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Updated State of Capelin Stock in NAFO Divisions 3NO Based on Data from Trawl Surveys

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this work is to define more precisely the current state of the stock comparing with the previous estimate. Indices of capelin trawl biomass obtained in Canadian random-stratified bottom trawl surveys are the only available at the present time indicators of capelin stock dynamics. In 2004-2005, trawl biomass of capelin in Divisions 3NO was 35.5 and 3.9 thousand tons correspondingly and the average since 1996 was 25.5 thousand tons. The average catch in these years per km² was 0.42 and 0.06 thousand accordingly and the average since 1996 has been 0.35 thousand tons. The estimate in 2005 corresponds to the lowest level of the stock, which was observed in 1996-2004. Fishery was conducted in the years when this value was equal or higher than 2 t/km². Capelin stock in Div. 3NO remains in at the very low level.

Introduction

Estimation of capelin stock (*Mallotus villosus*) in Div. 3NO was based on the results of Russian and Canadian acoustic surveys conducted before 1993. In all subsequent years, data on capelin by-catch in Canadian trawl surveys of demersal fish has been the only source of data on state of capelin stock. Before 1995, Yankee 41-5 trawl and Engel 145 Hi-Lift trawl were used. Since autumn 1995, Campelen 1800 shrimp trawl has been applied as standard sampling gear. After taking in use a new trawl, by-catches of capelin increased greatly and this made it even more difficult to interpret the obtained results.

Since capelin is a pelagic fish species, a bottom trawl cannot be used as adequate sampling gear for quantitative estimation of the stock. Therefore, relationship between biomass indices from bottom trawl survey and stock size remains unclear. As analytical methods could not be applied, the purpose of this work was to estimate current state of capelin stock in the Div. 3NO according to the available indirect data.

Fishery and Management

Fishery for capelin started in 1971 and total catch was maximal in mid-1970s with the highest catch of 132 000 tons in 1975. The fishing was closed in 1979-1986 and then reopened in 1987-1992. Annual catches in this period did not exceed 25 000 tons. In subsequent years due to abrupt decline of the stock size, the target fishery for capelin was banned. Highest historical catches were taken by Russia (former USSR), Norway, Iceland and Japan (Table 1).

TAC of capelin was set for the first time in 1974 and in 1977-1978 it reached 200 000 tons, then TAC was reduced to 30 000 tons in 1990-1992. Considering that the catch did not exceed TAC in the whole regulation period, the decline of stock size observed since early 1990s could hardly be caused by overexploitation of the stock. A similar idea about capelin stock in NAFO Subareas 2 and Div. 3KL was expressed by J. Carscadden (DFO, 2000). Because

of dramatic decline of the capelin stock size since 1993, the ban on target fishery for capelin was imposed as a regulation measure.

Research Surveys

Stock assessment based on data of acoustic surveys

Acoustic surveys of capelin stock in Div. 3NO were conducted by the USSR/Russia in 1975-1994 and Canada in 1981-1992. Now, it is difficult to compare the results of these surveys since some Russian assessments were merged for Div. 3LNO. However, both surveys showed that maximum stock size was registered in 1988 and then an abrupt decline was observed after 1990 (Table 2). Despite the collapse of the stock registered in surveys conducted in Div. 3LNO, TAC remained at the same level of 30 000 tons in 2 years.

In recent years, STACFIS several times has advised to conduct investigations of capelin stock in Div. 3NO utilizing trawl-acoustic surveys to allow comparison with historical time series. However, this advice was not followed.

Indices of trawl biomass according to the data from Canadian spring surveys

Indices of capelin biomass obtained in Canadian random-stratified bottom surveys are the only available at the present time indicators of capelin stock dynamics. Since autumn 1995, Campelen 1800 shrimp trawl has been used as a standard sampling gear instead of Engel 145 Hi-Lift trawl and the catch rate of Campelen trawl for capelin appeared to be much higher (Lilly and Simpson, 2000).

The applicability of biomass indices obtained by Campelen trawl for assessment of capelin stock was investigated by identification of relationship between values of trawl and acoustic biomasses of capelin in Div. 3L obtained in 1999-2004 (Gorchinsky and Golovanov, 2005).

In 1996-2005, when Campelen was used as sampling gear, trawl biomass of capelin in Div. 3NO varied greatly from 3.9 to 58.1 thousand tons (Fig. 1).

Based on the results of classification of average catches per 1 km² in 1990-2004, the estimate in 2005 corresponds to the lowest level of the stock observed in the period 1996-2004 (Fig. 2). Fishing was conducted in the years when this parameter exceeded or was close to 2 t/km².

