

MEGRIM – STÓRKJAFTA

Lepidorhombus whiffiagonis

GENERAL INFORMATION

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

THE FISHERY

Main fishing grounds for megrim are in the southeast, south and southwest of Iceland, with smaller fishing grounds in the west of the island. There is no target fishery for megrim in Iceland, it is only taken as by-catch, particularly in demersal seine and *Nephrops* trawl. Seiners dominate the coastal fishery, while trawlers catch them deeper and further offshore. Megrim fishing grounds in 2009-2017, as reported by mandatory electronic logbooks are shown on Figure 1.

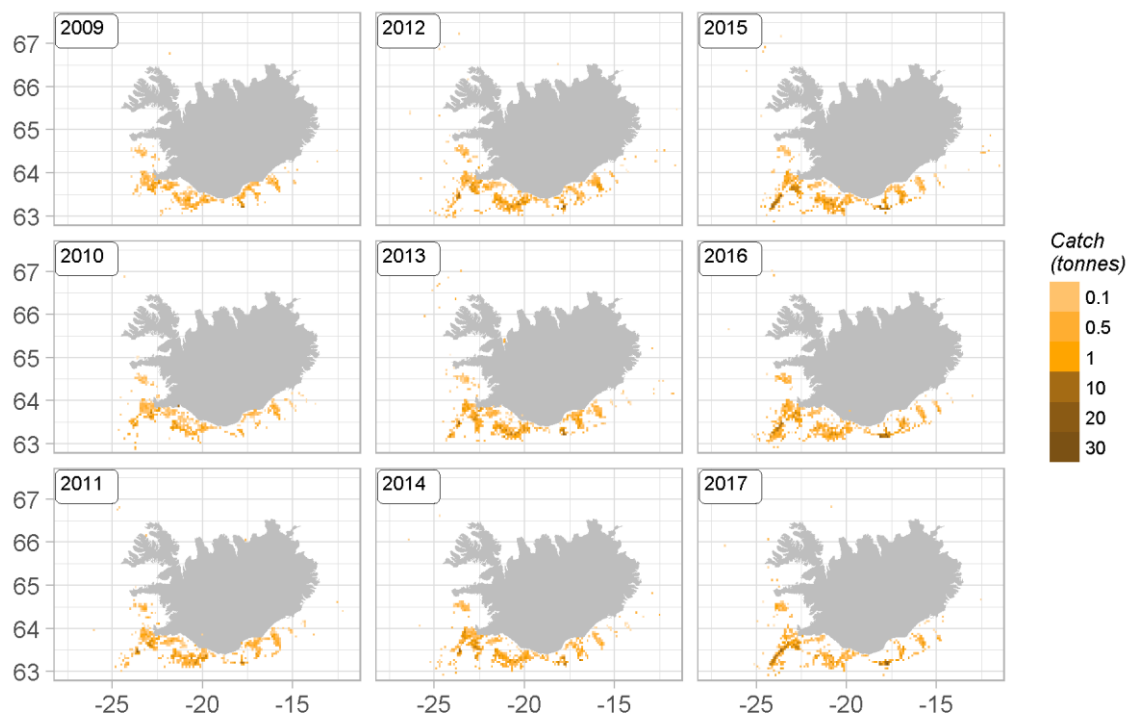


Figure 1. Megrim. Geographical distribution of the Icelandic fishery since 2009. Reported catch from logbooks.

Mynd 1. Stórkjafta. Útbreiðsla veiða á Íslandsmiðum frá 2009 samkvæmt afladagbókum.

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

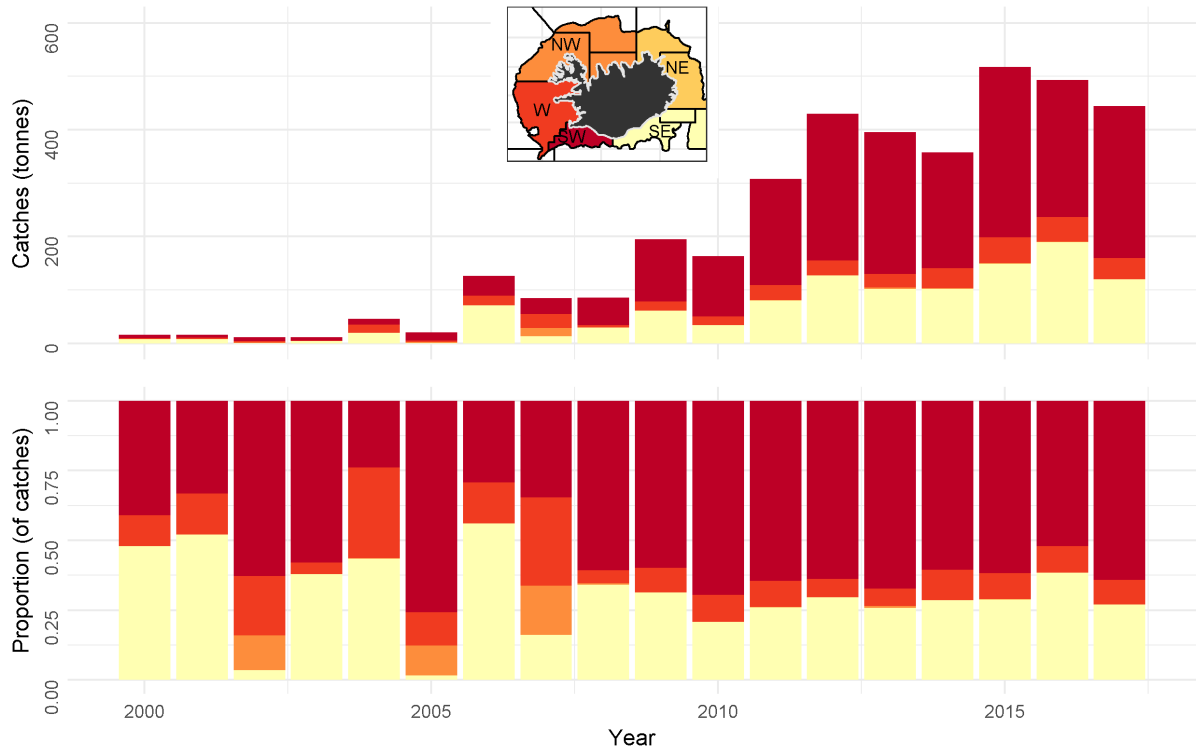


Figure 2. Megrím. Spatial distribution of the Icelandic fishery by fishing area from 2000-2017. All gears combined.

Mynd 2. Stórkjaftha. Útbreiðsla veiða á íslensku veiðisvæði árin 2000-2017. Öll veiðarfæri samanlagt.

