17. Assessment of the Atka mackerel stock in the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands

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Executive Summary

Relative to the November 2015 SAFE report, the following substantive changes have been made in the assessment of Atka mackerel.

Summary of Changes in Assessment Input

1. Total 2015 catch estimate was updated, and the projected total catch for 2016 was set equal to the 2016 TAC (55,000 t), based on the catch amounts occurring after Oct. 1 in recent years.
2. The 2015 fishery age composition data were added.
3. The 2016 Aleutian Islands survey biomass was added.
4. The estimated average selectivity for 2011-2015 was used for projections.
5. We assume that approximately 62% of the BSAI-wide ABC is likely to be taken under the revised Steller Sea Lion Reasonable and Prudent Alternatives (SSL RPAs) implemented in 2015. This percentage was applied to the 2017 and 2018 maximum permissible ABCs, and those reduced amounts were assumed to be caught in order to estimate the 2017 and 2018 ABCs and OFL values.

Summary of Changes in the Assessment Methodology

1. The sample sizes specified for fishery and survey age composition data were rescaled. Sample sizes were scaled to have the same means as in the baseline model (Model 14.1), but varied relative to the number of hauls.

Summary of Results

1. The addition of the 2015 fishery age composition information impacted the estimated magnitude of the 2011 year class which decreased 23%, relative to last year's assessment.
2. Estimated values of $B_{100\%}$, $B_{40\%}$, $B_{35\%}$ are 8% lower relative to last year's assessment.
3. Projected 2017 female spawning biomass (145,258 t) is 13% lower relative to last year's estimate of 2016 female spawning biomass, but essentially equivalent to last year's projection for 2017 (2% decrease).
4. Projected 2017 female spawning biomass is above $B_{40\%}$ (125,288 t), thereby placing BSAI Atka mackerel in Tier 3a.
5. The projected 2017 yield at $maxF_{ABC} = F_{40\%} = 0.34$ is 87,200 t, which is 3% lower relative to last year's estimate for 2016.
6. The projected 2017 overfishing level at $F_{35\%}$ ($F = 0.40$) is 102,700 t, which is 2% lower than last year's estimate for 2016.

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Quantity	As estimated or *specified last* year for: 2016	2017	As estimated or *recommended this* year for: 2017*	2018*
M (natural mortality rate)	0.30	0.30	0.30	0.30
Tier	3a	3a	3a	3a
Projected total (age 1+) biomass (t)	672,184	664,208	598,791	611,442
Projected Female spawning biomass				
Projected	166,407	147,496	145,258	138,791
$B_{100\%}$	339,135	339,135	313,220	313,220
$B_{40\%}$	135,654	135,654	125,288	125,288
$B_{35\%}$	118,697	118,697	109,627	109,627
F_{OFL}	0.35	0.35	0.40	0.40
$maxF_{ABC}$	0.30	0.30	0.34	0.34
F_{ABC}	0.30	0.30	0.34	0.34
OFL (t)	104,749	99,490	102,700	99,900
maxABC (t)	90,340	85,840	87,200	85,000
ABC (t)	90,340	85,840	87,200	85,000
Status	As determined *last* year for: 2014	2015	As determined *this* year for: 2015	2016
Overfishing	No	n/a	No	n/a
Overfished	n/a	No	n/a	No
Approaching overfished	n/a	No	n/a	No

*Projections are based on estimated total catch of 55,000 t and 53,000 t in place of maximum permissible ABC for 2017 and 2018, respectively.

Area apportionment of ABC

The apportionments of the 2017 and 2018 recommended ABCs based on the random effects model:

	2017 (t)	2018 (t)
Eastern (541+S.BSea)	34,890	34,000
Central (542)	30,330	29,600
Western (543)	21,980	21,400
Total	87,200	85,000

Responses to SSC and Plan Team Comments on Assessments in General

From the December 2015 SSC minutes: *The SSC reminds the authors and PTs to follow the model numbering scheme adopted at the December 2014 meeting.* The Atka mackerel assessment follows the model numbering scheme (Option D) as described in the most recent version of the SAFE Guidelines.

The SSC encourages the authors and PTs to refer to the forthcoming CAPAM data-weighting workshop report. The authors will refer to the Special Issue on Data Weighting in *Fisheries Research* and explore alternative data weighting methods for the 2017 Atka mackerel assessment. An initial first step was to rescale the sample sizes specified for fishery and survey age composition data. Sample sizes were scaled to have the same mean as in the baseline model (Model 14.1), but varied relative to the number of hauls sampled (see Model Structure section).

The SSC recommends that assessment authors work with AFSC's survey program scientist to develop some objective criteria to inform the best approaches for calculating Q with respect to information provided by previous survey trawl performance studies (e.g. Somerton and Munro 2001), and fish-temperature relationships which may impact Q. The authors discuss the potential effect of temperature on survey catchability and fish behavior in the Survey Data section. The variation in survey biomass and low survey abundance estimates for Atka mackerel in 2000 and 2012 may be associated with colder than average temperatures in the region and their effects on fish behavior. We will continue to examine survey and temperature data and work with the AFSC survey program to understand whether temperature affects the vertical or broad scale distribution of Atka mackerel to make them less available to the trawl during cold years.

From the October 2016 SSC minutes: *The SSC reminds groundfish and crab stock assessment authors to follow their respective guidelines for SAFE preparation.* The Atka mackerel assessment strives to follow the Groundfish SAFE Guidelines.

The SSC requests that stock assessment authors bookmark their assessment documents and commends those that have already adopted this practice. The Atka mackerel assessment has the bookmark feature.

The BSAI Plan Team did not make any comments on assessments in general.

Responses to SSC and Plan Team Comments Specific to the Atka Mackerel Assessment

From their December 2015 minutes: *The SSC noted and supports the authors' intention to explore the use of spatial analyses and covariates to extract additional information from trawl surveys and to improve precision of biomass estimates. The SSC also supports the PT recommendation to explore other selectivity formulations for model projections and ABC calculations in future assessments.* Explorations of other approaches for analyzing the survey data are in progress. Analyses have focused on alternative age-dependent estimates of natural mortality. In response to the BSAI Plan Team recommendations, we dropped the current year from the average used to make projections and compute ABC, and compared a 5 year average selectivity (2011-2015) and a 10 year average selectivity (2006-2015) for projections. See full response to November 2015 BSAI Plan Team minutes (below).

From the November 2015 BSAI Plan Team minutes: *The Team recommends that the author explore different methods of estimating the fishery selectivity at age vector used to make projections and computing ABC, such as including more years in the average, dropping the current year from the average (given that age data for the current year are typically unavailable), or using random effects models.*

We dropped the current year from the average used to make projections and compute ABC. We compared a 5 year average selectivity (2011-2015) and a 10 year average selectivity (2006-2015) for projections. The selectivity vectors were nearly identical and a comparison of projections with the different selectivity assumptions showed little difference. We utilize a 5-year average (2011-2015) to reflect recent conditions for projections and computing ABC. See *Specification of OFL and Maximum Permissible ABC* (Fig. 17.24).

Introduction

Native Names: In the Aleut languages, Atka mackerel are known as *tmadgi-{* among the Eastern and Atkan Aleuts and Atkan of Bering Island. They are also known as *tavyi-{* among the Attuan Aleuts (Sepez *et al.* 2003).

Distribution

Atka mackerel (*Pleurogrammus monopterygius*) are widely distributed along the continental shelf across the North Pacific Ocean and Bering Sea from Asia to North America. On the Asian side they extend from the Kuril Islands to Provideniya Bay (Rutenburg 1962); moving eastward, they are distributed throughout the Komandorskiye and Aleutian Islands (AI), north along the eastern Bering Sea (EBS) shelf, and through the Gulf of Alaska (GOA) to southeast Alaska.

Early life history

Atka mackerel are a substrate-spawning fish with male parental care. Single or multiple clumps of adhesive eggs are laid on rocky substrates in individual male territories within nesting colonies where males brood eggs for a protracted period. Nesting colonies are widespread across the continental shelf of the Aleutian Islands and western GOA down to bottom depths of 144 m (Lauth *et al*. 2007b). Historical data from ichthyoplankton tows done on the outer shelf and slope off Kodiak Island in the 1970's and 1980's (Kendall and Dunn 1985) suggest that nesting colonies may have existed at one time in the central GOA. Possible factors limiting the upper and lower depth limit of Atka mackerel nesting habitat include insufficient light penetration and the deleterious effects of unsuitable water temperatures, wave surge, or high densities of kelp and green sea urchins (Gorbunova 1962, Lauth *et al.* 2007b, Zolotov 1993).

In the eastern and central AI, larvae hatch from October to January with maximum hatching in late November (Lauth *et al.* 2007a). After hatching, larvae are neustonic and about 10 mm in length (Kendall and Dunn 1985). Along the outer shelf and slope of Kodiak Island, larvae caught in the fall were about 10.3 mm compared to larvae caught the following spring which were about 17.6 mm (Kendall and Dunn 1985). Larvae and fry have been observed in coastal areas and at great distances offshore (>500 km) in the Bering Sea and North Pacific Ocean (Gorbunova 1962, Materese *et al*. 2003, Mel'nikow and Efimkin 2003).

The Bering-Aleutian Salmon International Survey (BASIS) project studies salmon during their time at the high seas, and has conducted standardized surveys of the upper pelagic layer in the EBS shelf using a surface trawl. In addition to collecting data pertaining to salmon species, BASIS also collected and recorded information for many other Alaskan fish species, including juvenile Atka mackerel. The EBS shelf was sampled during the mid-August through September from 2004 to 2006 and juvenile Atka mackerel with lengths ranging from 150-200 mm were distributed along the outer shelf in the southern EBS shelf and along the outer middle shelf between St. George and St. Matthew Islands (Appendix B in Lowe *et al*. 2007). The fate or ecological role of these juveniles is unknown since adult Atka mackerel are much less common or absent in annual standardized bottom trawl surveys in the EBS shelf (Lauth and Acuna 2009).

Reproductive ecology

The reproductive cycle consists of three phases: 1) establishing territories, 2) spawning, and 3) brooding (Lauth *et al*. 2007a). In early June, a fraction of the adult males end schooling and diurnal behavior and begin aggregating and establishing territories on rocky substrate in nesting colonies (Lauth *et al*. 2007a). The widespread distribution and broad depth range of nesting colonies suggests that previous conjecture of a concerted nearshore spawning migration by males in the AI is not accurate (Lauth *et al.* 2007b). Geologic, oceanographic, and biotic features vary considerably among nesting colonies, however, nesting

habitat is invariably rocky and perfused with moderate or strong currents (Lauth *et al.* 2007b). Many nesting sites in the AI are inside fishery trawl exclusion zones which may serve as *de facto* marine reserves for protecting Atka mackerel (Cooper *et al*. 2010).

The spawning phase begins in late July, peaks in early September, and ends in mid-October (Lauth *et al*. 2007a). Mature females spawn an average of 4.6 separate batches of eggs during the 12-week spawning period or about one egg batch every 2.5 weeks (McDermott *et al*. 2007). After spawning ends, territorial males with nests continue to brood egg masses until hatching. Incubation times for developing eggs decrease logarithmically with an increase in water temperature and range from 39 days at a water temperature of 12.2° C to 169 days at 1.6 °C, however, an incubation water temperature of 15 °C was lethal to developing embryos *in situ* (Guthridge and Hillgruber 2008). Higher water temperatures in the range of water temperatures observed in nesting colonies, 3.9 °C to 10.5 °C (Gorbunova 1962, Lauth *et al*. 2007b), can result in long incubation times extending the male brooding phase into January or February (Lauth *et al*. 2007a).

Prey and predators

Adult Atka mackerel in the Aleutians consume a variety of prey, but principally calanoid copepods and euphausiids (Yang 1999), and are consumed by a variety of piscivores, including groundfish (e.g., Pacific cod and arrowtooth flounder, Livingston *et al.* unpubl. manuscr.), marine mammals (e.g., northern fur seals and Steller sea lions, Kajimura 1984, NMFS 1995, Sinclair and Zeppelin 2002, Sinclair *et al*. 2013), and seabirds (e.g., thick-billed murres, tufted puffins, and short-tailed shearwaters, Springer *et al.* 1999).

