3. Scientific Council Advice of its own Accord

Alfonsino in Division 6G **Advice June 2019 for 2019 and beyond**

Recommendation for 2019 and beyond

The substantial decline in CPUE and catches on the Kükenthal peak in the past year indicates that the stock may be depleted.

SC advises to close the fishery until biomass increases to exploitable levels.

Management objectives

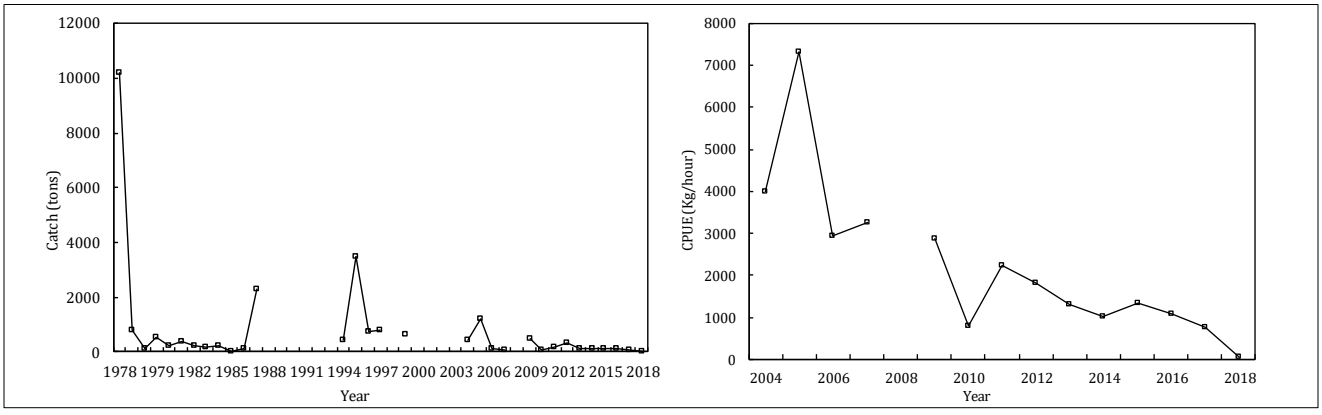
No explicit management plan or management objectives have been defined by the Commission. Convention General Principles are applied.

Convention General Principles	*Status*	*Comment/consideration*
Restore to or maintain at B_{msy}	🔴	B_{msy} unknown, stock appears depleted
Eliminate overfishing	🔴	Unknown F level; current catches appear unsustainable
Apply Precautionary Approach	🔴	Reference points not defined
Minimise harmful impacts on living marine resources and ecosystems	⚪	Pelagic fishery; unknown gear impact
Preserve marine biodiversity	⚪	Cannot be evaluated

🟢 OK
🟡 Intermediate
🔴 Not accomplished
⚪ Unknown

Management unit

Alfonsino is an oceanic demersal species which form distinct aggregations, at 300–950 m depth, on top of seamounts in the North Atlantic. Alfonsino is distributed over a wide area which may be composed of several populations. Stock structure is unknown. Until more complete data on stock structure is obtained it is considered that separate populations live on each seamount.



Stock status

Appears to be depleted.

Projections

No projections can be conducted.

Reference points

Not defined.

Assessment

No analytical or survey based assessment were possible. The only data available at present are the catch and effort time series.

Despite the difficulties of interpreting the CPUE as an indicator of stock status and knowing that this species is easily overexploited and can only sustain low rates of exploitation, the sharp decline in CPUE to the lowest observed (92% lower than in 2017) and catches in the last year indicate an apparent overfishing situation and that the stock may be depleted.

Human impact

Mainly fishery related mortality. Other mortality sources (e.g. pollution, shipping, oil-industry) are undocumented.

Environmental impact

Limited information is available.

Fishery

Commercial aggregations of alfonsino on the Corner Rise have been found on three seamounts. Two of them named "Kükenthal" (known also as "Perspektivnaya") and "C-3" ("Vybornaya") are located in the NAFO Regulatory Area. One more bank named "Milne Edwards" ("Rezervnaya") is located in the Central Western Atlantic. Russian vessels fished in this area in different periods between 1976 and 1999 using pelagic trawls. There is no statistics on the Russian fishery on separate seamounts.

Based on the information collected in the 2004 Spanish experimental survey in Corner Rise, a directed commercial fishery had been conducted since 2005 by Spanish vessels. Since 2006 virtually all the effort has been made in the Kükenthal seamount with pelagic trawl gear.

Recent catch estimates (tonnes) are as follows:

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
STATLANT 21	53		298	112	118	77	129	51	
STACFIS	52	152	302	114	118	122	127	51	2

Effects of the fishery on the ecosystem

Midwater trawls (pelagic and semi-pelagic) can produce significant adverse impacts (SAI) on VME communities, as per information provided by the Scientific Council in 2010 and further addressed by the Scientific Council in 2015. Such impacts are typically associated with: 1.) habitat destruction or direct contact with VMEs by the gear when it is fished near the seafloor and 2.) lost gear that becomes entangled in VMEs. Given the slow growth/reproductive rates that characterize VME-forming species, these impacts to VMEs can cumulatively result in Significant Adverse Impact (SAIs).

Special comments

The next assessment of this stock was previously scheduled for 2021. The SC is providing new advice this year due to the abrupt drop of catches and CPUE in the past year. Subject to data availability, the next assessment will be conducted according to the Commission request or if SC considers it is warranted.

Periods of decline in catches have been observed several times in the past after several years of fishing. In the past, catches have increased after a period of low/no removals; however, it is unknown if this corresponded to stock recovery. In the absence of new data (eg. from an exploratory fishery or survey) there will be no basis to update the present assessment.

Sources of Information SCR 15/06; SCS Doc. 19/10.