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

Megrím in Icelandic fishing grounds are mainly caught in demersal seine and *Nephrops* trawl (Figure 4, Table 1). Catch in demersal seine has been decreasing in the past few years, while catches in *Nephrops* trawl and more recently in bottom trawl have increased. In 2017, approximately 53% of landed megrim was fished in *Nephrops* trawl, 39% in bottom trawl. Since 2000, the number of boats landing annually over one tonne of megrim has remained relatively similar between years (Table 1).

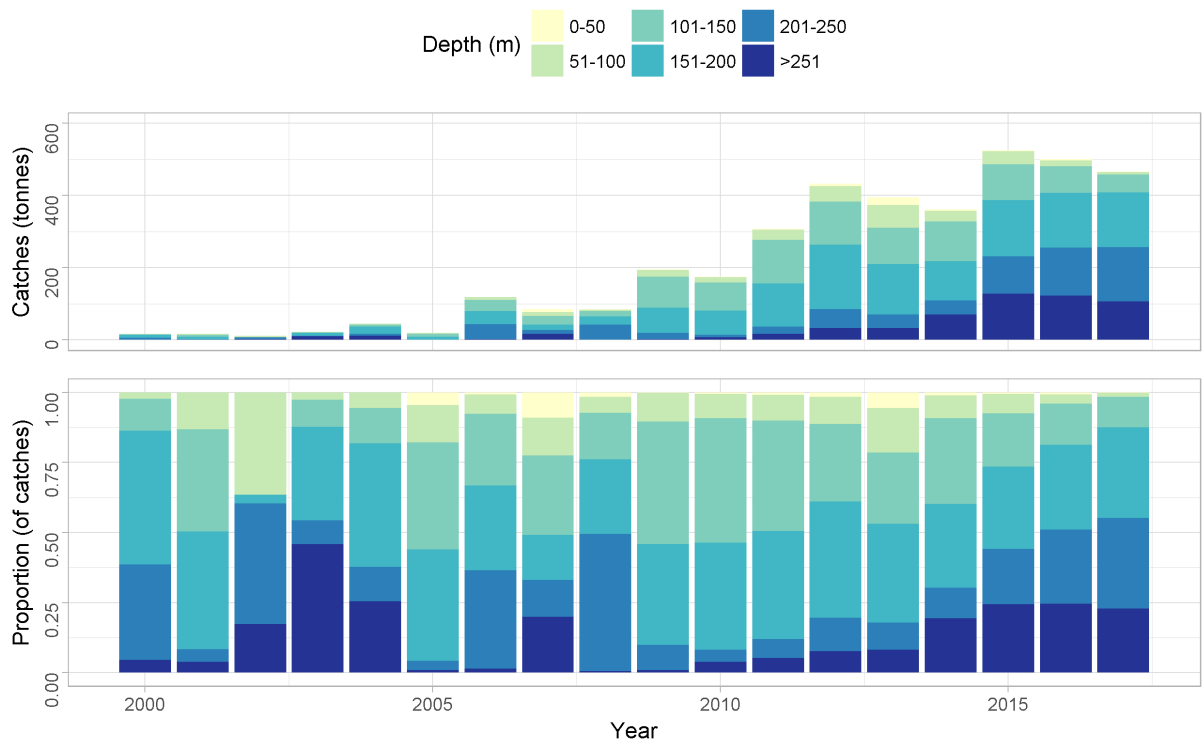


Figure 3. Megrim. Depth distribution catches according to logbooks.

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

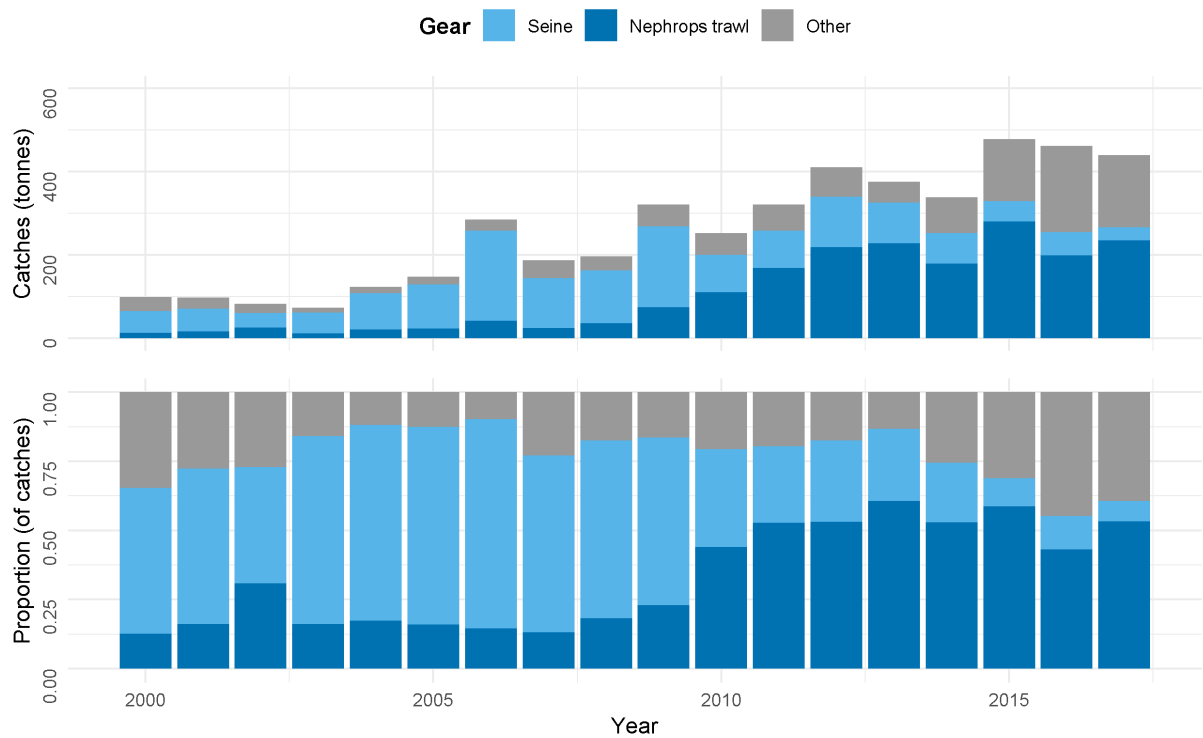


Figure 4. Megrim. Total catch (landings) by fishing gear since 2000.

Mynd 4. Stórkjafra. Landaður afli eftir veiðarfærum frá 2000.