Predation on Atka mackerel eggs by cottids and other hexagrammids is prevalent during the spawning season as is cannibalism by other Atka mackerel of both sexes (heterocannibalism) and by males from their own nest (filial cannibalism; Canino *et al*. 2008, Yang 1999, Zolotov 1993). Filial egg cannibalism is a common phenomenon in species with extended paternal care.

Rand *et al*. (2010) analyzed Atka mackerel stomach data and determined that the east to west size cline in Atka mackerel sizes across the Aleutian Islands, was the result of food quality rather than food quantity or temperature, and may reflect local productivity. Atka mackerel near Amchitka Island (area 542) were eating more copepods and less euphausiids, whereas fish at Seguam pass (area 541) were eating more energy rich euphausiids and forage fish (Rand *et al*. 2010).

Nichol and Somerton (2002) examined the diurnal vertical migrations of Atka mackerel using archival tags and related these movements to light intensity and current velocity. Atka mackerel displayed strong diel behavior, with vertical movements away from the bottom occurring almost exclusively during daylight hours, presumably for feeding, and little to no movement at night (where they were closely associated with the bottom).

Stock structure

A morphological and meristic study suggests there may be separate populations in the GOA and the AI (Levada 1979). This study was based on comparisons of samples collected off Kodiak Island in the central Gulf, and the Rat Islands in the Aleutians. Lee (1985) also conducted a morphological study of Atka mackerel from the Bering Sea, AI, and GOA. The data showed some differences (although not consistent by area for each characteristic analyzed), suggesting a certain degree of reproductive isolation. Results from an allozyme genetics study comparing Atka mackerel samples from the western GOA with samples from the eastern, central, and western AI showed no evidence of discrete stocks (Lowe *et al.* 1998). A survey of genetic variation in Atka mackerel using microsatellite DNA markers provided little evidence of genetic structuring over the species range, although slight regional heterogeneity was evident in comparisons between some areas (Canino *et al*. 2010). Samples collected from the AI, Japan, and the

GOA did not exhibit genetic isolation by distance or a consistent pattern of differentiation. Examination of these results over time (2004, 2006) showed temporal stability in Stalemate Bank, but not at Seguam Pass. These results indicate a lack of structuring in Atka mackerel over a large portion of the species range, perhaps reflecting high dispersal, a recent population expansion and large effective population size, or some combination of all these factors (Canino *et al*. 2010).

The question remains as to whether the Aleutian Island and Gulf of Alaska populations of Atka mackerel should be managed as a unit stock or separate populations given that there is a lack of consistent genetic stock structure over the species range. There are significant differences in population size, distribution, recruitment patterns, and resilience to fishing, suggesting that management as separate stocks is appropriate. Bottom trawl surveys and fishery data suggest that the Atka mackerel population in the GOA is smaller and much more patchily distributed than that in the AI, and composed almost entirely of fish >30 cm in length. There are also more areas of moderate Atka mackerel density in the AI than in the GOA. The lack of small fish in the GOA suggests that Atka mackerel recruit to that region differently than in the AI. Nesting sites have been located in the GOA in the Shumagin Islands (Lauth *et al.* 2007a), and historical ichthyoplankton data from the 1970's around Kodiak Island indicate there was a spawning and nesting population even further to the east (Kendall and Dunn 1985), but the source of these spawning populations is unknown. They may be migrant fish from strong year classes in the AI or a self-perpetuating population in the GOA, or some combination of the two. The idea that the western GOA is the eastern extent of their geographic range might also explain the greater sensitivity to fishing depletion in the GOA as reflected by the history of the GOA fishery since the early 1970s. Catches of Atka mackerel from the GOA peaked in 1975 at about 27,000 t. Recruitment to the AI population was low from 1980-1985, and catches in the GOA declined to 0 in 1986. Only after a series of large year classes recruited to the AI region in the late 1980s, did the population and fishery reestablish in the GOA beginning in the early 1990s. After passage of these year classes through the population, the GOA population, as sampled in the 1996 and 1999 GOA bottom trawl surveys, has declined and is very patchy in its distribution. More recently, the strong 1999, 2006, and 2007 year classes documented in the AI showed up in the GOA. Leslie depletion analyses using historical AI and GOA fishery data suggest that catchability increased from one year to the next in the GOA fished areas, but remained the same in the AI areas (Lowe and Fritz 1996; 1997). These differences in population resilience, size, distribution, and recruitment support separate assessments and management of the GOA and AI stocks and a conservative approach to management of the GOA portion of the population.

Management units

Amendment 28 to the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands (BSAI) Fishery Management Plan became effective in mid-1993, and divided the Aleutian subarea into three districts at 177°W and 177°E for the purposes of spatially apportioning Total Allowable Catches (TAC). Since 1994, the BSAI Atka mackerel TAC has been allocated to the three regions (541 Eastern Aleutians, 542 Central Aleutians, and 543 Western Aleutians).

Fishery

Catch history

Annual catches of Atka mackerel in the EBS and AI regions increased during the 1970s reaching an initial peak of over 24,000 t in 1978 (see BSAI SAFE Introduction Table 3). Atka mackerel became a reported species group in the BSAI Fishery Management Plan in 1978. Catches (including discards and community development quota [CDQ] catches), corresponding Acceptable Biological Catches (ABC), TAC, and Overfishing Levels (OFL) set by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC or Council) from 1978 to the present are given in Table 17.1.

From 1970-1979, Atka mackerel were landed off Alaska exclusively by the distant water fleets of the U.S.S.R., Japan and the Republic of Korea. U.S. joint venture fisheries began in 1980 and dominated the landings of Atka mackerel from 1982 through 1988. Total landings declined from 1980-1983 primarily due to changes in target species and allocations to various nations rather than changes in stock abundance. Catches increased quickly thereafter, and from 1985-1987 Atka mackerel catches averaged 34,000 t annually, dropping to a low of 18,000 t in 1989. The last joint venture allocation of Atka mackerel off Alaska was in 1989, and since 1990, all Atka mackerel landings have been made by U.S. fishermen. Beginning in 1992, TACs increased steadily in response to evidence of a large exploitable biomass, particularly in the central and western AI.

Description of the directed fishery

The patterns of the Atka mackerel fishery generally reflect the behavior of the species: (1) the fishery is highly localized and usually occurs in the same few locations each year; (2) the schooling semi-pelagic nature of the species makes it particularly susceptible to trawl gear fished on the bottom; and (3) trawling occurs almost exclusively at depths less than 200 m. In the early 1970s, most Atka mackerel catches were in the western AI (west of 180°W longitude). In the late 1970s and through the 1980s, fishing effort moved eastward, with the majority of landings occurring near Seguam and Amlia Islands. In 1984 and 1985 the majority of landings came from a single 0.5° latitude by 1° longitude block bounded by 52° 30' N, 53° N, 172° W, and 173° W in Seguam Pass (73% in 1984, 52% in 1985). Areas fished by the Atka mackerel fishery from 1977 to 1992 are displayed in Fritz (1993). Areas of 2015 and 2016 fishery operations are shown in Fig. 17.1.

Atka mackerel are caught almost exclusively by the Amendment 80 Fleet. The fishery for Atka mackerel has been a catch share fishery since 2008 when Amendment 80 to the BSAI Groundfish FMP was implemented, rationalizing the fleet of catcher/processor vessels in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands region targeting flatfish, Atka mackerel and Pacific ocean perch. An economic performance report for 2015 for BSAI Atka mackerel is included in Appendix 17C.

Management history

Prior to 1992, ABCs were allocated to the entire Aleutian management district with no additional spatial management. However, because of increases in the ABC beginning in 1992, the Council recognized the need to disperse fishing effort throughout the range of the stock to minimize the likelihood of localized depletions. In 1993, an initial Atka mackerel TAC of 32,000 t was caught by March 11, almost entirely south of Seguam Island. This initial TAC release represented the amount of Atka mackerel that the Council thought could be appropriately harvested in the eastern portion of the AI subarea (based on the assessment for the 1993 fishery; Lowe 1992). In mid-1993, however, Amendment 28 to the BSAI Fishery Management Plan became effective, dividing the Aleutian subarea into three districts at 177°W and 177°E for the purposes of spatially apportioning TACs (Fig. 17.1). On August 11, 1993, an additional 32,000 t of Atka mackerel TAC was released to the Central (27,000 t) and Western (5,000 t) districts. From 1994-2014, the BSAI Atka mackerel TAC was allocated to the three regions based on the average distribution of biomass estimated from the AI bottom trawl surveys. Beginning in 2015, The TAC was apportioned by applying the random effects model to AI survey biomass estimates. Table 17.2 gives the time series of BSAI Atka mackerel catches, corresponding ABC, OFL, and TAC by region.

In June 1998, the Council passed a fishery regulatory amendment that proposed a four-year timetable to temporally and spatially disperse and reduce the level of Atka mackerel fishing within Steller sea lion critical habitat (CH) in the BSAI Islands. Temporal dispersion was accomplished by dividing the BSAI Atka mackerel TAC into two equal seasonal allowances, an A-season beginning January 1 and ending April 15, and a B-season from September 1 to November 1. Spatial dispersion was accomplished through a planned 4-year reduction in the maximum percentage of each seasonal allowance that could be caught

within CH in the Central and Western AI. This was in addition to bans on trawling within 10 nm of all sea lion rookeries in the Aleutian district and within 20 nm of the rookeries on Seguam and Agligadak Islands (in area 541), which were instituted in 1992. The goal of spatial dispersion was to reduce the proportion of each seasonal allowance caught within CH to no more than 40% by the year 2002. No CH allowance was established in the Eastern subarea because of the year-round 20 nm trawl exclusion zone around the sea lion rookeries on Seguam and Agligadak Islands that minimized effort within CH. The regulations implementing this four-year phased-in change to Atka mackerel fishery management became effective on January 22, 1999 and lasted only 3 years (through 2001). In 2002, new regulations affecting management of the Atka mackerel, pollock, and Pacific cod fisheries went into effect. Furthermore, all trawling was prohibited in CH from August 8, 2000 through November 30, 2000 by the Western District of the Federal Court because of violations of the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

As part of the plan to respond to the Court and comply with the ESA, NMFS and the NPFMC formulated new regulations for the management of Steller sea lion and groundfish fishery interactions that went into effect in 2002. The objectives of temporal and spatial fishery dispersion, cornerstones of the 1999 regulations, were retained. Season dates and allocations remained the same (A season: 50% of annual TAC from 20 January to 15 April; B season: 50% from 1 September to 1 November). However, the maximum seasonal catch percentage from CH was raised from the goal of 40% in the 1999 regulations to 60%. To compensate, effort within CH in the Central (542) and Western (543) Aleutian fisheries was limited by allowing access to each subarea to half the fleet at a time. Vessels fishing for Atka mackerel were randomly assigned to one of two teams, which started fishing in either area 542 or 543. Vessels were not permitted to switch areas until the other team had caught the CH allocation assigned to that area. In the 2002 regulations, trawling for Atka mackerel was prohibited within 10 nm of all rookeries in areas 542 and 543; this was extended to 15 nm around Buldir Island and 3 nm around all major sea lion haulouts. Steller sea lion CH east of 178° W in the Aleutian district, including all CH in subarea 541 and a 1° longitude-wide portion of subarea 542, was closed to directed Atka mackerel fishing.

The 2010 NMFS Biological Opinion (BiOp) found that the fisheries for Alaska groundfish in the Bering Sea and AI and GOA, and the cumulative effects of these fisheries, are likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the western distinct population segment (DPS) of Steller sea lions, and also likely to adversely modify the designated critical habitat of the western DPS of Steller sea lions. Because this BiOp found jeopardy and adverse modification of critical habitat, the agency was required to implement reasonable and prudent alternatives (RPAs) to the proposed actions (the fisheries). The 2010 BiOp included RPAs which required changes in groundfish fishery management in Management Sub-areas 543, 542, and 541 in the AI Management Area. NOAA Fisheries implemented the RPAs via an interim final rule before the start of the 2011 fishery in January.

Subsequently, the U.S. District Court ordered NMFS to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on the interim final rule. The NPFMC preferred alternative in the draft EIS for the final EIS differed from the interim final rule, and a reinitiation of consultation was requested for the proposed action under the preferred alternative. The NMFS Section 7 Consultation BiOp determined that the proposed action is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the western DPS of Steller sea lions and is not likely to destroy or adversely modify designated critical habitat (NMFS 2014a). The final EIS was issued May, 2014 (NMFS 2014b). The modifications to the RPAs went in to effect for the 2015 fishing year.

