in the year in which the assessment is carried out to supplement information from the acoustic survey conducted in the spring. In most recent years more than 90% of the annual catches of the age 3+ fish are consistently taken in the first half year, which makes it reasonable to estimate the total annual catch-at-age from preliminary first semester data. This is expected to provide an assessment that is less prone to the year effects sometimes observed in the survey index from the International Blue Whiting Spawning Stock Survey (IBWSS). The deviations between the preliminary and final catch weight for both 2016 and 2017 are less than 3 %. However, the final age structure differs because only a limited amount of biological samples are available and used. This could have an impact on the accuracy of the forecast.

SSB has been overestimated and F underestimated in the last two years.

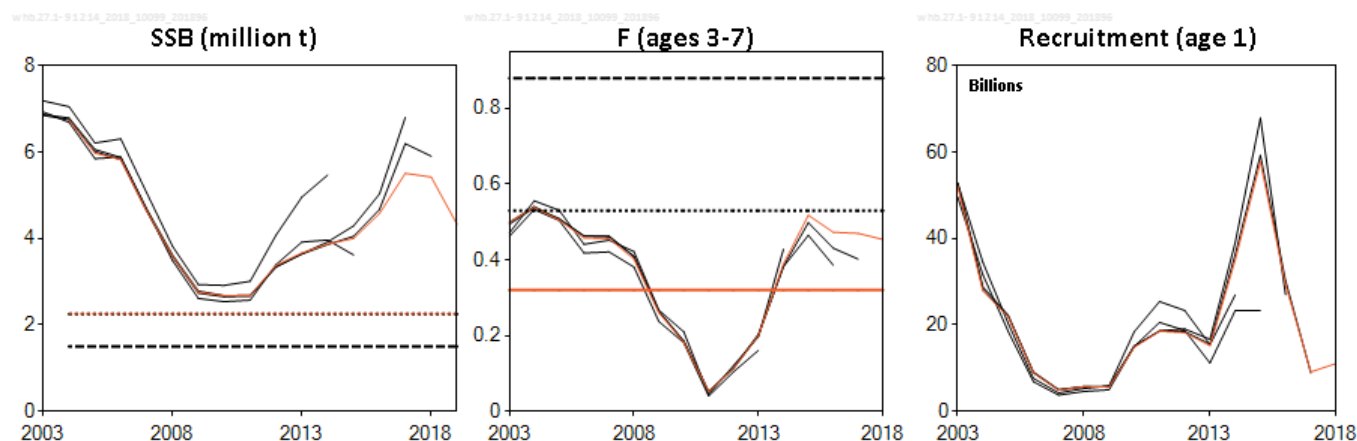


Figure 2 Blue whiting in subareas 1–9, 12, and 14. Historical assessment results. Since 2016, the SSB time series include the TAC year.

Issues relevant for the advice

The assessment estimates a low 2017 year class, which is confirmed by a series of surveys not used in the assessment model. This is likely to result in a decrease in stock size, and a reduction in fishing opportunities when the 2016 and the 2017 year classes are fully selected in the fishery from 2020.

The advice is based on the application of the long-term management strategy agreed by the European Union, the Faroe Islands, Iceland, and Norway and does not take into account the deviations from the plan as evident from the sum of unilateral quotas in 2018. The last catch scenario presented (Table 3) therefore uses the recommended catch from last year's application of the management plan as the basis from which to calculate the option relating to a 20% TAC constraint.

Reference points

Table 5 Blue whiting in subareas 1–9, 12, and 14. Reference points, values, and their technical basis.