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

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

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

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

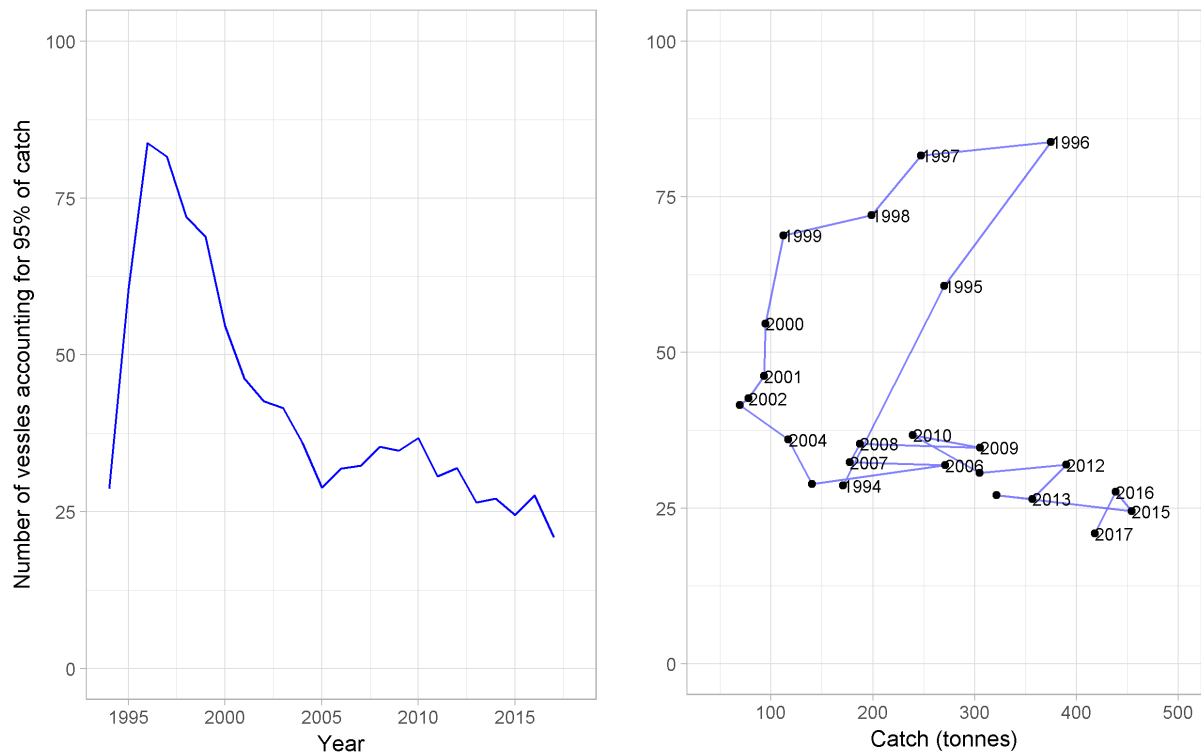


Figure 5. Megrim. Number of vessels (all gear types) accounting for 95% of the total catch annually since 1994. Left: Plotted against year. Right: Plotted against total catch. Data from the Directorate of Fisheries.

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

CATCH PER UNIT EFFORT (CPUE) AND EFFORT.

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

Non-standardised estimate of CPUE in demersal seine (kg/set) is calculated as the total weight in sets in which megrim was caught, according to logbooks. CPUE of megrim was increasing since 2010 to 2014 and remained relatively stable between 150 to 200 kg/set until 2017 when it declined to 117 kg/set (Figure 6). CPUE of *Nephrops* trawl (kg/h), in hauls where megrim was caught, has been slowly increasing since 2000. It should, however, be noted that megrim was poorly registered in logbooks before 2009, particularly from the *Nephrops* fishery.

Total fishing effort for megrim (number of sets where megrim was caught) in demersal seine was around 200 sets during 2000-2005 (Figure 6). After a rapid increase, it remained high in 2009-2012, before it declined to about 300 sets in last three years. Effort (number of towing hours where megrim was caught) in *Nephrops* trawl increased rapidly from 2008-2012 and has remained high since then (Figure 6).

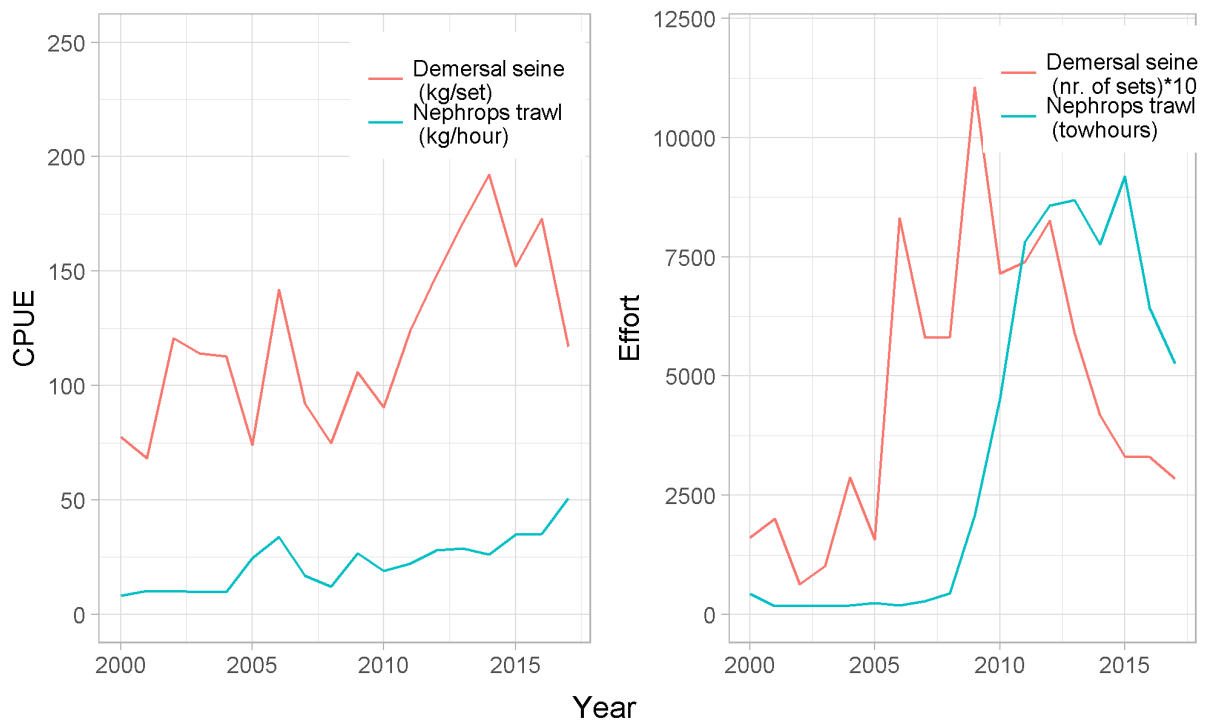


Figure 6. Megrím. Non-standardised estimate of CPUE (left) and fishing effort (right) from demersal seine (kg/set or nr. of sets) in red and demersal trawl (kg/hour or towhours) in blue.