The RPAs from the 2010 BiOp and the 2014 Section 7 Consultation Biological Opinion specific to Atka mackerel are listed below.

RPAs from the 2010 Biological Opinion

In Area 543:

- Prohibit retention by all federally permitted vessels of Atka mackerel and Pacific cod.

- Establish a TAC for Atka mackerel sufficient to support the incidental discarded catch that may occur in other targeted groundfish fisheries (e.g., Pacific ocean perch).
- Eliminate the Atka mackerel platoon management system in the HLA.

In Area 542:

- Close waters from 0–3 nm around Kanaga Island/Ship Rock to directed fishing for groundfish by federally permitted vessels.
- Set TAC for Area 542 to no more than 47 percent of the Area 543 ABC.
- Between 177° E to 179° W longitude and 178° W to 177° W longitude, close critical habitat from 0–20 nm to directed fishing for Atka mackerel by federally permitted vessels year round.
- Between 179° W to 178° W longitude, close critical habitat from 0-10 nm to directed fishing for Atka mackerel by federally permitted vessels year round. Between 179° W and 178° W longitude, close critical habitat from 10-20 nm to directed fishing for Atka mackerel by federally permitted vessels not participating in a harvest cooperative or fishing a CDQ allocation.
- Add a 50:50 seasonal apportionment to the CDQ allocation to mirror seasonal apportionments for Atka mackerel harvest cooperatives.
- Limit the amount of Atka mackerel harvest allowed inside critical habitat to no more than 10 percent of the annual allocation for each harvest cooperative or CDQ group. Evenly divide the annual critical habitat harvest limit between the A and B seasons.
- Change the Atka mackerel seasons to January 20, 12:00 noon to June 10, 12:00 noon for the A season and June 10, 12:00 noon to November 1, 12:00 noon for the B season.
- Eliminate the Atka mackerel platoon management system in the HLA.

In Area 541:

- Change the Bering Sea Area 541 Atka mackerel seasons to January 20, 12:00 noon to June 10, 12:00 noon for the A season and June 10,12:00 noon to November 1, 12:00 noon for the B season.

In Bering Sea Subarea:

- Close the Bering Sea subarea year round to directed fishing for Atka mackerel.
- Prohibit trawling for Atka mackerel from 0 to 20 nm around all Steller sea lion rookeries and haulouts and in the Bogoslof Foraging Area.

Revised RPAs from the 2014 Biological Opinion

The season dates for the AI Atka mackerel trawl fishery are modified relative to the action analyzed in the 2010 Biological Opinion. The season dates from the action in the 2010 BiOp, the interim final rule, and the 2014 BiOp are shown in the table below. The interim final rule changed the Atka mackerel trawl season dates to align the Atka mackerel seasons with the AI pollock and Pacific cod trawl fisheries and to temporally disperse catch. The Atka mackerel trawl fishery season dates are extended even further under the 2014 BiOp.

Atka mackerel trawl fishery season dates in 2010 Biological Opinion (BiOp), 2011–2014 Interim Final Rule, and the 2014 BiOp:

	A Season		B Season	
	Start	End	Start	End
Action in 2010 BiOp	20-Jan	15-Apr	1-Sep	1-Nov
Interim Final Rule	20-Jan	10-Jun	10-Jun	1-Nov
Action in 2014 BiOp	20-Jan	10-Jun	10-Jun	31-Dec

In Area 543:

- Modify the closure around Buldir Island from a 0 to 15 nm closure to trawl fishing for Atka mackerel to a 0 to 10 nm closure.
- Limit the Area 543 Atka mackerel TAC to less than or equal to 65 percent of the ABC.

The action analyzed in the 2010 BiOp did not include an Area 543-specific Atka mackerel harvest limit and prohibited directed fishing for Atka mackerel and Pacific cod.

In Area 542:

- Close Stellar sea lion CH to Atka mackerel fishing between 178°E and 180° longitude.
- Increase 0 to 10 nm closures to 0 to 20 nm closures year-round at five rookeries (Ayugadak Point, Amchitka/Column Rocks, Amchitka Island/East Cape, Semisopochnoi/Petrel, and Semisopochnoi/Pochnoi)
- Increase 0 to 3 nm closures to 0 to 20 nm at six haulouts (Unalga and Dinkum Rocks, Amatignak Island/Nitrof Point, Amchitka Island/Cape Ivakin, Hawadax Island (formerly Rat Island), Little Sitkin Island, and Segula Island).

The action analyzed in the 2010 BiOp included an Area 542-specific Atka mackerel harvest limit which set TAC for Area 542 to no more than 47 percent of the Area 542 ABC. The revised action does not include an Area 542-specific Atka mackerel harvest limit.

In Area 541:

- Open a portion of CH in Area 541 from 12 to 20 nm southeast of Seguam Island.
- Beyond the 50 percent seasonal apportionments there is no limit on the amount of the Atka mackerel TAC that could be harvested inside this open area of CH.

All of CH in Area 541 was closed to Atka mackerel fishing under the action analyzed in the 2010 BiOp. Fishing for Atka mackerel has been prohibited in Steller sea lion CH in Area 541 since 2001.

In Bering Sea Subarea:
Management of the Atka mackerel TAC in the AI Area 541 is combined with the Bering Sea subarea. In general, the harvest of Atka mackerel in the Bering Sea is incidental to harvest of other groundfish target species, and occurs in relatively small quantities in critical habitat areas closed to directed fishing for Atka mackerel

- Modify maximum retainable amount (MRA) regulations for Amendment 80 vessels and Western Alaska Community Development Quota (CDQ) entities operating in the Bering Sea subarea to revise the method for calculating the MRA.

The effect of the modifications in the Bering Sea subarea would provide for more of the combined Bering Sea/541 Atka mackerel TAC to be harvested in the Bering Sea subarea rather than the AI.

Amendment 78 to the BSAI Groundfish FMP closed a large portion of the AI subarea to nonpelagic trawling. The Amendment 78 closures to nonpelagic trawling include the AI Habitat Conservation Area (AIHCA), the AI Coral Habitat Protection Areas, and the Bowers Ridge Habitat Conservation Zone, located in the northern portion of Area 542 and 543. These closures were implemented on July 28, 2006. These closures are in addition to the Steller sea lion protection measures and, in combination, substantially limit the locations available for nonpelagic trawling in the AI subarea

Amendment 80 to the BSAI Groundfish FMP was adopted by the Council in June 2006 and implemented for the 2008 fishing year. This action allocated several BSAI non-pollock trawl groundfish species

(including Atka mackerel) among trawl fishery sectors, facilitated the formation of harvesting cooperatives in the non-American Fisheries Act (non-AFA) trawl catcher/processor sector, and established a limited access privilege program (also referred to as a catch share program). BSAI Atka mackerel is one of the groundfish species directly affected by Amendment 80. Participation in the Atka mackerel fishery is now limited as a result of Amendment 80. In addition, the Alaska Seafood Cooperative (AKSC) formerly the Best Use Cooperative was formed under Amendment 80 which includes most of the participants in the BSAI Atka mackerel fishery.

Bycatch and discards

Atka mackerel are not commonly caught as bycatch in other directed Aleutian Islands fisheries. The largest amounts of discards of Atka mackerel, which are likely under-size fish, occur in the directed Atka mackerel trawl fishery. Atka mackerel are also caught as bycatch in the trawl Pacific cod and rockfish fisheries. Discard data have been available for the groundfish fishery since 1990. Discards of Atka mackerel for 1990-1999 and 2000-2005 have been presented in previous assessments (Lowe *et al.* 2003 and Lowe *et al*. 2011, respectively). Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands Atka mackerel discard data from 2006 to the present are given below:

Year	Fishery	Discarded (t)	Retained (t)	Total (t)	Discard Rate (%)
2006	Atka mackerel	1,793	57,815	59,608	3.0
	All others	1,252	1,035	2,287	
	All	3,045	58,850	61,895	
2007	Atka mackerel	1,730	55,563	57,293	3.0
	All others	324	1,130	1,454	
	All	2,054	56,693	58,747	
2008	Atka mackerel	1,091	54,024	55,114	2.0
	All others	158	2,810	2,968	
	All	1,249	56,834	58,082	
2009	Atka mackerel	2,620	67,271	69,891	3.7
	All others	326	2,590	2,916	
	All	2,946	69,861	72,807	
2010	Atka mackerel	3,880	63,191	67,071	5.8
	All others	95	1,480	1,575	
	All	3,975	64,671	68,646	
2011	Atka mackerel	1,191	47,377	48,568	2.5
	All others	575	2,667	3,242	
	All	1,766	50,044	51,810	
2012	Atka mackerel	929	44,097	45,026	2.1
	All others	415	2,384	2,799	
	All	1,344	46,481	47,825	
2013	Atka mackerel	448	19,387	19,835	2.3
	All others	254	3,092	3,346	
	All	702	22,479	23,181	
2014	Atka mackerel	113	28,053	28,166	0.4
	All others	274	2,511	2,785	
	All	387	30,564	30,951	
2015	Atka mackerel	555	46,979	47,533	1.2
	All others	238	5,499	5,737	
	All	792	52,478	53,270	

Discard rates have been 2-3% until 2009 when the discard rate increased to nearly 4%. The increases in 2009 and 2010 may have been due to large numbers of small fish from the 2006 and 2007 year classes. In 2011, Steller sea lion protection measures were implemented which resulted in closures of the Western and Central Aleutian sub-areas (543, 542) to the Atka mackerel fishery and a reduction in the Atka mackerel TAC in the Central Aleutian sub-area (542). The large decrease in the 2011 discard rate likely reflects regulatory changes to the operation of the Atka mackerel fishery. Most recently, the discard rate dropped significantly to less than 1% in 2014. In 2015, the Western Aleutian sub-area (543) was re-opened to directed fishing for Atka mackerel, and the discard rate increased to slightly over 1%.

Until 1998, discard rates of Atka mackerel by all fisheries have generally been greatest in the western AI (543) and lowest in the east (541, Lowe *et al.* 2003). In the 2004 fishery, the discard rates decreased in both the central and western Aleutians (542 & 543) while the eastern rate increased (Lowe *et al*. 2011). Subsequently, the 2005 discard rates dropped significantly in all three areas, contributing to the large overall drop in the 2005 discard rate (Lowe *et al*. 2011). Discard rates have continued to decrease in eastern AI (541) since 2005, and the discard rates in the Central AI (542) have increased, reflecting a shift in effort of the Atka mackerel fishery. The 2011-2014 data from the Western AI (543) are minimal Atka mackerel catches from the rockfish fisheries; directed fishing for Atka mackerel in 543 was prohibited under Steller sea lion protection measures. The discard rates in the Eastern and Central AI dropped significantly in 2014 to less than 1%. In 2015 under the revised Steller sea lion RPAs, the TAC reduction in the Central AI was removed and the Western AI was re-opened to directed fishing for Atka mackerel.

		Aleutian Islands Subarea		
Year		**541**	**542**	**543**
2006	Retained (t)	4,013	38,447	14,374
	Discarded (t)	232	1,389	263
	Rate	***5%***	***4%***	***2%***
2007	Retained (t)	19,752	25,475	8,847
	Discarded (t)	169	1,248	251
	Rate	***1%***	***5%***	***3%***
2008	Retained (t)	18,701	22,180	15,650
	Discarded (t)	18	746	395
	Rate	***0.1%***	***3%***	***2%***
2009	Retained (t)	25,734	28,415	15,512
	Discarded (t)	439	1,722	740
	Rate	***2%***	***6%***	***5%***
2010	Retained (t)	23,073	24,035	17,460
	Discarded (t)	384	2,354	1,190
	Rate	***2%***	***9%***	***6%***
2011	Retained (t)	39,214	9,828	0.3
	Discarded (t)	467	886	205
	Rate	***2%***	***8%***	***100%***
2012	Retained (t)	36,034	9,599	0.2
	Discarded (t)	308	723	195
	Rate	***1%***	***7%***	***100%***
2013	Retained (t)	15,481	416	1.3
	Discarded (t)	149	6,867	119
	Rate	***1%***	***6%***	***99%***
2014	Retained (t)	21,011	9,434	2
	Discarded (t)	42	86	240
	Rate	***0.2%***	***0.9%***	***99%***
2015	Retained (t)	25,896	16,281	10,155
	Discarded (t)	182	391	98
	Rate	***0.7%***	***2.3%***	***1%***

Steller sea lions and Atka mackerel fishery interactions

Since 1979, the Atka mackerel fishery has occurred largely within areas designated as Steller sea lion critical habitat (20 nm around rookeries and major haulouts). While total removals from critical habitat may be small in relation to estimates of total Atka mackerel biomass in the Aleutian region, past fishery harvest rates may have been high enough to affect prey availability of Steller sea lions in localized areas (Lowe and Fritz 1997). The localized pattern of fishing for Atka mackerel does not appear to affect fishing success from one year to the next because local populations in the Aleutian Islands are likely replenished by immigration and recruitment. However, temporary reductions in the size and density of localized Atka mackerel populations may have affected Steller sea lion foraging success during the time the fishery was operating in critical habitat, and this effect may have persisted for a period of unknown duration after the fishery was excluded from critical habitat. As a precautionary measure, the NPFMC passed regulations in 1998 and 2001 (described above) to disperse fishing effort temporally and spatially as well as reduce effort within Steller sea lion critical habitat.