The results of previous assessments show that capelin stock in Div. 3NO remains in depressive state (Shibanov *et al.*, 2002, Gorchinsky 2003, 2004, Gorchinsky and Golovanov, 2005). Comparing with previous years, trawl biomass of capelin in 2005 in Div. 3NO was at the lowest level for 1996-2004, which gives ground to prolong advice of the Scientific Council about the ban on target fishery for capelin in 2007-2008. A more precise estimation of the stock will be possible if trawl-acoustic surveys are resumed.

In today situation when the target fishing is banned and no acoustic surveys of capelin in Div. 3NO are conducted on a regular basis, it is impossible to calculate LRPs.

Distribution of capelin stock

In 8 cases during last 10 years capelin stock distributed mostly in Div. 3O or approximately in even proportions between the Divisions (Fig. 1). The characteristic pattern of the distribution was that in odd years main aggregations as a rule occurred on the slopes of the bank and in even years, fish mostly concentrated in the central shallow part of the bank (Fig. 3). In 2005, the distribution was to some extent different from that in previous year and the highest catches were registered in the central shallow part of the bank (Fig. 4).

Acknowledgment

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TABLE 1. Nominal catch and TAC of capelin in NAFO Div. 3NO (tons)

Year	BGR	CAN	CUB	DDR	ISL	IRL	JPN	NOR	POL	E/PRT	ROM	E/ESP	RUS	Total	TAC
1970														0	
1971													750	750	
1972	166												20598	20764	
1973		1658						41293	203				83721	126875	
1974		3698						43682		500		4016	48855	100751	148000
1975					15814		2734	37477	4306			3748	67704	131783	180000
1976	311	5233			8839	230	5007	23178	3778				63610	110186	180000
1977		36	700		2994		3746	21499	401				17322	46698	200000
1978				56	116		665	4237	7		7		119	5207	200000
1979														0	0
1980														0	0
1981														0	0
1982														0	0
1983														0	0
1984														0	0
1985			3											3	0
1986														0	0
1987							793						14	807	10000
1988							1395	1094					4738	7227	15000
1989							2222	4085					3189	9496	28000
1990			85				2054	8415					14076	24630	30000
1991			118											118	30000
1992			65											65	30000
1993			3											3	0
1994														0	0
1995														0	0
1996														0	0
1997														0	0
1998														0	0
1999														0	0
2000														0	0
2001														0	0
2002														0	0
2003														0	0
2004														0	0
2005														0	0
Total	477	10625	1059	56	27763	230	20670	193375	8695	500	7	7764	338772	609993	

Note: TACs in 1974-1978 are merged for NAFO Div. 3LNO.

TABLE 2. Estimate of capelin stock according to the data of Russian and Canadian acoustic survey in 1975-1994 (thousand tons)

Year	USSR 3LNO	Canada 3NO	Year	USSR 3LNO	Canada 3NO
1975	1050*		1985	2200	212
1976	685*		1986	1491	494
1977	1000*		1987	2161	229
1978	310		1988	3900	561
1979	483		1989	2455	28
1980	0		1990	3752	
1981	109	223	1991	118	
1982		419	1992		4
1983	346	219	1993	315	
1984	2880	85	1994	83	

* biomass of mature capelin in Divisions 3NO.

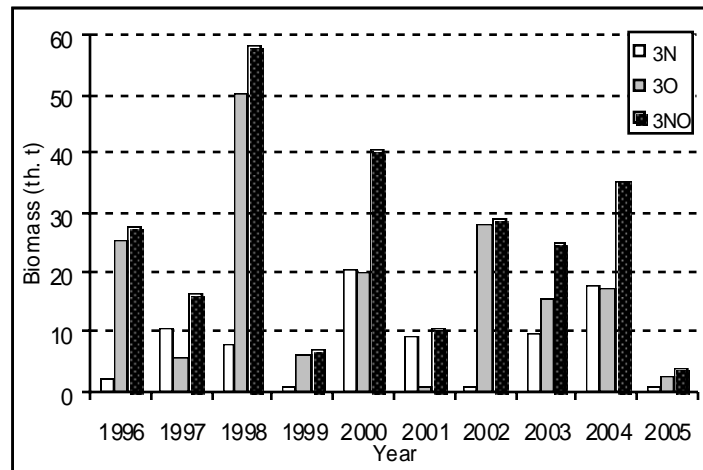


Fig. 1. Estimates of trawl biomass of capelin in Div. 3NO according to the data of Canadian spring surveys conducted in 1996-2005.