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

AGE DISTRIBUTION OF LANDED MEGRIM

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

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

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

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

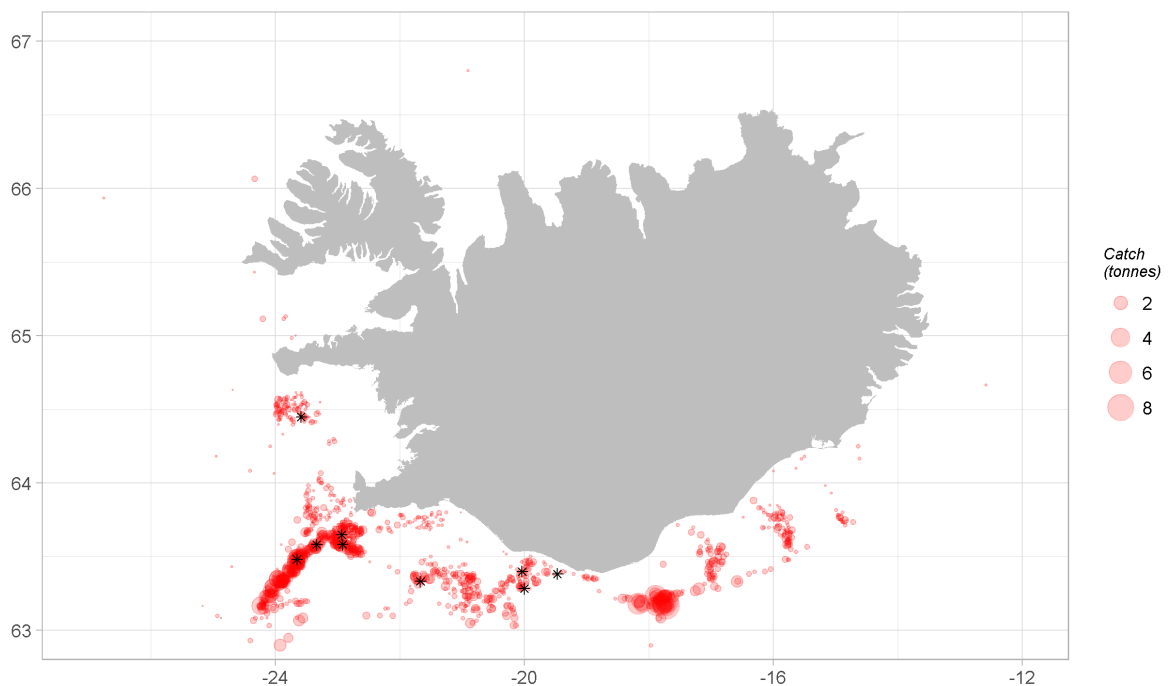


Figure 7. Megrim. Fishing grounds in 2017 as reported in logbooks (red) and positions of samples taken from landings (asterisks).

Mynd 7. Stórkjafna. Veiðisvæði við Ísland árið 2017 samkvæmt afladagbókum (rautt) og staðsetningar sýna úr lönduðum afla (stjörnur).

LENGTH DISTRIBUTION OF LANDED MEGRIM

Length distribution of landed megrim was relatively stable in 2001-2009, with average length ranging between 47 and 49 cm in most years (Figure 8). Since 2010 landings of larger megrim (50 cm and larger) have been increasing.

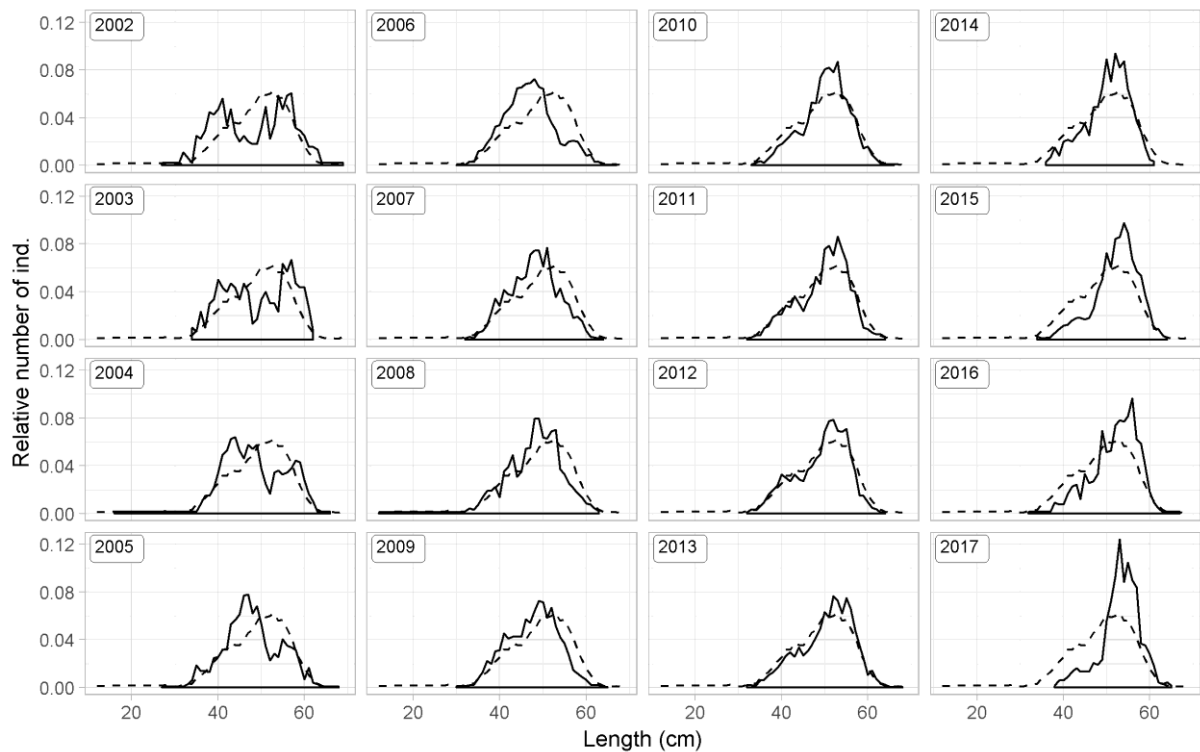


Figure 8. Megrím. Length distribution from landed catch. The dotted line represents the mean length distribution for all years.

Mynd 8. Stórkjafra. Lengdardreifing aflasýna frá árinu 2002 með meðallengdardreifingu fyrir öll árin (punktalína).