NMFS has conducted ongoing tagging studies to determine the efficacy of trawl exclusion zones as a fishery-Steller sea lion management tool and to determine the local movement rates of Atka mackerel.

Since 2000, the AFSC has released over 130,000 tagged fish and has recovered over 3,000 tagged fish. These studies are conducted to determine small scale changes in abundance and distribution of Atka mackerel around all of the major Steller sea lion rookeries along the Aleutian Island chain that are also targeted fishing areas for Atka mackerel. Mark- recapture methods have been successful for this species because the variance estimates obtained are unaffected by species patchiness, and tagging and handling mortality are very low (less than 4% in previous studies). In addition, the fishing industry has aided in the tag recovery process, substantially reducing the expense of chartering survey vessels.

The tagging studies conducted near Seguam Pass (in area 541) in August 2000, 2001 and 2002 indicated that the 20 nm trawl exclusion zones around the rookeries on Seguam and Agligadak Islands are effective in minimizing disturbance to prey fields within them (McDermott *et al*. 2005). The boundary of the 20 nm trawl exclusion zone at Seguam appears to occur at the approximate boundary of two naturally occurring assemblages. The movement rate between the two assemblages is small. Therefore, the results obtained in area 541 at Seguam regarding the efficacy of the trawl exclusion zone may not generally apply to other, smaller zones to the west. The tagging studies were expanded to management area 542, both inside and outside the 10 nm trawl exclusion zones in Tanaga Pass (in 2002), near Amchitka Island (in 2003) and off Kiska Island (in 2006). Movement rates at Tanaga pass and Kiska Island appear similar to those at Seguam with the trawl exclusion zones overlaying apparent natural boundaries to local aggregations. Movement rates at Amchitka were higher relative to Seguam. The boundaries at Amchitka bisect Atka mackerel habitat, unlike the boundaries at Seguam and Tanaga

After the release of the 2010 BiOp and implementation of the closure of area 543 to the Atka mackerel and Pacific cod fisheries, additional tagging studies were conducted with the primary objective of examining Atka mackerel populations near rookeries in all areas open to directed Atka mackerel fishing in the Aleutian Islands. Since 2006, NMFS has been working cooperatively with the North Pacific Fisheries Foundation (NPFF) to conduct field work. In May to June 2011 NMFS, in collaboration with NPFF, released 8,500 tagged fish in the Eastern Aleutian Islands subarea (Seguam pass, area 541) and 19,000 fish in the Central Aleutian Islands subarea (Tanaga pass and Petrel bank, area 542). In May and June 2014, an additional 20,000 fish were tagged and released in the Western Aleutian Islands (Buldir Island, Western Aleutian Island Seamounts, Aggatu Island, and Ingenstrem Rocks, area 543) as well as Seguam Pass in the Eastern Aleutian Islands Aleutian Islands (area 541). Tag recovery surveys were conducted by a chartered fishing vessel and augmented with recoveries from the fishery.

Additionally, during the 2012 tag recovery survey there was an opportunity to study the prey distribution of a Steller sea lion adult female that was tagged with a satellite-tracking tag in November 2011 by the AFSC National Marine Mammal Laboratory. A hydroacoustic transect was conducted, species composition data was collected from trawl hauls, and camera tows were conducted in the area where the sea lion was feeding (South Petrel Bank). This provided a unique opportunity to investigate possible prey species availability during the same time and in the same location where the tagged female sea lion was diving. The Steller sea lion appeared to be diving in an area with high prey diversity: 5 spatially close trawl hauls each a captured a different predominant prey species (including Pacific ocean perch, northern rockfish, walleye pollock, Pacific cod, and Atka mackerel (McDermott *et al*. 2014); http://www.afsc.noaa.gov/REFM/Stocks/fit/FITcruiserpts.htm.

These studies indicate that Atka mackerel exhibit very little large scale movement, with 98.5 % of tagged fish being recovered in the same study areas as they were released. The tagging model population and biomass estimates at the three study areas in the Eastern and Central Aleutian Islands showed large biomass estimates at Seguam Pass (541) and Petrel bank (542), both with approximately 190,000 t in the area open to fishing, and an estimated smaller biomass estimate (29,000 t) at Tanaga pass (542). In all three areas the local exploitation rate was below 10%, with 8% at Seguam pass, 4% at Petrel bank and 2% at Tanaga pass. These low exploitation rates indicated that there was little concern for localized depletion

in the areas open to fishing in the Eastern and Central Aleutian Islands during 2011-2012 (McDermott *et al*. 2014). In 2015, several of the areas closed in 2010, including the Western Aleutians (area 543), were reopened to commercial fishing. Analysis of the local population biomass estimates from 2014 to 2015 in the Western Aleutian Islands is ongoing.

Data

Fishery data

Fishery data consist of total catch biomass from 1977 to 2015 and projected end of year 2016 catch data (Table 17.1).

Fishery Length Frequencies

From 1977 to 1988, commercial catches were sampled for length and age structures by the NMFS foreign fisheries observer program. There was no JV allocation of Atka mackerel in 1989, when the fishery became fully domestic. Since the domestic observer program was not in full operation until 1990, there was little opportunity to collect age and length data in 1989. Also, the 1980 and 1981 foreign observer samples were small, so these data were supplemented with length samples taken by R.O.K. fisheries personnel from their commercial landings. Data from the foreign fisheries are presented in Lowe and Fritz (1996).

Atka mackerel length distributions from the 2015 and preliminary 2016 fisheries by management area are shown in Figures 17.2 and 17.3, respectively. The modes at about 27-33 and 37-40 cm in the 2015 length distributions represent the 2012 and 2011 year classes, respectively. The available 2016 fishery data are presented and should be considered preliminary, but are similar to the 2015 distributions. A significant difference in 2016 is the presentation of data from fish sampled from areas 517 and 519.

Fishery Age Data

Length measurements collected by observers and otoliths read by the AFSC Age and Growth Lab (Table 17.3) were used to create age-length keys to determine the age composition of the catch from 1977-2015 (Table 17.4). In previous assessments (prior to 2008), the catch-at-age in numbers was compiled using total annual BSAI catches and global (Aleutian-wide) year-specific age-length keys. The formulas used are described by Kimura (1989). As with the length frequencies, the age data for 1980-1981 and 1989 presented problems. The commercial catches in 1980 and 1981 were not sampled for age structures, and there were too few age structures collected in 1989 to construct a reasonable age-length key. Kimura and Ronholt (1988) used the 1980 survey age-length key to estimate the 1980 commercial catch age distribution, and these data were further used to estimate the 1981 commercial catch age distribution with a mixture model (Kimura and Chikuni 1987). However, this method did not provide satisfactory results for the 1989 catch data and that year has been excluded from the analyses (Lowe *et al*. 2007).

An alternative approach to compiling the catch-at-age data was adopted in the 2008 assessment in response to issues raised during the 2008 Center for Independent Experts (CIE) review of the Aleutian Islands Atka mackerel and pollock assessments. This method uses stratified catch by region (Table 17.2) and compiles (to the extent possible) region-specific age-length keys stratified by sex. This method also accounts for the relative weights of the catch taken within strata in different years. This approach was applied to catch-at-age data after 1989 (the period when consistent observer data were available) and follows the methods described by Kimura (1989) and modified by Dorn (1992; Table 17.4). Briefly, length-stratified age data are used to construct age-length keys for each stratum and sex. These keys are then applied to randomly sampled catch length frequency data. The stratum-specific age composition estimates are then weighted by the catch within each stratum to arrive at an overall age composition for each year. In summary, estimates of the proportion of catch-at-age are derived from the mean of the

bootstrap sampling of the revised catch-at-age estimates. The bootstrap method also allows evaluation of sample-size scaling that better reflect inter-annual differences in sampling and observer coverage. Since body mass is applied in this estimation, stratum-weighted mean weights-at-age are available with the estimates of catch-at-age. The three strata for the Atka mackerel coincide with the three management areas (eastern, central, and western regions of the Aleutian Islands). This method was used to derive the age compositions for 1990-2015 (the period for which all the necessary information is readily available). Prior to 1990, the catch-age composition estimates remain the same as in previous assessments.

The most notable features of the estimated catch-at-age data (Table 17.4) are the strong 1975, 1977, 1999, 2000, and 2001 year classes, and large numbers of the 2006 and 2011 year classes which showed up in the 2009-2010 and 2014 fisheries, respectively. The 1975 year class appeared strong as 3 and 4-year-olds in 1978 and 1979. It is unclear why this year class did not continue to show up strongly after age 4. The 1977 year class appeared strong through 1987, after entering the fishery as 3-year-olds in 1980. The 2002 fishery age data showed the first appearance in the fishery of the exceptionally strong 1999 year class, and the 2003 and 2004 fishery data showed the first appearance of large numbers from the 2000 and 2001 year classes, respectively. The 2012 fishery data are dominated by 5 and 6-year-olds of the 2007 and 2006 year classes, respectively, and continue to show the presence of the 2001 year class. Significant numbers of 4 year olds of the 2009 year class were observed in 2013, and the 2011 year class dominated the 2014 fishery catch-at-age data, which also showed the continued presence of large numbers of the 2009 year class. Most recently, the 2015 catch data are mainly comprised of the 2010-2012 year classes, and show the continued presence of the 2009 year class (Table 17.4).

Atka mackerel are a summer-fall spawning fish that do not appear to lay down an otolith annulus in the first year (Anderl *et al.*, 1996). The Alaska Fisheries Science Center Age and Growth Unit adds one year to the number of otolith hyaline zones determined for Atka mackerel otoliths. All age data presented in this report have been corrected in this way.

Survey data

Atka mackerel are a difficult species to survey because: (1) they do not have a swim bladder, making them poor targets for hydroacoustic surveys; (2) they prefer hard, rough and rocky bottom which makes sampling with survey bottom trawl gear difficult; (3) their schooling behavior and patchy distribution result in survey estimates associated with large variances; and 4) Atka mackerel are thought to be very responsive to tide cycles. During extremes in the tidal cycle, Atka mackerel may not be accessible which could affect their availability to the survey. Despite these shortcomings, the U.S.-Japan cooperative trawl surveys conducted in 1980, 1983, 1986, and the 1991- 2016 domestic trawl surveys, provide the only direct estimates of population biomass from throughout the Aleutian Islands region. It is important to note that the biomass estimates from the early U.S-Japan cooperative surveys are not directly comparable with the biomass estimates obtained from the U.S. trawl surveys because of differences in the net, fishing power of the vessels and sampling design (Barbeaux *et al.* 2004). Due to differences in area and depth coverage of the U.S-Japan cooperative surveys, we present this historical data (Table 17.5), but these data are not used in the assessment model.

The most recent Aleutian Islands biomass estimate from the 2016 Aleutian Islands bottom trawl survey is 448,166 t, down 38% relative to the 2014 survey estimate (Table 17.6b). The breakdown of the Aleutian biomass estimates by area corresponds to the management sub-districts (541-Eastern, 542-Central, and 543-Western). The decrease in biomass in the 2016 survey is largely a result of the decrease in biomass observed in the Eastern Aleutian area, but all areas showed declines (Table 17.6b). Relative to the 2014 survey, the 2016 biomass estimates are down 27% in the Western area, 35% in the Central area, and 48% in the combined Southern Bering Sea/Eastern area (Fig. 17.4). The 95% confidence interval about the mean total 2016 Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands biomass estimate is 33-941,646 t. The coefficient of variation (*CV*) of the 2016 mean BSAI biomass is 31% (Table 17.6b).