Framework	Reference point	Value	Technical basis	Source
MSY approach	MSY B_{trigger}	2250000 t	B_{pa}	ICES (2013a, 2013b, 2016a)
	F_{MSY}	0.32	Stochastic simulations with segmented regression stock–recruitment relationship	ICES (2016a)
Precautionary approach	B_{lim}	1500000 t	Approximately B_{loss}	ICES (2013a, 2013b, 2016a)
	B_{pa}	2250000 t	$B_{\text{lim}} \exp(1.645 \times \sigma)$, with $\sigma = 0.246$	ICES (2013a, 2013b, 2016a)
	F_{lim}	0.88	Equilibrium scenarios with stochastic recruitment: F value corresponding to 50% probability of ($\text{SSB} < B_{\text{lim}}$)	ICES (2016a)
	F_{pa}	0.53	Based on F_{lim} and assessment uncertainties. $F_{\text{lim}} \exp(-1.645 \times \sigma)$, with $\sigma = 0.299$	ICES (2016a)
EU–Faroes–Iceland–Norway long-term management strategy	$\text{SSB}_{\text{MGT_lower}}$	1500000 t	B_{lim}	Anon (2016)
	SSB_{MGT}	2250000 t	B_{pa}	
	$F_{\text{MGT_lower}}$	0.05	Arbitrary low F	
	F_{MGT}	0.32	F_{MSY}	

Basis of the assessment

Table 6 Blue whiting in subareas 1–9, 12, and 14. Basis of the assessment and advice.

ICES stock data category	1 (ICES, 2016b)
Assessment type	Age-based analytical assessment (SAM; Berg and Nielsen, 2016) that uses catches for the model and the forecast
Input data	Commercial catches, preliminary estimate of catch-at-age in the year in which the assessment is carried out. One survey index (International Blue Whiting Spawning Stock Survey (IBWSS) ages 1–8, 2004–2018, excluding 2010). Fixed maturity estimated in 1994 by combining maturity ogives from the southern and northern areas. Natural mortalities fixed at 0.2, derived in the 1980s from age compositions before the targeted fishery started.
Discards and bycatch	Discard data have been included since 2014.
Indicators	Estimates of recruitment from surveys: Norwegian bottom trawl survey in the Barents Sea, International Ecosystem Survey in the Nordic Seas in May (IESNS) and the International Ecosystem Summer Survey in the Nordic Seas in July (IESSNS), the Faroese bottom trawl surveys in spring and the Icelandic bottom trawl survey in spring).
Other information	The stock was benchmarked in 2012 (WKPELA; ICES, 2012). An inter-benchmark protocol was conducted in the spring of 2016 (ICES, 2016c).
Working group	Working Group on Widely Distributed Stocks (WGWIDE)

Information from stakeholders

The EU industry reported that the fishery for blue whiting in 2018 was very good. High catch rates were maintained all through the season and the vessels had no difficulty catching their allocations. A very large fishery took place in west of Ireland in the Porcupine area and west of Scotland. There was a higher proportion of larger blue whiting in the catch in the Spring (February, March, and April) than in the previous year. The industry considers recruitment to the fishery to have been above average over the last three years.

History of the advice, catch, and management

Table 7 Blue whiting in subareas 1–9, 12, and 14. ICES advice and catch. All weights are in tonnes.

