

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD
FISHERIES LABORATORY, LOWESTOFT, SUFFOLK, UK

1995 RESEARCH VESSEL PROGRAMME

REPORT: CHARTER DOUBLE-BEAM TRAWLER (BRIXHAM)

STAFF: M R Vince
B F M Harley

DURATION: 28 September-5 October

LOCALITY: Western English Channel

AIMS:

1. To carry out a trawl survey for sole, by repeating the standard grid of station positions.
2. To collect length distributions and otolith samples of sole, monk, plaice and lemon sole.
3. To collect details of all crab (*Cancer pagurus*), lobster and scallop.

NARRATIVE:

Staff travelled to Brixham by road on 27 September. The following day the two 4 metre survey beam-trawls, and all other gear were put aboard CARHELMAR at Philip's shipyard on the river Dart. The fishing survey commenced on the afternoon of 28 September and was completed on the morning of 5 October. The staff returned to Lowestoft the same day.

RESULTS:

AIM 1

The survey grid was completed, and a total of 55 half-hour tows was made, despite a succession of fresh to strong winds from the south to west quarter. The mean catch rate for sole continues to drop by about 13% for the entire survey, however some offshore grounds indicate a small improvement on last year. There is no evidence of any strong recruitment of sole between the ages of 1 to 3 years old.

AIM 2

All commercial species of fish were measured on all hauls, and otolith samples collected from the following species: sole (259), plaice (237), dab (128), lemon sole (36), monkfish (54), brill (9), turbot (3). Additionally scales were taken from 5 small bass caught on an inshore station.

The mean catch rate for plaice (nos. per hour) has reduced by 8% from 1994 and like sole, there is no evidence of any strong recruitment. The majority of plaice were greater than 32cms, and on the offshore grounds have contributed to an increase by weight in the catch per

unit effort. The number of lemon sole caught is up for the first time since 1991. Monkfish (*Lophius piscatorius*) numbers are also up to pre-1990 levels, however these increases in catches relate to the offshore grounds only and are still small in number.

AIM 3

All (45) edible crab (*Cancer pagurus*) and scallop caught were measured and all spider crab (*Maia squinado*) counted. This year the numbers of cuttlefish caught increased particularly on the grounds in the east of the survey area. This confirmed the early start of the directed cuttlefish fishery by the Brixham beam-trawlers. In addition to the catch of large commercial size cuttlefish, the inshore hauls in the south-east of the survey area yielded large numbers of small and very small (<100mm mantle length) cuttlefish which exceeded both in area and magnitude any previous survey in this 11 year series.

Once more our thanks must go to the crew of the CARHELMAR for their help and professional expertise.

M R Vince
12 October 1995

INITIALLED:



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