The distribution of biomass in the Western, Central, and Eastern Aleutians and the southern Bering Sea shifted between each of the surveys, most dramatically in area 541 in the 2000 survey, and recently in the 2012 survey (Fig. 17.5). The 2000 Eastern Aleutian area biomass estimate (900 t) was the lowest of all surveys, contributing only 0.2% of the total 2000 Aleutian biomass and represented a 98% decline relative to the 1997 survey. The 2012 Eastern Aleutian biomass estimate of 33,149 t was down 91% relative the 2010 survey, and represented 12% of the total 2012 Aleutian biomass. The extremely low 2000 biomass estimate for the Eastern area has not been reconciled, but there are several factors that may have had a significant impact on the distribution of Atka mackerel that were discussed in Lowe *et al.* (2001).

The area specific variances for area 541 have always been high relative to 542 and 543; the distribution of Atka mackerel in 541 is patchier with episodic large catches often resulting from trawl samples in the major passes. During 2012, large catches of Atka mackerel were not observed in area 541 as they were during 2006, 2010, 2014, and to some extent in 2016. During the 2010, 2014, and 2016 surveys, the biomass from area 541 comprised 35 to 42% of the Aleutian Island biomass, but in 2012, only comprised 12% of the Atka mackerel biomass (Table 17.6b).

This variation in survey biomass and low estimates for 2012 may be affected by colder than average temperatures in the region and their effects on fish behavior. Gear temperature near the bottom during the 2012 survey in area 541 was 0.25 °C colder than average for the 100 to 200 m depth stratum where 99% of the Atka mackerel are caught in the surveys, and both 2012 and 2000 were years with colder than average temperatures and low abundances of Atka mackerel (Fig. 17.5). Temperatures from the 2014 and 2016 surveys were some of the warmest in the time series over all depth strata (Fig. 17.5). Previous studies suggest that temperature affects the incubation period and potentially the occupation of nesting habitats by males (Lauth *et al*. 2007a). The effect of temperature on survey catchability and fish behavior should be examined more fully in the future to understand whether temperature affects the vertical or broad scale distribution of Atka mackerel to make them less available to the trawl during cold years.

Other factors could also affect survey catches. Sampling in area 541 includes passes with high currents that may affect towing success and catchability during daily tidal cycles and bi-weekly spring and neap tides. Atka mackerel are thought to be very responsive to tide cycles and current patterns, and the catchability of Atka mackerel may be influenced by currents. However, there were no changes in survey protocols during 2012 that affected trawling operations with respect to tidal cycles and tows at stations were attempted with some failures through different current strengths. Three stations were resampled at the end of the cruise in area 541 in 2012 without any effect on the catch per unit effort of Atka mackerel. There is no evidence to suggest that the survey vessels were not sampling properly in 2012. Appendix 1 in Lowe *et al*. (2001) examined the distribution of historical Atka mackerel survey data. Simulation results showed that it is very possible to underestimate the true biomass when the target organism has a very patchy distribution (E. Conners, Appendix 1 in Lowe *et al*. 2001).

In 1994 for the first time since the initiation of the Aleutian triennial surveys, a significant concentration of biomass was detected in the southern Bering Sea area (66,603 t). This occurred again in 1997 (95,680 t), 2002 (59,883 t), 2004, (267,556 t), and in the 2010 survey (103,529 t, Table 17.6). These biomass estimates are a result of large catches from a single haul encountered north of Akun Island in all five surveys. In addition, large catches of Atka mackerel in the 2004 survey were also encountered north of Unalaska Island, with a particularly large haul in the northwest corner of Unalaska Island. The 2004 southern Bering Sea strata biomass estimate of 267,556 t is the largest biomass encountered in this area in the survey time series. The *CV* of the 2004 southern Bering Sea estimate is 43%, much lower than previous years as several hauls contributed to the 2004 estimate. Most recently, the 2016 survey estimated only 186 t of biomass in the southern Bering Sea (*CV*=39%). Very little biomass has been observed in the southern Bering Sea since the 2010 survey.

Areas with large catches of Atka mackerel in the 2010 survey included north of Akun Island, northwest of the Islands of Four Mountains, Seguam Pass, Kiska Island, Buldir Island, and Stalemate Bank (Fig. 17.6 in Lowe *et al*. 2015). In the 2012 survey there were no extremely large catches observed as in previous surveys, and moderate catches were only observed south of Amchitka Island, Kiska Island, and Stalemate Bank (Fig. 17.6) In the 2014 survey, several large catches were observed at Seguam Pass, Atka Island, Tanaga Island, Kiska Island, and Stalemate Bank. In the 2016 survey there were fewer large hauls, and more hauls that did not encounter Atka mackerel relative to previous surveys. Moderately large catches in the 2016 survey were observed at Seguam Pass, Buldir Islands and Stalemate Bank (Fig. 17.6). In the 2002, 2004, 2006, and 2010 surveys Atka mackerel were much less patchily distributed relative to previous surveys and were encountered in 55, 58, 52, and 56% of the hauls respectively, which are some of the highest rates of encounters in the survey time series. Although no extremely large catches of Atka mackerel were encountered in the 2012 survey, low to moderate catches were observed in areas consistent with previous surveys, and the percent occurrence of Atka mackerel in the 2012 survey was 48%. In the 2014 survey, Atka mackerel were encountered in 55% of the survey hauls, similar to surveys before 2012. The percent occurrence of Atka mackerel dropped to 38% in the most recent 2016 survey.

The average bottom temperatures measured in the 2000 and 2012 surveys were the lowest of any of the Aleutian surveys, particularly in depths less than 200 m where 99% of the Atka mackerel are caught in the surveys (Fig. 17.5). The average bottom temperatures measured in the 2016 survey was the highest of the Aleutian surveys, and the 2014 survey was the second highest, significantly higher than the 2000 and 2012 surveys and very similar to the 1991 and 1997 surveys (Fig. 17.5).

Survey length frequencies

The bottom trawl surveys have consistently revealed a strong east-west gradient in Atka mackerel size similar to fishery data, with the smallest fish in the west and progressively larger fish to the east along the Aleutian Islands chain. This was evident in the 2012 and 2014 surveys (Figure 17.7 in Lowe *et al.* 2012 and Lowe *et al*. 2015). The 2016 survey length frequency distributions also show a strong east-west gradient in Atka mackerel size, although the pattern is somewhat obscured in the Central Aleutians which showed a bimodal distribution with modes at 28-30 and 34-38 cm (Fig. 17.7). It is unclear why large numbers of 28-30 cm fish were only encountered in the Central Aleutians.

Survey age data

The 2010 survey age composition was dominated by 3 and 4-year olds of the 2007 and 2006 year classes (Fig. 17.8 in Lowe *et al*. 2011). The 2009-2013 fishery data confirm the strong presence of the 2006 and 2007 year classes in fishery catches. The 2012 survey age composition is dominated by 3 and 5-year olds of the 2009 and 2007 year classes, respectively. The 2014 survey age composition which is the most recent available, is dominated by 3 and 4-year olds of the 2011 and 2010 year classes, respectively; 7 and 8-year olds of the 2006 and 2007 year classes are still numerous (Fig. 17.8). The mean age in the 2014 survey age composition is 5.8 years. Table 17.7 gives estimated survey numbers at age of Atka mackerel from the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands trawl surveys and numbers of Atka mackerel otoliths aged.

We note that although biomass estimates from the U.S.-Japan cooperative trawl surveys are not utilized, we do use the survey age data from the 1986 U.S.-Japan cooperative trawl survey as this was the most well-sampled survey in the cooperative survey time series, and the age data provide useful historical information for the assessment model.

Survey abundance indices

A partial time series of relative indices from the 1980, 1983, 1986 Aleutian Islands surveys had been used in early assessments (Lowe *et al.* 2001). The relative indices of abundance excluded biomass from the 1-100 m depth strata of the Southwest Aleutian Islands region (west of 180°) due to the lack of sampling in

this stratum in some years. Because the excluded area and depth stratum have consistently been found to be locations of high Atka mackerel biomass in later surveys, it was determined that the indices did not provide useful additional information to the model and have been omitted from the assessment since 2001. Analyses to determine the impact of omitting the relative time series showed that results without the relative index are more conservative (Lowe *et al*. 2002).

Analytic Approach

The 2002 BSAI Atka mackerel stock assessment introduced a new modeling approach implemented through the "Stock Assessment Toolbox" (an initiative by the NOAA Fisheries Office of Science and Technology) that evaluated favorably with previous assessments (Lowe *et al.* 2002). This approach used the Assessment Model for Alaska (AMAK)[1] from the Toolbox, which is similar to the stock synthesis application (Methot 1989, 1990; Fournier and Archibald 1982, Fournier 1998) used for Aleutian Islands Atka mackerel from 1991–2001, but allows for increased flexibility in specifying models with uncertainty in changes in fishery selectivity and other parameters such as natural mortality and survey catchability (Lowe *et al.* 2002). This approach (AMAK) has also been adopted for the Aleutian Islands pollock stock assessment (Barbeaux *et al.* 2004).

Model structure

The AMAK models catch-at-age with the standard Baranov catch equation. The population dynamics follows numbers-at-age over the period of catch history (here 1977-2016) with natural and age-specific fishing mortality occurring throughout the 11-age-groups that are modeled (1-11+). Age 1 recruitment in each year is estimated as deviations from a mean value expected from an underlying stock-recruitment curve. Deviations between the observations and the expected values are quantified with a specified error model and cast in terms of a penalized log-likelihood. The overall log-likelihood (L) is the sum of the log-likelihoods for each data component and prior specification (e.g., for affecting the extent selectivity is allowed to vary). Appendix Tables A-1 – A-3 provide a description of the variables used, and the basic equations describing the population dynamics of Atka mackerel as they relate to the available data. The quasi[2] likelihood components and the distribution assumption of the error structure are given below:

[1] AMAK. 2015. A statistical catch at age model for Alaska, version 15.0. NOAA version available on request to authors.

[2] Quasi likelihood is used here because model penalties (not strictly relating to data) are included.

Data component	**Years of data**	**Likelihood form**	***CV* or sample size (*N*)**
Catch biomass	1977-2016	Lognormal	*CV*=5%
Fishery catch age composition	1977-2015	Multinomial	Year specific *N*=1-206, Ave.=100
Survey biomass	1991, 1994, 1997, 2000, 2002 2004, 2006, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016	Lognormal	Average *CV*=25%
Survey age composition	1986, 1991, 1994, 1997, 2000 2002, 2004, 2006, 2010, 2012, 2014	Multinomial	*N*=25-70, Ave.=50 (see Fig. 17.11)
Recruitment deviations		Lognormal	
Stock recruitment curve		Lognormal	
Selectivity smoothness (in age-coefficients, survey and fishery)		Lognormal	
Selectivity change over time (fishery and survey)		Lognormal	
Priors (where applicable)		Lognormal	

The age-composition components are heavily influenced by the sample size assumptions specified for the multinomial likelihood. In previous assessments we estimated "effective sample sizes" ($\dot{N}_{i,j}$) with the following equation (where *i* indexes year, and *j* indexes age):

$$\dot{N}_{i,j} = \frac{p_{i,j}\left(1 - p_{i,j}\right)}{\mathrm{var}\left(p_{i,j}\right)}$$

where $p_{i,j}$ is the proportion of Atka mackerel in age group *j* in year *i* plus an added constant of 0.01 to provide some robustness. The variance of $p_{i,j}$ was obtained from the estimates of variance in catch-at-age (Dorn 1992). Thompson and Dorn (2003, p. 137) and Thompson (AFSC pers. comm.) note that the above is a random variable that has its own distribution. Thompson and Dorn (2003) show that the harmonic mean of this distribution is equal to the true sample size in the multinomial distribution. This property was used in the previous assessments to obtain sample size estimates for the (post 1989) fishery numbers-at-age estimates (scaled to have a mean of 100; earlier years were set to constant values). This year the assumptions on sample sizes for age composition data were re-evaluated. For the fishery, the number of Atka mackerel lengths measured varied substantially as did the number of hauls from which hard-parts were sampled from fish for age-determinations (Fig. 17.9). A comparison of values used in Model 14.1 (last year's assessment model renamed Model 14.1 here), and the scaled number of hauls shows differing patterns over time (Fig. 17.10). Stewart and Hamel (2014) found the maximum realized sample sizes for fishery biological data to be related both to the number of hauls and individual fish sampled from those hauls, and that a relative measure proportional to the number of hauls sampled might be a better indicator of sampling intensity. Therefore, for Model 16.0 (introduced in the current assessment, see Model Evaluation), the sample sizes were scaled to have the same mean as in Model 14.1 (*N*=100) but varied relative to the number of hauls sampled (Fig. 17.10). The Table below compares sample sizes under Model 14.1 (last year's values) and the current revised values.