SURVEY DATA

The Icelandic spring groundfish survey (hereafter spring survey, IS-SMB), which has been conducted annually in March since 1985, covers the most important distribution area of the megrim fishery. In addition, the Icelandic autumn groundfish survey (hereafter autumn survey, IS-SMH) was commenced in 1996. However, a full autumn survey was not conducted in 2011 due to a labour dispute and therefore the results for 2011 are not presented. The spring survey is considered to measure changes in abundance/biomass better than the autumn survey.

Figure 9 shows both a recruitment index based on abundance of megrim smaller than 30 cm, and trends in various biomass indices. Survey length distributions are shown in Figures 10-11, abundance and changes in spatial distribution in Figures 12-15.

Total biomass index and the biomass index for megrim larger than 40 cm (harvestable part of the stock) has been increasing steadily since 1999-2001 (Figure 9). The same holds for the index of megrim larger than 53 cm suggesting a decrease in fishing mortality. The index of juvenile abundance (<30 cm) has been low in the last six years.

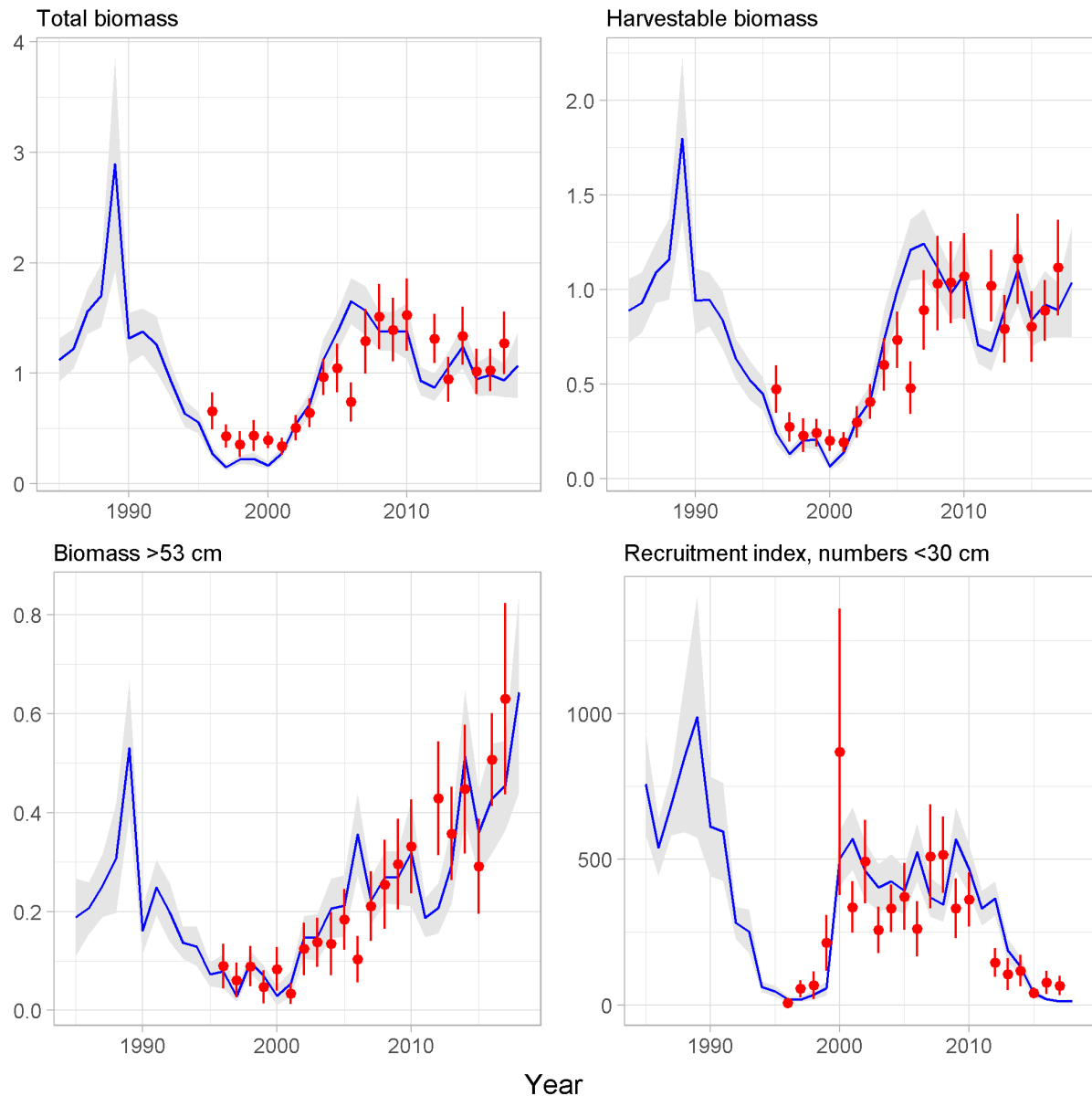


Figure 9. Megrím. Total biomass indices (upper left) and harvestable biomass indices (>40 cm) (upper, right), biomass indices of larger ind. (>53cm) (lower left) and juvenile abundance indices (<30 cm) (lower right) from the spring survey (blue) from 1985 and autumn survey (red) from 1996, along with the standard deviation.

Mynd 9. Stórkjafta. Stofnvísitala (efri til vinstri), vísitala veiðistofns (40 cm og stærri, efri til hægri) og vísitala stærri einstaklinga (53 cm og stærri, neðri til vinstri) og nýliðunarvísitala (neðri til hægri), úr stofnmælingu botnfiska að vori (blátt) frá árinu 1985 og hausti (rautt) frá árinu 1996, ásamt staðalfrávik.

From the onset of the spring survey until 1993 there were little changes in the general length distribution of megrim and the average length of measured fish ranged between 36 and 39 cm (Figure 10). In the 1994-1999 surveys there were relatively more larger fish, increasing the average length to 44 cm in 1998. In the survey of 2000 there was a sudden change in the length distribution of megrim with relatively high number of small individuals and the average length fell down to 26.5 cm. This is seen as a sudden increase in recruitment in 2000 (Figure 9). Although the recruitment continued to be high the next years, the length distribution gradually shifted towards larger fish with increase in average length reaching a high of 48 cm in 2017. Comparable changes in length distribution of megrim are also seen in the autumn survey (Figure 11).