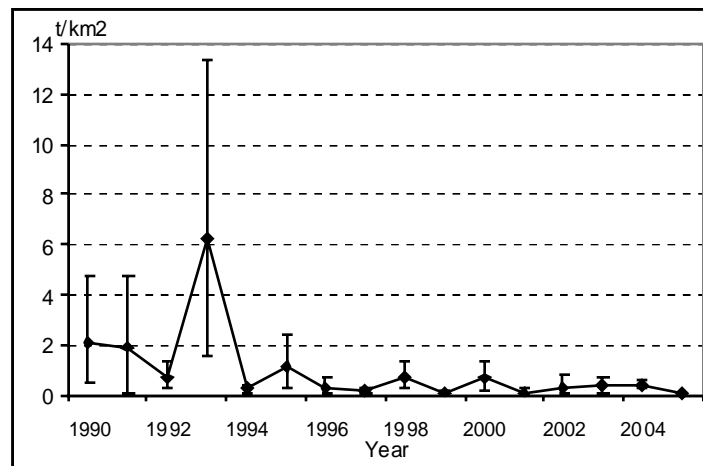


Fig. 2. Average catch (t/km^2) according to the data of Canadian spring surveys in Div. 3NO.

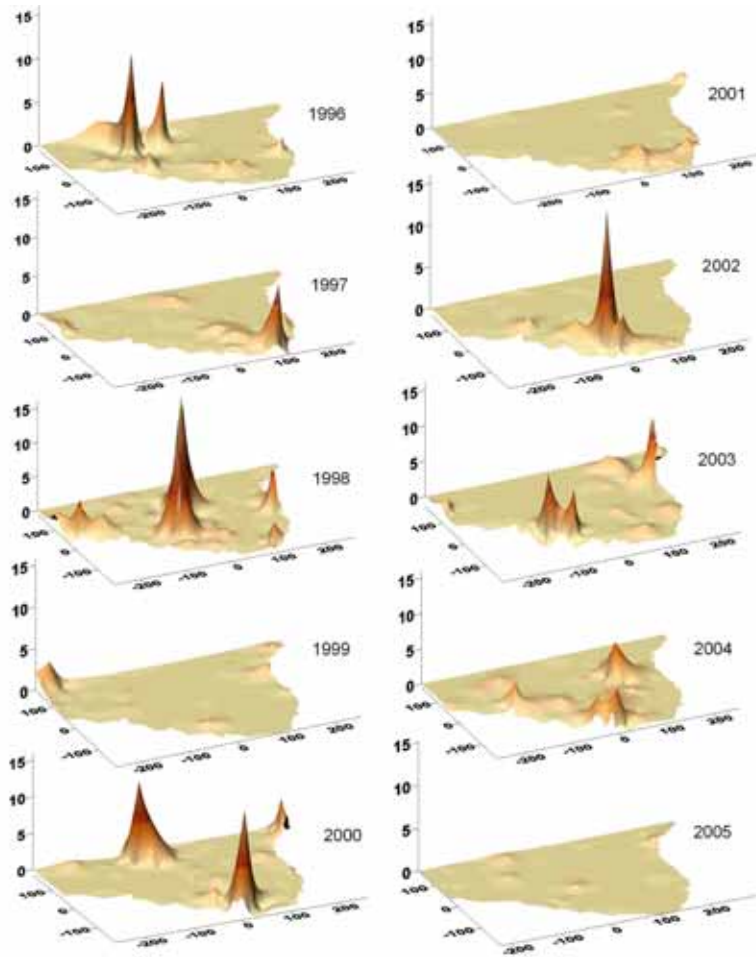


Fig. 3. Distribution of capelin biomass (t/km^2) in Div. 3NO in 1996-2005 according to the data of spring surveys with bottom trawl.

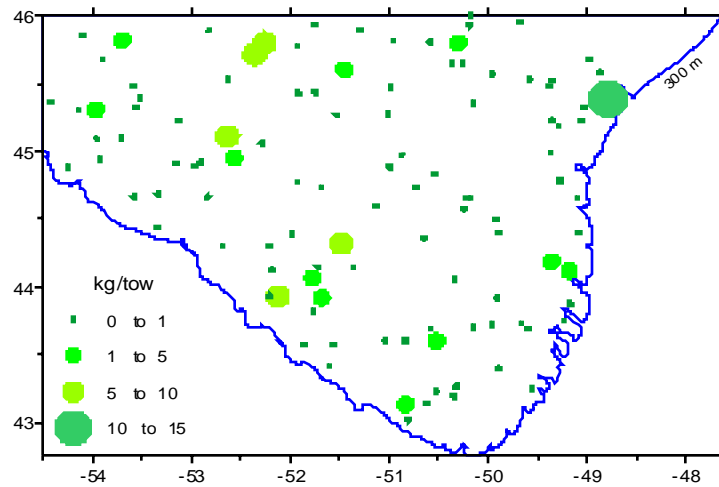


Fig. 4. Distribution of capelin by-catches in Div. 3NO in 2005.