Year	Model 14.1	Model 16.0		Model 14.1	Model 16.0		Model 14.1	Model 16.0
1977	25	25	1990	47	47	2003	132	162
1978	25	25	1991	35	3	2004	132	172
1979	25	25	1992	10	2	2005	88	187
1980	25	25	1993	10	1	2006	116	171
1981	50	50	1994	65	17	2007	88	156
1982	50	50	1995	59	15	2008	143	148
1983	50	50	1996	116	14	2009	149	193
1984	50	50	1997	16	2	2010	128	198
1985	50	50	1998	82	15	2011	83	148
1986	50	50	1999	218	58	2012	100	206
1987	50	50	2000	233	107	2013	100	97
1988	50	50	2001	103	128	2014	100	118
			2002	135	118	2015		100

A similar approach for computing time-varying sample sizes for survey age compositions was applied. The sample sizes were scaled to have a mean of 50 but varied with the number of Atka mackerel hauls (Fig. 17.11).

An ageing error conversion matrix is used in the assessment model to translate model population numbers at age to expected fishery catch at age. We estimated this matrix using an ageing error model fit to the observed percent agreement at ages 2 through 10. Mean percent agreement is close to 100% at age 2 and declines to 54% at age 10. Annual estimates of percent agreement are variable, but show no obvious trend, hence a single conversion matrix for all years in the assessment model was adopted. The model is based on a linear increase in the standard deviation of ageing error and the assumption that ageing error is normally distributed. The model predicts percent agreement by taking into account the probability that both readers are correct, both readers are off by one year in the same direction, and both readers are off by two years in the same direction. The probability that both readers agree and were off by more than two years was considered negligible.

Parameters estimated outside the assessment model

The following parameters were estimated independently of other parameters outside of the assessment model: natural mortality (*M*), length and weight at age parameters, and maturity at age and length parameters. A description of these parameters and how they were estimated follows.

Natural mortality

Natural mortality (*M*) is a difficult parameter to estimate reliably. One approach we took was to use the regression model of Hoenig (1983) which relates total mortality as a function of maximum age. Hoenig's (1983) equation is:

$$\ln(Z) = 1.46 - 1.01(\ln(Tmax)).$$

Where Z is total instantaneous mortality (the sum of natural and fishing mortality, $Z=M+F$), and $Tmax$ is the maximum age. The instantaneous total mortality rate can be considered an upper bound for the natural mortality rate if the fishing mortality rate is minimal. The catch-at-age data showed a 14-year-old fish in the 1990 fishery, and a 15-year-old in the 1994 fishery. Assuming a maximum age of 14 years and Hoenig's regression equation, Z was estimated to be 0.30 (Lowe 1992). Because fishing mortality was relatively low in 1990, natural mortality has been reasonably approximated by a value of 0.30 in past assessments.

An analysis was undertaken to explore alternative methods to estimate natural mortality for Atka mackerel (Lowe and Fritz, 1997). Several methods were employed based on correlations of *M* with life

history parameters including growth parameters (Alverson and Carney 1975, Pauly 1980, Charnov 1993), longevity (Hoenig 1983), and reproductive potential (Roff 1986, Rikhter and Efanov 1976). Atka mackerel appear to be segregated by size along the Aleutian chain. Thus, natural mortality estimates based on growth parameters would be sensitive to any sampling biases that could result in under- or over-estimation of the von Bertalanffy growth parameters. Fishery data collections are more likely to be biased as the fishery can be more size selective and concentrates harvests in specific areas as opposed to the surveys. Natural mortality estimates derived from fishery data ranged from 0.05 to 1.13 with a mean of 0.53. Natural mortality estimates, excluding those based on fishery data, ranged from 0.12 to 0.74 with a mean value of 0.34. The current assumed value of 0.3 is consistent with these values. Also, a value of 0.3 is consistent with values of *M* derived by the methods of Hoenig (1983) and Rikhter and Efanov (1976) which do not rely on growth parameters (Lowe and Fritz, 1997).

The 2003 assessment explored the use of priors on *M*, resulting in drastically higher biomass levels (Fig. 17.11 in Lowe *et al.* 2003). We conducted preliminary explorations of alternative formulations of an age-dependent *M* selected outside the assessment model. Alternatives included the Lorenzen model (Lorenzen, 1996), and the *M*-at-age formulation suggested in the report of the Natural Mortality Workshop held in 2009 (the "best ad-hoc mortality model" in that report [see Brodziak *et al.* 2011]). Initial results showed higher natural mortality rates compared to the baseline assessment model. Values of recruitment were much greater relative to the baseline model and were reflected in higher spawning biomass levels and target fishing mortality rates. We found the effect of higher natural mortality generally is traded off with estimated patterns in selectivity, especially for the older ages. Further analysis is needed, and we intend to more fully explore the estimation of age-dependent *M* and the impacts on parameters of interest.

In the current assessment, a natural mortality value of 0.3 was used in the assessment model.

Length and weight at age

Atka mackerel exhibit large annual and geographic variability in length at age. Because survey data provide the most uniform sampling of the Aleutian Islands region, data from these surveys were used to evaluate variability in growth (Kimura and Ronholt 1988, Lowe *et al.* 1998). Kimura and Ronholt (1988) conducted an analysis of variance on length-at-age data from the 1980, 1983, and 1986 U.S.-Japan surveys, and the U.S.-U.S.S.R. surveys in 1982 and 1985, stratified by six areas. Results showed that length at age did not differ significantly by sex, and was smallest in the west and largest in the east. Studies by Lowe *et al.* (1998), Rand *et al*. (2010), and McDermott *et al*. (2014) corroborated differential growth in three sub-areas of the Aleutian Islands and the Western GOA, and the east to west differential size cline. Based on the work of Kimura and Ronholt (1988), and annual examination of length and age data by sex which has found no differences, growth parameters are presented for combined sexes. Parameters of the von Bertalanffy length-age equation and a weight-length equation have been calculated for (1) the combined 1986, 1991, and 1994 survey data for the entire Aleutians region, and for the Eastern (541) and combined Central and Western (542 and 543) subareas, and (2) the combined 1990-96 fishery data for the same areas:

Data source	L_∞(cm)	K	t_0
86, 91& 94 surveys			
Areas combined	41.4	0.439	-0.13
541	42.1	0.652	0.70
542 & 543	40.3	0.425	-0.38
1990-96 fishery			
Areas combined	41.3	0.670	0.79
541	44.1	0.518	0.35
542 & 543	40.7	0.562	0.37

Length-age equation: Length (cm) = $L_\infty\{1\text{-exp}[-K(\text{age}-t_0)]\}$

Both the survey and fishery data show a clear east to west size cline in length at age with the largest fish found in the eastern Aleutians.

The weight-length relationship determined from the same data sets are as follows:

weight (kg) = 9.08E-06 × length (cm) $^{3.0913}$ (86, 91 & 94 surveys; N = 1,052)
weight (kg) = 3.72E-05 × length (cm) $^{2.6949}$ (1990-1996 fisheries; N = 4,041).

The observed differences in the weight-length relationships from the survey and fishery data, particularly in the exponent of length, probably reflect the differences in the timing of sample collection. The survey data were all collected in summer, the spawning period of Atka mackerel when gonad weight would contribute the most to total weight. The fishery data were collected primarily in winter, when gonad weight would be a smaller percentage of total weight than in summer.

Year-specific weight-at-age estimates are used in the model to scale fishery and survey catch-at-age (and the modeled numbers-at-age) to total catch biomass and are intended to represent the average weight-at-age of the catch. Separate annual survey weights-at-age are compiled for expanding modeled numbers into age-selected survey biomass levels (Table 17.8). Specifically, survey estimates of length-at-age were obtained using year-specific age-length keys. Weights-at-age were estimated by multiplying the length distribution at age from the age-length key, by the mean weight-at-length from each year-specific data set (De Robertis and Williams 2008). In addition, a single vector of weight-at-age values based on the 2010, 2012, and 2014 surveys is used to derive population biomass from the modeled numbers-at-age in order to allow for better estimation of current biomass (Table 17.8).

The fishery weight-at-age data presented in previous assessments (prior to 2008) were compiled based on unweighted, unstratified (Aleutian-wide) fishery catch-age samples to construct the year-specific age-length keys (see Table 17.8 in Lowe *et al*. 2007). Beginning with the 2008 assessment, the weights-at-age for the post 1989 fishery reflect stratum-weighted values based on the relative catches. The fishery weight-at-age data presented in Table 17.8 for 1990 to 2015, were compiled using the region-specific age-length key estimation scheme described above in the Fishery Data section. Prior to 1990, the fishery weight-at-age estimates are as in previous assessments and given in Table 17.8.

Maturity at age and length

Female maturity at length and age were determined for Aleutian Islands Atka mackerel (McDermott and Lowe, 1997). The estimated female maturity at age is used in the assessment models. The age at 50%

maturity is 3.6 years. Length at 50% maturity differs by area as the length at age differs by Aleutian Islands sub-areas:

	Length at 50% maturity (cm)
Eastern Aleutians (541)	35.91
Central Aleutians (542)	33.55
Western Aleutians (543)	33.64

The maturity schedules are given in Table 17.9. Cooper *et al*. (2010) examined spatial and temporal variation in Atka mackerel female maturity at length and age. Maturity at length data varied significantly between different geographic areas and years, while maturity at age data failed to indicate differences and corroborated the age at 50% maturity determined by McDermott and Lowe (1997).

Parameters estimated inside the assessment model

Deviations between the observations and the expected values are quantified with a specified error structure. Lognormal error is assumed for survey biomass estimates and fishery catch, and a multinomial error structure is assumed for survey and fishery age compositions. These error structures are used to estimate the following parameters conditionally within the model (fishing mortality, survey selectivity, survey catchability, age 1 recruitment). A description of these parameters and how they were estimated follows.

Fishing mortality

Fishing mortality is parameterized to be separable with a year component and an age (selectivity) component in both models. The selectivity relationship is modeled with a smoothed non-parametric relationship that can take on any shape (with penalties controlling the degree of change over time, degree of declining selectivity at age (dome-shape, σ_d), and curvature as specified by the user; Table A-2). Selectivity is conditioned so that the mean value over all ages will be equal to one. To provide regularity in the age component, a moderate penalty was imposed on sharp shifts in selectivity between ages (curvature) using the sum of squared second differences (log-scale). In addition, the age component parameters are assumed constant for ages 10 and older. Asymptotic growth is reached at about age 9 to 10 years. Thus, it seemed reasonable to assume that selectivity of fish older than age 10 would be the same. A moderate penalty was imposed to allow the model limited flexibility on degree of declining selectivity at age. In the 2012 assessment we evaluated a range of alternative values for the prior penalty of the parameter determining the degree of dome-shape (σ_d) for fishery selectivity and assumed a value of 0.3 for σ_d for the recommended Model 2 which was accepted (Lowe *et al*. 2012). This assumption is carried forward in the current assessment.

Prior to the 2008 assessment, selectivity had been allowed to vary annually with a low constraint as described in the 2002 assessment (Lowe *et al*. 2002). As suggested by the 2008 CIE reviewers, we adopted a new model configuration with blocks of years with constant selectivity which corresponded approximately to the foreign fishery, the joint venture fishery, the domestic fishery prior to Steller sea lion regulations, and the domestic fishery post Steller sea lion regulations. This model configuration was used in the 2008-2012 assessments. In the 2013 assessment, a method to allow fishery selectivity to vary without having to subjectively specify an arbitrary degree of penalty was implemented based on analysis developed and presented at the CAPAM workshop on selectivity (CAPAM 2013). The same method to constrain fishery selectivity variability as described in the 2013 assessment (Lowe *et al*. 2013), was used in this assessment.