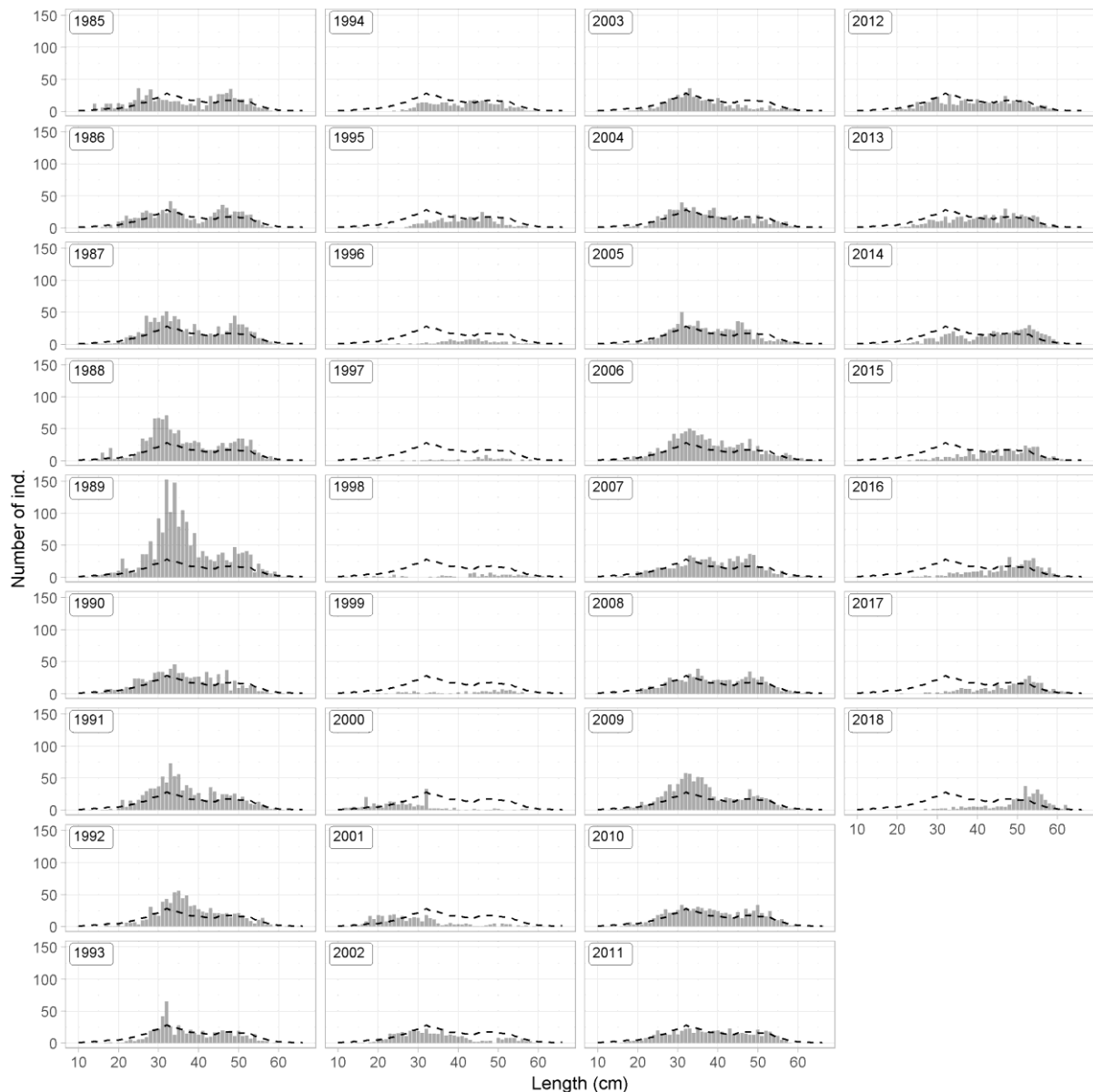


Figure 10. Megrim. Length distribution from the spring survey. The dotted line shows mean length for all years combined.
Mynd 10. Stórkjafa. Lengdardreifing úr stofnmælingu botnfiska að vori frá 1985 ásamt meðallengd allra ára (punktalína).