Year	ICES advice	Catch corresponding to advice	TAC	ICES catch
1987	TAC for northern areas; no advice for southern areas	950000	-	655000
1988	TAC for northern areas; no advice for southern areas	832000	-	557847
1989	TAC for northern areas; no advice for southern areas	630000	-	627447
1990	TAC for northern areas; no advice for southern areas	600000	-	561610
1991	TAC for northern areas; no advice for southern areas	670000	-	369524
1992	No advice	-	-	475026
1993	Catch at status quo F (northern areas); no assessment for southern areas	490000	-	480679
1994	Precautionary TAC (northern areas); no assessment for southern areas	485000	650000*	459414
1995	Precautionary TAC for combined stock	518000	650000*	578905
1996	Precautionary TAC for combined stock	500000	650000*	645982
1997	Precautionary TAC for combined stock	540000	-	672437
1998	Precautionary TAC for combined stock	650000	-	1128969
1999	Catches above 650 000 t may not be sustainable in the long run	650000	-	1256228
2000	F should not exceed the proposed F_{pa}	800000	-	1412927
2001	F should not exceed the proposed F_{pa}	628000	-	1780170
2002	Rebuilding plan	0	-	1556792
2003	F should be less than the proposed F_{pa}	600000	-	2321406
2004	Achieve 50% probability that F will be less than F_{pa}	925000	-	2380161
2005	Achieve 50% probability that F will be less than F_{pa}	1075000	-	2034309
2006	F old management plan	1500000	2100000**	1982692
2007	F should be less than the proposed F_{pa}	980000	1847000***	1630646
2008	F should be less than F_{pa}	835000	1250000^	1265830
2009	Maintain stock above B_{pa}	384000	606000^^	641878
2010	Follow the agreed management plan	540000	548000	528793
2011	See scenarios	40100–223000	40000	103644
2012	Follow the agreed management plan	391000	391000	382843
2013	Follow the agreed management plan	643000	643000	628171
2014	Follow the agreed management plan	948950	1200000	1161778
2015	Follow the agreed management plan	839886	1260000^^^	1401894
2016	MSY approach	≤ 776391	1147000^^^	1194712
2017	MSY approach	≤ 1342330	1675400^^^	1558349§
2018	Long-term management strategy	≤ 1387872	1727964^^^	1712874§
2019	Long-term management strategy	≤ 1143629		

* NEAFC proposal for NEAFC regions 1 and 2.

** Agreed TAC from four Coastal States of 2 million tonnes, and an additional allocation to Russia in the international zone of 100 000t.

*** Agreed TAC from four Coastal States of 1.7 million tonnes, and an additional allocation to Russia and Greenland of 147 000 t.

^ Agreed TAC from four Coastal States of 1.1 million tonnes, and an additional allocation to Russia and Greenland.

^^ Agreed TAC from four Coastal States of 0.59 million tonnes, and an additional allocation to Russia of 16 000 t.

^^^ No agreed TAC by the Coastal States, sum of unilateral quotas.

§ Preliminary.

History of the catch and landings

Table 8 Blue whiting in subareas 1–9, 12, and 14. Catch distribution by fleet in 2017 as estimated by ICES.

Total catch (2017)	Landings		Discards
1558061 tonnes	98% pelagic trawl	2% bottom trawl	2030 tonnes
	1556030 tonnes		

Table 9 Blue whiting in subareas 1–9, 12, and 14. Catches inside and outside NEAFC regulatory area. All weights are in tonnes

Year	Catches inside NEAFC RA	Catches outside NEAFC RA	Total catches
2017	263019	1295042	1558061

Table 10 Blue whiting in subareas 1–9, 12, and 14. History of commercial catch and landings; ICES estimated values are presented for each country participating in the fishery. Discard data are included since 2014. All weights are in tonnes.

Country	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Denmark	89500	41450	54663	48659	18134	248	140	165	340	2167	35256	45178	39395	60868
Estonia	*													
Faroes	322322	266799	321013	317859	225003	58354	49979	16405	43290	85768	224700	282502	282416	356501
France		8046	18009	16638	11723	8831	7839	4337	9799	8978	10410	9659	10345	13369
Germany	15293	22823	36437	34404	25259	5044	9108	278	6239	11418	24487	24107	20025	45555
Iceland	379643	265516	309508	236538	159307	120202	87942	5887	63056	104918	182879	214870	186914	228934
Ireland	75393	73488	54910	31132	22852	8776	8324	1195	7557	13205	21466	24785	27657	43238
Lithuania			4635	9812	5338						4717		1129	5300
Netherlands	95311	147783	102711	79875	78684	35686	33762	4595	26526	51635	38524	56397	58148	81156
Norway	957684	738490	642451	539587	418289	225995	194317	20539	118832	196246	399520	489439	310412	399363
Poland														15889
Portugal	3937	5190	5323	3897	4220	2043	1482	603	1955	2056	2150	2547	2586	2046
Spain	15612	17643	15173	13557	14342	20637	12891	2416	6726	15274	32065	29206	31952	28920
Sweden	19083	2960	101	464	4	3	50	1	4	199	2	32	42	90
UK (England Wales)	2593	7356	10035	12926	14147	6176	2475	27	1590	4100	11	131	1374+	3447
UK (Northern Ireland)										1232	2205	1119		
UK (Scotland)	57028	104539	72106	43540	38150	173	5496	1331	6305	8166	24630	30508	37173	64724
Russia	346762	332226	329100	236369	225163	149650	112553	45841	88303	120674	152256	185763	173655	188449
Greenland			6517	5389	5215	60	2435	24	2321	2135	6500	5651	12863	20500
Unallocated									3 499					
TOTAL	2380161	2034309	1982692	1630646	1265830	641878	528793	103644	382843	628171	1161778	1401894	1194712	1558349