Survey selectivity and catchability

For the bottom trawl survey, selectivity-at-age follows a parameterization similar to the fishery selectivity-at-age presented above (except with no allowance for time-varying selectivity). In response to the December 2010 SSC minutes which noted a lack of model fit to survey biomass estimates after 1999, the 2011 assessment explored the implementation of a random walk for a transition set of years in survey catchability and time periods for survey selectivity, as one approach to help resolve the poor residual pattern identified (Lowe *et al*. 2011). Results were unsatisfactory and little improvement of model fit to survey biomass was noted. The random walk for catchability was not carried forward, but two survey selectivity time blocks were retained which coincided the break point in the lack of fit for the 2012-2013 assessments. Model explorations in 2012-2013 assessments which constrained the degree of dome-shape for fishery selectivity and allowed for a greater degree of time-varying fishery selectivity improved model fits to the survey by having survey catchability increase. The 2014 assessment utilized a single survey selectivity-at-age vector. We will continue to explore options for implementing time-varying selectivity for the survey. As in the past, we also specified that the average selectivity-at-age for the survey is equal to 1 over ages 4-10. This was done to standardize the ages over which selectivity most reasonably applies.

The 2002 assessment explored the estimation of M and survey catchability (q) simultaneously with various combinations of priors (Lowe *et al*. 2002). Preliminary results were unsatisfactory and difficult to interpret biologically. The 2003 assessment explored a range of priors on M or q, while the other parameter was fixed with mixed results that were also difficult to interpret and did not seem biologically reasonable (Lowe *et al.* 2003). In the 2004 assessment we presented a model (Model 4, Lowe *et al.* 2004), with a moderate prior on q (mean = 1.0, $\sigma^2 = 0.2^2$) which was accepted and used as the basis for the ABC and OFL specifications since 2004.

We will continue to pursue a comprehensive analysis of fishery and survey time-varying selectivity, and also explore estimation of M and q as requested by the SSC and in response to CIE recommendations.

Recruitment

The Beverton-Holt form of stock recruitment relationship based on Francis (1992) was used (Table A-2). Values for the stock recruitment function parameters α and β are calculated from the values of R_0 (the number of 0-year-olds in the absence of exploitation and recruitment variability) and the "steepness" of the stock-recruit relationship (h, Table A-2). The "steepness" parameter is the fraction of R_0 to be expected (in the absence of recruitment variability) when the mature biomass is reduced to 20% of its pristine level (Francis 1992). Past assessments have assumed a value of 0.8. A value of $h = 0.8$ implies that at 20% of the unfished spawning stock size, an expected value of 80% of the unfished recruitment level will result. Model runs exploring other values of h and the use of a prior on h were explored in previous assessments (Lowe *et al.* 2002), but were found to have little or no bearing on the stock assessment results and were not carried forward for further evaluation at the time. As in past years, we assumed $h = 0.8$ for all model runs since previous work showed that assessment results were insensitive to this assumption (and given the Tier 3 status does not affect future projections). Prior to the 2012 assessment, the recruitment variance was fixed at a value 0.6. As in the 2015 assessment, we estimate this value.

Results

Model evaluation

The 2014 CIE review noted the assessment appeared to reasonably capture the overall uncertainty and lacked any serious gaps or inconsistencies relative to the population dynamics. In 2014, results of Model 1 (renamed Model 14.1 in this assessment), fell within the range of sensitivity runs explored in the assessment (Lowe *et al*. 2014). We thus use Model 14.1 as the reference model. This year we introduce

Model 16.0 which is Model 14.1 with sample sizes scaled to have the same mean as in Model 14.1 (*N*=100), but samples sizes are varied relative to the number of hauls sampled.

Impact of new data introduced in 2016

Model 14.1 (the selected model configuration used for ABC setting since 2014) was updated with new data. To evaluate the impact of these additions a set of sub-models were run where 0.0 is the 2015 assessment, 0.1 is extended to 2016 with updated catch estimates, 0.2 includes 2015 fishery age composition data, and 0.3 adds in the 2016 survey biomass estimates (Fig. 17.12). The addition of the 2015 age composition and 2016 survey biomass estimates impacted the historical female spawning biomass prior to 2013 and also after 2015, indicating slightly lower levels relative to the 2015 assessment (Fig. 17.12 top panel). The addition of the 2015 age composition and 2016 survey biomass estimates impacted the estimates of age-1 recruitment after 2012 (Fig. 17.12 bottom panel).

Alternative model configurations considered

Comparing Models 14.1 and 16.0 (both with new data), the likelihoods improved considerably even though the input sample sizes had the same mean value. This suggests that the time-varying aspect which brings sample sizes proportional to the number of hauls rather than the number of fish is consistent with how the model fits the data. Whereas this might qualify as being a minor modification of 14.1, we chose to consider this a significant improvement and labeled it as 16.0 and recommend using this configuration for the current assessment.

	Fishery Age	Fishery Selectivity	Survey Index	Survey Age	Survey Selectivity	Recruitment	*q* prior	Total
Model_14.1	96.4	86.6	6.9	42.4	6.5	-5.2	0.1	233.66
Model_16.0	84.0	80.3	7.2	40.1	6.0	-8.5	0.4	209.48

A summary of key results from the selected Model 16.0 is presented in Table 17.10. Results from the 2015 assessment model with updated data are presented for comparison.

Model fit

Key results from Model 16.0 are presented in Table 17.10. The coefficient of variation or *CV* (reflecting uncertainty) about the 2016 biomass estimate is 20% and the *CV*s on the strength of the 2001 and 2006 year classes at age 1 are 14 and 15%, respectively (Table 17.10). Recruitment variability (SigmaR) was moderate and estimated to be 0.44. Sample size values were calculated for the fishery data and the bottom trawl survey data. The model estimated an average fishery effective sample size (*N*) of 250 and average survey effective *N* of 112, which are higher than many of the input values but reasonable given the level of sampling that occurs in the fishery and survey. The overall residual mean square error (RMSE) for the survey is estimated at 0.341, which is somewhat higher than estimates of sampling-error *CV*s for the survey which range from 14-35% and average 26% over the time series (Table 17.6).

Figure 17.13 compares the observed and estimated survey biomass abundance values for the BSAI. The decreases in biomass indicated by the 1994 and 1997 surveys followed by the large increases in biomass from the 2002 and 2004 surveys appear to be consistent with recruitment patterns. However, the large increase observed in the 2004 survey was not fit as well by the model compared to the 2000, 2002, and 2006 surveys. In the 2004 survey, an unusually high biomass (268,000 t) was estimated for the southern Bering Sea area. This value represented 23% of the entire 2004 BSAI survey biomass estimate. The 2006 survey indicates a downward trend which is consistent with the population age composition at the time. The 2010 survey biomass estimate indicated a large increase that was not predicted by the assessment model. The 2010 survey biomass estimate for the southern Bering Sea was also unusually high (103,500

t) and represented a 741% increase over the 2006 southern Bering Sea estimate. The 2012 survey biomass estimate is the lowest value and associated with the lowest variance in the time series, but is not fit by the model (Fig. 17.13). However, the declining trend in biomass indicated by the 2014 and 2016 surveys are consistent with the population age composition. Population biomass would be expected to decline as the most recent strong year class (2006 year class) is aging and past peak cohort biomass. We note that the model's predicted survey biomass trend is very conservative relative to the 2004, 2010, and 2014 observed bottom trawl survey biomass values, but fits the other survey years quite well (survey catchability is approximately equal to 1).

The fits to the survey and fishery age compositions for Model 16.0 are depicted in Figures 17.14 and 17.15, respectively. The model fits the fishery age composition data well particularly after 1997, and the survey age composition data less so. This reflects the fact that the sample sizes for age and length composition data are higher for the fishery in some years than the survey. It is interesting to note that the 2014 survey observed significantly fewer 3-year olds (2011 year class) than predicted, whereas the 2014 fishery catch was comprised of a larger proportion of 3-year olds than predicted. The 2015 fishery age composition did not reflect large numbers of 4-year olds of the 2011 year class. We also note an unusual pattern in the recent survey data (2010, 2012, and 2014) of relatively large numbers of Atka mackerel in the "plus group" (Fig. 17.14).

These figures also highlight the patterns in changing age compositions over time. Note that the older age groups in the fishery age data are largely absent until around 1985 when the 1977 year class appears. Fits to the recent fishery age composition data in Lowe *et al*. (2012) indicated a need for greater flexibility in selectivity. The 2013 assessment allowed for more flexibility to estimate time-varying fishery selectivity, which improved fits to the fishery age compositions.

The results discussed below are based on the recommended Model 16.0 with updated 2015 fishery catch- and weight-at-age values, and the 2016 survey biomass estimates.

Time series results

Selectivity

For Atka mackerel, the estimated selectivity patterns are particularly important in describing their dynamics. Previous assessments focused on the transitions between ages and time-varying selectivity (Lowe *et al.* 2002, 2008, 2013). The current assessment allows for flexibility over time (fishery only) and age (Figures 17.16, 17.17, and 17.18; also Table 17.11). The current assessment's terminal year fishery selectivity estimate (2015) and the average selectivity used for projections (2011-2015) differ from the terminal year and average selectivity for projections used in the 2015 assessment, showing lower selectivity for ages 3-6 (Fig. 17.17). Last year there was an unusually strong showing of 3-year olds of the 2011 year class in the 2014 fishery age data which was not evident in the 2015 fishery data. The 2015 fishery data showed large numbers of 8-year olds from the 2007 year class which is reflected in a sharp peak in selectivity at age 8 (Fig. 17.16)

The fishery catches essentially consist of fish 3-11 years old, although a 15-year-old fish were found in the 2013 and 2014 fishery catches. The fishery exhibits a dome-shaped selectivity pattern which is more pronounced prior to 1992 during the foreign and joint venture fisheries (1977-1983 and 1984-1991, respectively (Fig. 17.16). After 1991, fishery selectivity patterns are relatively consistent but do show differences at ages 3-7 and more notable differences at age 8 and older. Fish older than age 9 make up a very small percentage of the population each year, and the differences in the selectivity assumptions for the older ages are not likely to have a large impact. However, differences in selectivity for ages 3-8 can have a significant impact. The recent patterns since 2000 reflect the large numbers of fish from the 1999, 2000, 2001, 2006, 2007, and 2011 year classes (Table 17.4). The age at 50% selectivity is estimated at

about ages 3-4 in 2006-2013 as the large year classes moved through the population. A large shift occurred recently with the large number of 3-year olds dominating the 2014 fishery age composition. The age at 50% selectivity decreased to about 2.5 years. In the current assessment terminal year (2015), the age at 50% selectivity increased to about 5 years (Fig. 17.17). It is important to note the maturity-at-age vector relative to the current selectivity patterns (age at 50% maturity is 3.6 years). The age at 50% maturity is nearly equivalent to the age at 50% selectivity for the average selectivity used for projections (2011-2015, Fig. 17.17)

Survey catches are mostly comprised of fish 3-9 years old. However, the 2014 survey still shows significant numbers of 13 and 14 year olds of the 2000 and 2001 year classes. A 17-year old fish was found in the 2012 survey and 3, 16-year old fish were caught in the 2014 survey. The 2014 survey also caught large numbers of 3 year olds of the 2011 year class. The current model configuration estimates a moderately dome-shape selectivity pattern (Fig. 17.18). It is interesting to note that the survey tends to catch higher numbers of young fish (<3 years) and older fish (>10 years) relative to the fishery.

Abundance trend

The estimated time series of total numbers at age are given in Table 17.12. The estimated time series of total biomass (ages 1+) and female spawning biomass with approximate upper and lower 95% confidence limits are given in Table 17.13a. A comparison of the age 3+ biomass and spawning biomass trends from the current and previous assessments (Table 17.13b and Figure 17.19) indicates consistent trends throughout the time series, i.e., biomass increased during the early 80s and again in the late 80s to early 90s. After the estimated peak spawning biomass in 1992, spawning biomass declined for nearly 10 years until 2001 (Fig. 17.19). Thereafter, spawning biomass began a steep increase which continued to 2005. The abundance trend has been declining since the most recent peak in 2005 which represented a build-up of biomass from the exceptionally strong 1999-2001 year classes. Estimates from the current assessment are slightly lower after 1990 which is attributed to revised estimates of recruitment levels, particularly for strong year classes between 1988 and 2001 and the 2011 year class.