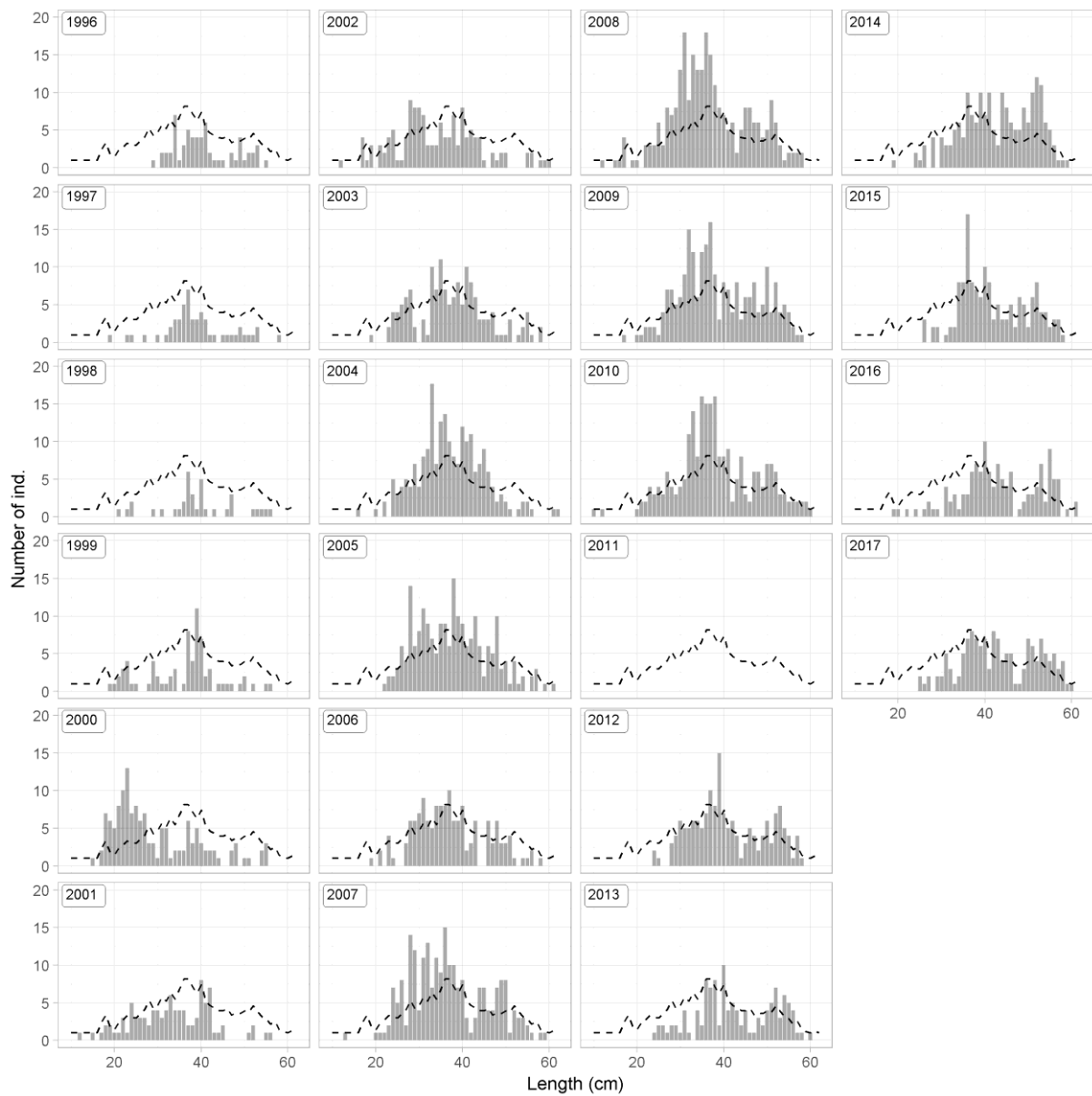


Figure 11. Megrím. Length distribution from the autumn survey. The dotted line shows mean length for all years combined.

Mynd 11. Stórkjafa. Lengdardreifing úr stofnmælingu botnfiska að hausti frá 1996 ásamt meðallengd allra ára (punktalína).

Megrim were mostly caught off the southern part of the country in the spring survey in 2018, particularly in the SW area (Figure 12). Spatial distribution of the biomass index of megrim in the spring survey has been relatively stable since 2007, with highest proportion of megrim caught in the SW area (Figure 13).

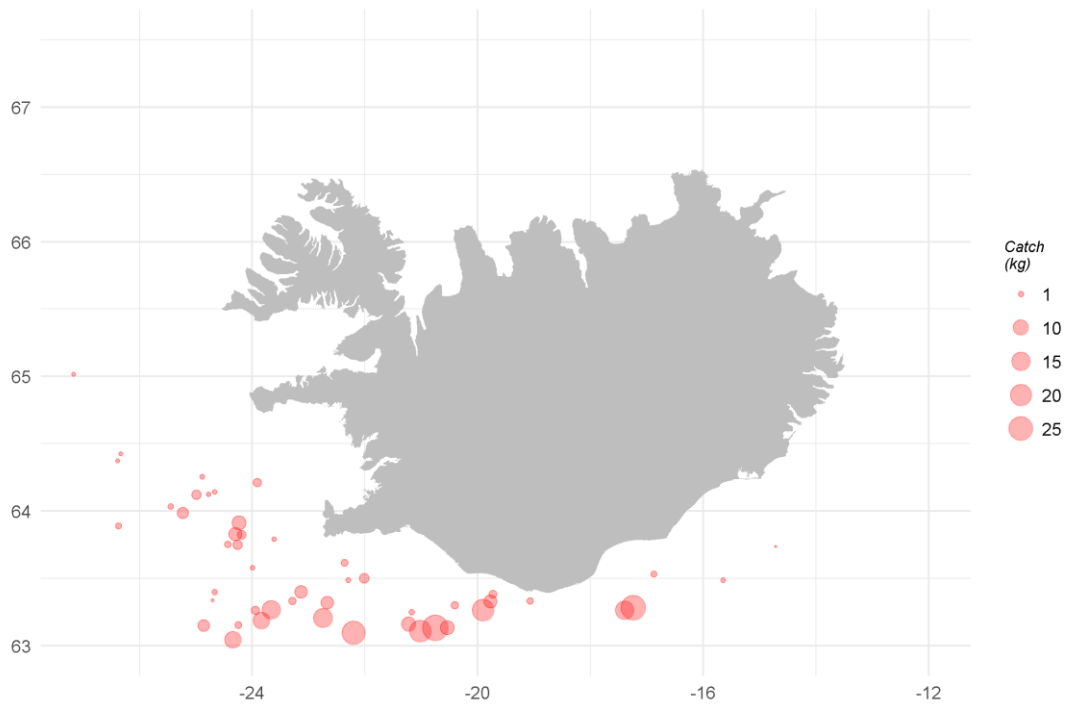


Figure 12. Megrim. Spatial distribution in the spring survey in 2018.

Mynd 12. Stórkjafta. Útbreiðsla í stofnmælingu botnfiska að vori 2018.

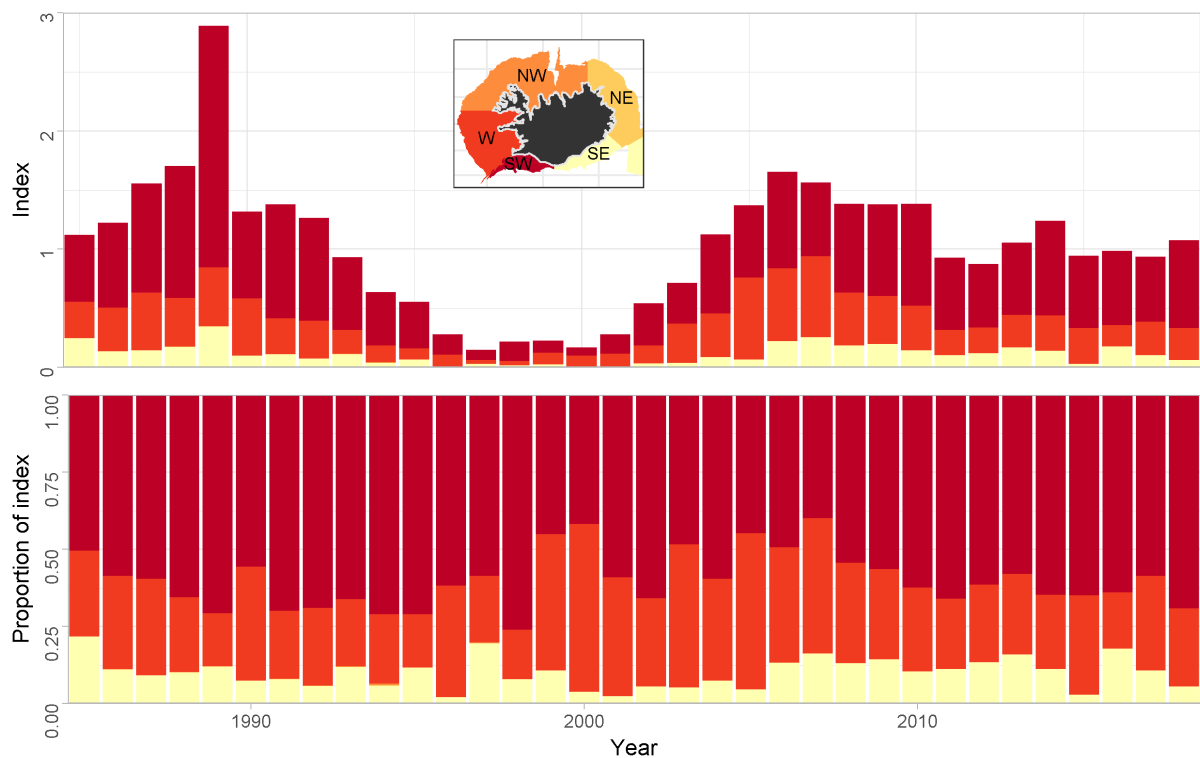


Figure 13. Megrim. Spatial distribution of biomass index from the spring survey since 1985.