* Landings of 19 467 tonnes were reported to the EU, but not to the ICES WGNPBW.

+ updated in 2018.

Table 11 Blue whiting in subareas 1–9, 12, and 14. ICES estimated catches (tonnes) by main fishing areas.

Year	Norwegian Sea fishery (SAs 1 and 2; ICES divisions 5.a and 14.a–b)	Fishery in the spawning area (SA 12.; ICES divisions 5.b, 6.a–b, and 7.a–c)	Directed- and mixed fisheries in the North Sea (SA 4; ICES Division 3.a)	Total northern areas	Total southern areas (SAs 8 and 9; ICES divisions 7.d–k)	Grand total
1988	55829	426037	45143	527009	30838	557847
1989	42615	475179	75958	593752	33695	627447
1990	2106	463495	63192	528793	32817	561610
1991	78703	218946	39872	337521	32003	369524
1992	62312	318018	65974	446367	28722	475026
1993	43240	347101	58082	448423	32256	480679
1994	22674	378704	28563	429941	29473	459414
1995	23733	423504	104004	551241	27664	578905
1996	23447	478077	119359	620883	25099	645982
1997	62570	514654	65091	642315	30122	672437
1998	177494	827194	94881	1099569	29400	1128969
1999	179639	943578	106609	1229826	26402	1256228
2000	284666	989131	114477	1388274	24654	1412928
2001	591583	1045100	118523	1755206	24964	1780170
2002	541467	846602	145652	1533721	23071	1556792
2003	931508	1211621	158180	2301309	20097	2321406
2004	921349	1232534	138593	2292476	85093	2377569
2005	405577	1465735	128033	1999345	27608	2026953
2006	404362	1428208	105239	1937809	28331	1966140
2007	172709	1360882	61105	1594695	17634	1612330
2008	68352	1111292	36061	1215704	30761	1246465
2009	46629	533996	22387	603012	32627	635639
2010	36214	441521	17545	495280	28552	523832
2011	20599	72279	7524	100401	3191	103592
2012	24391	324545	5678	354614	29402	384016*
2013	31759	481356	8749	521864	103973	625837**
2014	45580	885483	28596	959659	195620	1155279
2015	150828	895684	44661	1091173	305071	1396244
2016	59744	905087	55774	1020604	162583	1183187
2017	136565	1284105	45474	1466144	91917	1558061

* Official catches by area from Sweden are not included (2012).

** Official catches by area from Sweden and Greenland are not included (2013).

Summary of the assessment

Table 12 Blue whiting in subareas 1–9, 12, and 14. Assessment summary. Weights are in tonnes.

Year	Recruitm. (age 1) Thousands	Recruitm. 97.5 th percentile	Recruitm. 2.5 th percentile	SSB	SSB 97.5 th percentile	SSB 2.5 th percentile	Catch*	Mean F (ages 3–7)	Mean F 97.5 th percentile	Mean F 2.5 th percentile
1981	3943692	6171224	2520198	2843780	3640508	2221416	922980	0.26	0.36	0.186
1982	4664381	7383007	2946828	2303718	2913988	1821256	550643	0.22	0.30	0.162
1983	18115304	28059578	11695267	1858444	2299072	1502264	553344	0.26	0.34	0.190
1984	18014177	27639865	11740672	1752199	2130531	1441049	615569	0.32	0.42	0.24
1985	9611988	14685653	6291195	2088626	2544764	1714249	678214	0.36	0.47	0.27
1986	7249682	11002687	4776823	2271261	2762068	1867669	847145	0.44	0.57	0.34
1987	9122396	13876349	5997119	1931350	2345128	1590580	654718	0.42	0.55	0.32
1988	6427638	9783063	4223067	1637240	1971313	1359781	552264	0.44	0.57	0.34
1989	8537748	13044327	5588110	1547528	1857550	1289249	630316	0.53	0.69	0.41
1990	18736561	29063658	12078959	1360082	1647312	1122934	558128	0.52	0.68	0.39
1991	8988548	14103339	5728713	1779458	2229791	1420075	364008	0.29	0.40	0.21
1992	6713109	10398504	4333876	2459581	3124481	1936174	474592	0.23	0.32	0.170
1993	4998700	7837980	3187939	2540869	3213523	2009014	475198	0.20	0.28	0.149
1994	8135997	12637610	5237893	2535365	3171744	2026669	457696	0.184	0.25	0.134
1995	9335808	14346906	6074990	2312732	2827686	1891556	505176	0.24	0.32	0.179
1996	27984503	42911611	18249895	2212106	2678269	1827081	621104	0.30	0.39	0.22
1997	44654015	68314138	29188410	2467411	2992161	2034689	639681	0.30	0.40	0.23
1998	26698034	40590846	17560241	3674788	4521274	2986783	1131955	0.40	0.53	0.31
1999	20324984	31053766	13302894	4438043	5484320	3591370	1261033	0.39	0.51	0.30
2000	39079520	59843181	25520182	4235751	5129742	3497561	1412449	0.48	0.62	0.37
2001	55497740	84311145	36531341	4571904	5511112	3792756	1771805	0.47	0.61	0.36
2002	48380225	73556421	31821100	5397878	6518552	4469870	1556955	0.47	0.62	0.36
2003	52143422	78120861	34804230	6834267	8287133	5636111	2365319	0.50	0.64	0.39
2004	27840934	42105293	18409030	6730016	8072237	5610974	2400795	0.54	0.69	0.42
2005	21854787	32817581	14554141	5976941	7169991	4982409	2018344	0.51	0.65	0.39
2006	8915416	13538385	5871058	5824060	7021375	4830917	1956239	0.46	0.59	0.35
2007	4873765	7426981	3198282	4641908	5614809	3837586	1612269	0.46	0.60	0.35
2008	5730029	8858823	3706275	3584601	4400090	2920250	1251851	0.40	0.54	0.30
2009	5577076	8932002	3482285	2755802	3474958	2185478	634978	0.26	0.36	0.187
2010	14802057	23068329	9497910	2676765	3445491	2079551	539539	0.182	0.26	0.128
2011	18517015	28616700	11981809	2681413	3434960	2093175	103771	0.052	0.078	0.035
2012	18200627	27716214	11951951	3379349	4219058	2706766	375692	0.113	0.154	0.083
2013	15173469	23077923	9976381	3665883	4491716	2991885	613863	0.20	0.27	0.150
2014	34951221	54066761	22594064	3870679	4702926	3185710	1147650	0.39	0.51	0.30
2015	57777072	90577896	36854356	4001425	4919409	3254742	1390656	0.52	0.68	0.40
2016	29276819	47626416	17996990	4575498	5903228	3546395	1180786	0.47	0.65	0.35
2017	9104584	16249224	5101379	5508728	7560914	4013548	1555069	0.47	0.70	0.32
2018	11037772	25300070	4815497	5422226	8197337	3586596	1712874	0.45	0.79	0.26
2019	14580847**			4326857						

*Catches presented are the sum of product (SOP) values from catch- and weight-at-age used in the assessment model.

** GM (1981-2017)

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