Mynd 13. Stórkjafta. Dreifing lífmassavísitölu í stofnmælingu botnfiska að vori, frá árinu 1985.

In the autumn survey of 2017, the general distribution was similar to the spring survey (Figure 14). The same is true for the spatial distribution of megrim in the autumn survey since 1996 (Figure 15), where most of the biomass has been measured in the SW area, followed by the W and SE areas.

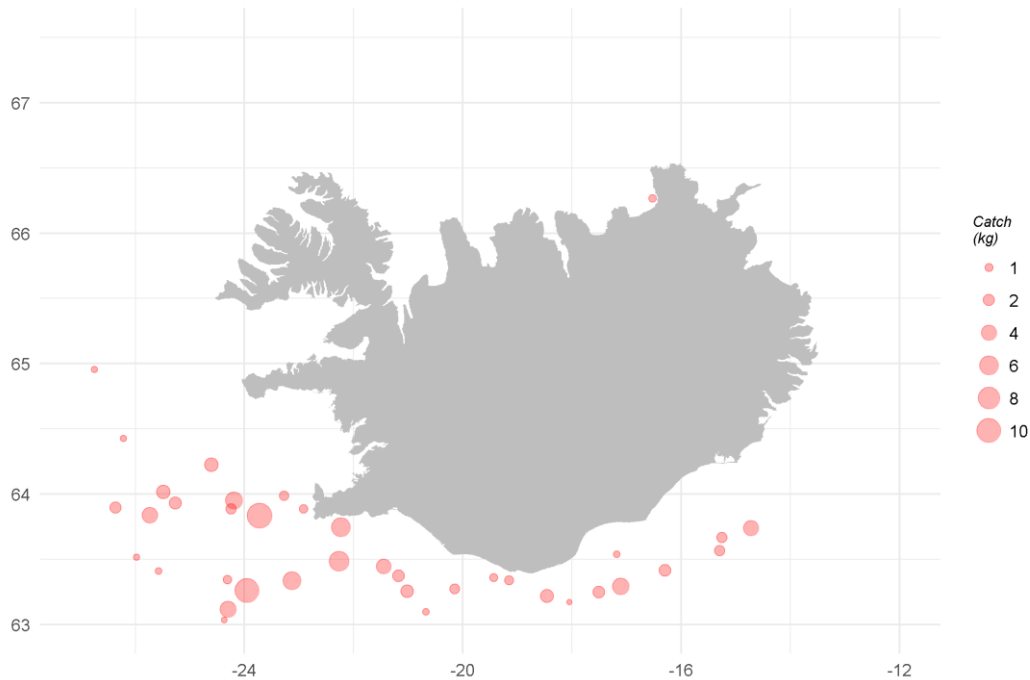


Figure 14. Megrim. Spatial distribution of megrim in 2017 in the autumn survey.

Mynd 14. Stórkjafa. Útbreiðsla í stofnmælingu botnfiska að hausti árið 2017.

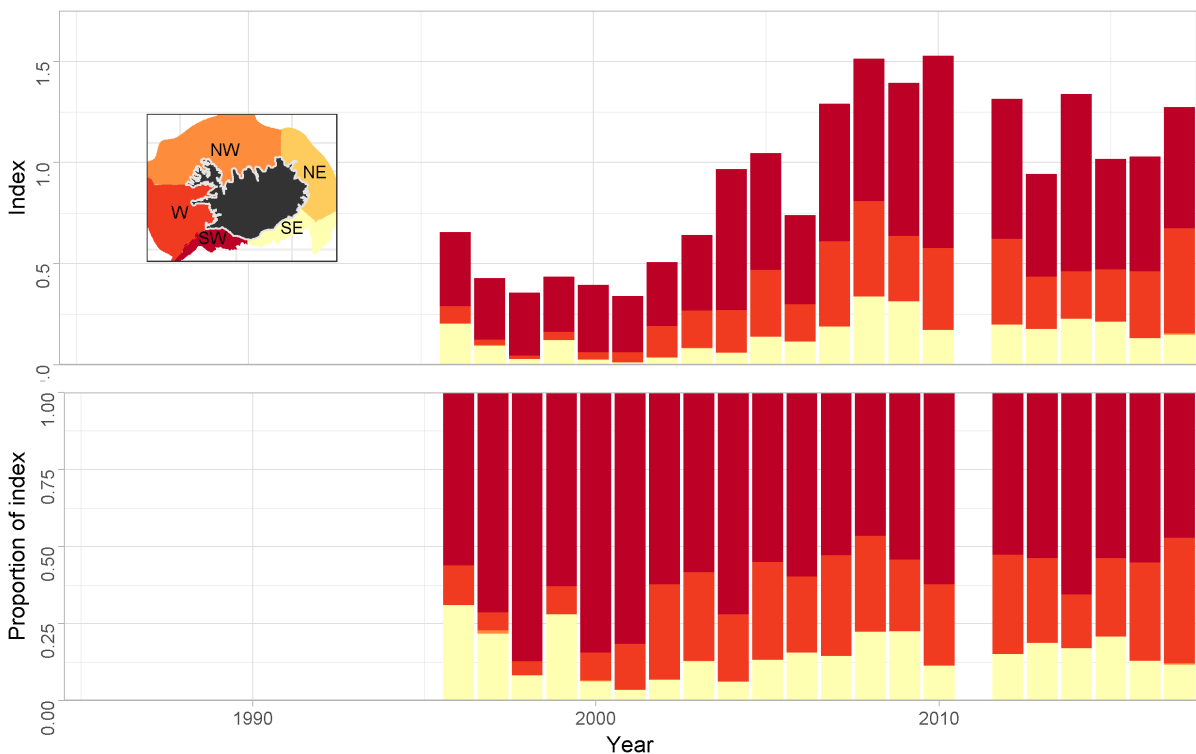


Figure 15. Megrim. Spatial distribution of the index from the autumn survey since 1996.

Mynd 15. Stórkjafa. Dreifing vísitölu í stofnmælingu botnfiska að hausti, frá árinu 1996.

MANAGEMENT

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

ADVICE

No TAC advice is made by the MFRI for megrim in the 2018/2019 fishing year.