Recruitment trend

The estimated time series of age 1 recruits indicates the strong 1999 year class as the most notable in the current assessment, followed by the 1977, 1988 and 2001 year classes (Figures 17.20 and 17.21). The 1999, 2000, and 2001 year classes are estimated to be three of the five largest recent year classes in the time series (approximately 2.0, 1.3, and 1.5 billion recruits, respectively) due to the persistent observations of these year classes in the fishery and survey catches. The current assessment estimates above average (greater than 20% of the mean) recruitment from the 1977, 1988, 1992, 1995, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2006 year classes (Fig. 17.20). The 1996 and 2008 year classes are the lowest in the time series, estimated at about 2 million recruits.

The average estimated recruitment from the time series 1978-2015 is 638 million fish and the median is 486 million fish (Table 17.14). The entire time series of recruitments (1977-2016) includes the 1976-2015 year classes. The Alaska Fisheries Science Center has recognized that an environmental “regime shift” affecting the long-term productive capacity of the groundfish stocks in the BSAI occurred during the period 1976-1977, and the 2016 estimate is only based on one year of data. Thus, the average recruitment value presented in the assessment is based on year classes spawned after 1976 through 2015 (1977-2014 year classes). Projections of biomass are based on estimated recruitments from 1978-2015 using a stochastic projection model described below.

Trend in exploitation

The estimated time series of fishing mortalities on fully selected age groups and the catch-to-biomass (age 3+) ratios are given in Table 17.15 and shown in Figure 17.22.

Retrospective analysis

A retrospective analysis was conducted by regressively eliminating the most current year of information extending back to 2006. This allows judgment of the model performance as specified. Atka mackerel have a reasonable retrospective pattern for the last 10 years of predicting spawning biomass with periods that are lower and higher (Fig. 17.23). However, after data from 2012-2016 are dropped from the model, most subsequent retrospective runs resulted in biomass that was historically considerably higher.

On closer investigation, the reason for the odd pattern can be attributed to the survey age compositions. Given the assumed natural mortality as fixed (and constant over time), and the recent period of data with relatively large numbers of Atka mackerel in the "plus age group" (Fig. 17.14), the survey selectivity was fairly asymptotically shaped (Fig 17.18). However, for the retrospectives which ignore those recent years of data, the survey selectivity becomes much more dome-shaped, hence the early period biomass estimates were estimated to be considerably higher. In terms of impacts on ABC advice going forward, the fact that the present selectivity estimates suggest that the older ages are mostly observed in the survey, and recognizing the relatively broad confidence bounds for the current stock biomass estimates, further alternative model specifications to resolve this pattern may be unwarranted at this time. The revised Mohn's rho statistic was calculated to be 0.046.

Projections and harvest recommendations

Results and recommendations in this section pertain to the authors' recommended baseline model (Model 16.0).

Amendment 56 Reference Points

Amendment 56 to the BSAI Groundfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP) defines "overfishing level" (OFL), the fishing mortality rate used to set OFL (F_{OFL}), the maximum permissible ABC, and the fishing mortality rate used to set the maximum permissible ABC ($max\ F_{ABC}$). The fishing mortality rate used to set ABC (F_{ABC}) may be less than this maximum permissible level, but not greater. The overfishing and maximum allowable ABC fishing mortality rates are given in terms of percentages of unfished female spawning biomass ($F_{SPR\%}$), on fully selected age groups. The associated long-term average female spawning biomass that would be expected under average estimated recruitment from 1978-2015 (638 million age-1 recruits) and F equal to $F_{40\%}$ and $F_{35\%}$ are denoted $B_{40\%}$ and $B_{35\%}$, respectively. The Tiers require reference point estimates for biomass level determinations. We present the following reference points for BSAI Atka mackerel for Tier 3 of Amendment 56. For our analyses, we computed the following values from Model 16.0 results based on recruitment from post-1976 spawning events:

$B_{100\%}$ = 313,220 t female spawning biomass

$B_{40\%}$ = 125,288 t female spawning biomass

$B_{35\%}$ = 109,627 t female spawning biomass

Specification of OFL and Maximum Permissible ABC

In the current assessment, Model 16.0 is configured with time-varying selectivity. We compared a 5-year average selectivity (2011-2015) and a 10-year average selectivity (2006-2015) for projections. The selectivity vectors were nearly identical and a comparison of catch projections with the different selectivity assumptions showed little difference (Fig.17.24). We therefore utilize a 5-year average (2011-

2015) to reflect recent conditions for projections and computing ABC. The following rates are based on the average of the 2011-2015 selectivity estimates:

Full selection *F*s	2017
F_{2016}	0.32
$F_{40\%}$	0.34
$F_{35\%}$	0.40
$F_{2016}/F_{40\%}$	0.93

For specification purposes to project the 2017 ABC, we assumed a total 2016 year end catch of 55,000 t equal to the 2016 TAC, based on the amount of catch taken after Oct. 1 in recent years. For projecting to 2018, an expected catch in 2017 is required. Recognizing that the modified Steller sea lion RPAs implemented in 2015 require a TAC reduction in Area 543, we assume a stock-wide catch based on a reduced overall BSAI-wide Atka mackerel catch for 2017. Under the modified Steller sea lion RPAs, the Area 543 Atka mackerel TAC is set less than or equal to 65 percent of the Area 543 ABC. We estimated that about 62% of the BSAI-wide ABC is likely to be taken. This percentage was applied to the maximum permissible 2017 ABC and that amount was assumed to be caught in order to estimate the 2018 ABC and OFL values.

It is important to note that for BSAI Atka mackerel, projected female spawning biomass calculations depend on the harvest strategy because spawning biomass is estimated at peak spawning (August). Thus, projections incorporate 7 months of the specified fishing mortality rate. The projected 2017 female spawning biomass (SSB_{2017}) is estimated to be 145,300 t under an assumed 2016 catch of 55,000 t and reduced 2017 catch reflecting the RPA adjustment to the 2017 ABC.

The projected 2017 female spawning biomass estimate is above the $B_{40\%}$ value of 125,300 t, placing BSAI Atka mackerel in **Tier 3a**. The 2018 female spawning biomass estimate is also above $B_{40\%}$. The maximum permissible ABC and OFL values under **Tier 3a** are:

Year	Catch*	ABC	F_{ABC}	OFL	F_{OFL}	SSB	Tier
2017	55,000	87,200	0.34	102,700	0.40	145,300	3a
2018	53,000	85,000	0.34	99,900	0.40	138,800	3a

* Catches in 2017 and 2018 are less than the recommended ABC to reflect expected catch reductions under Steller sea lion RPAs.

Standard Harvest Scenarios and Projection Methodology

A standard set of projections is required for each stock managed under Tiers 1, 2, or 3, of Amendment 56. This set of projections encompasses seven harvest scenarios designed to satisfy the requirements of Amendment 56, the National Environmental Policy Act, and the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSFCMA).

For each scenario, the projections begin with the vector of 2016 numbers at age estimated in the assessment. This vector is then projected forward to the beginning of 2029 using a fixed value of natural mortality of 0.3, the recent schedule of selectivity estimated in the assessment (in this case the average 2011-2015 selectivity), and the best available estimate of total (year-end) catch for 2016 (in this case assumed to be 55,000 t equal to TAC). In addition, the 2017 and 2018 catches are reduced to accommodate Steller sea lion RPA TAC reductions for Scenarios 1 and 2. In each subsequent year, the fishing mortality rate is prescribed on the basis of the spawning biomass in that year and the respective harvest scenario. In each year, recruitment is drawn from an inverse Gaussian distribution whose parameters consist of maximum likelihood estimates determined from recruitments estimated in the assessment. Spawning biomass is computed in each year based on the time of peak spawning (August)

and the maturity and population weight schedules described in the assessment. Total catch is assumed to equal the catch associated with the respective harvest scenario in all years. This projection scheme is run 500 times to obtain distributions of possible future stock sizes, fishing mortality rates, and catches.

Five of the seven standard scenarios will be used in a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement prepared in conjunction with the final SAFE. These five scenarios, which are designed to provide a range of harvest alternatives that are likely to bracket the final TAC for 2017 and 2018, are as follows ("*max* F_{ABC}" refers to the maximum permissible value of F_{ABC} under Amendment 56):

Scenario 1: In all future years, F is set equal to *max* F_{ABC}. (Rationale: Historically, TAC has been constrained by ABC, so this scenario provides a likely upper limit on future TACs.).

Scenario 2: In all future years, F is set equal to a constant fraction of *max* F_{ABC}, where this fraction is equal to the ratio of the F_{ABC} value for 2017 recommended in the assessment to the *max* F_{ABC} for 2017. (Rationale: When F_{ABC} is set at a value below *max* F_{ABC}, it is often set at the value recommended in the stock assessment).

Scenario 3: In all future years, F is set equal to the 2011-2015 average F. (Rationale: For some stocks, TAC can be well below ABC, and recent average F may provide a better indicator of F_{TAC} than F_{ABC}.)

Scenario 4: In all future years, F is set equal to $F_{75\%}$. (Rationale: This scenario represents a very conservative harvest rate and was requested by the Alaska Regional Office based on public comment.)

Scenario 5: In all future years, F is set equal to zero. (Rationale: In extreme cases, TAC may be set at a level close to zero.)

Two other scenarios are needed to satisfy the MSFCMA's requirement to determine whether a stock is currently in an overfished condition or is approaching an overfished condition. These two scenarios are as follows (for Tier 3 stocks, the MSY level is defined as $B_{35\%}$):

Scenario 6: In all future years, F is set equal to F_{OFL}. (Rationale: This scenario determines whether a stock is overfished. If the stock is expected to be 1) above its MSY level in 2016 or 2) above ½ of its MSY level in 2016 and above its MSY level in 2026 under this scenario, then the stock is not overfished.)

Scenario 7: In 2017 and 2018, F is set equal to *max* F_{ABC}, and in all subsequent years, F is set equal to F_{OFL}. (Rationale: This scenario determines whether a stock is approaching an overfished condition. If the stock is expected to be above its MSY level in 2029 under this scenario, then the stock is not approaching an overfished condition.)

Status Determination

The projections of female spawning biomass, fishing mortality rate, and catch corresponding to the seven standard harvest scenarios are shown in Table 17.16. Harvest scenarios #6 and #7 are intended to permit determination of the status of a stock with respect to its minimum stock size threshold (MSST). Any stock that is below its MSST is defined to be *overfished*. Any stock that is expected to fall below its MSST in the next two years is defined to be *approaching* an overfished condition. Harvest scenarios #6 and #7 are used in these determinations as follows:

Is the stock overfished? This depends on the stock's estimated spawning biomass in 2016:

a) If spawning biomass for 2016 is estimated to be below ½ $B_{35\%}$, the stock is below its MSST.
b) If spawning biomass for 2016 is estimated to be above $B_{35\%}$, the stock is above its MSST.

c) If spawning biomass for 2016 is estimated to be above ½ $B_{35\%}$ but below $B_{35\%}$, the stock's status relative to MSST is determined by referring to harvest scenario #6 (Table 17.16). If the mean spawning biomass for 2026 is below $B_{35\%}$, the stock is below its MSST. Otherwise, the stock is above its MSST.

Is the stock approaching an overfished condition? This is determined by referring to harvest scenario #7

a) If the mean spawning biomass for 2019 is below ½ $B_{35\%}$, the stock is approaching an overfished condition.

b) If the mean spawning biomass for 2019 is above $B_{35\%}$, the stock is not approaching an overfished condition.

c) If the mean spawning biomass for 2019 is above ½ $B_{35\%}$ but below $B_{35\%}$, the determination depends on the mean spawning biomass for 2029. If the mean spawning biomass for 2029 is below $B_{35\%}$, the stock is approaching an overfished condition. Otherwise, the stock is not approaching an overfished condition.

Based on the above criteria and Table 17.16, the BSAI Atka mackerel stock is not overfished and is not approaching an overfished condition.

ABC Recommendation

Observations and characterizations of uncertainty in the Atka mackerel assessment are noted for ABC considerations.

1) Trawl survey estimates of Aleutian Islands biomass are highly variable. The 2012 survey decreased 70% relative to the 2010 survey, the 2014 survey increased 161% relative to the 2012 survey, and the most recent 2016 survey indicated a 38% decrease in BSAI Atka mackerel biomass relative to the 2014 survey. It is noted that all areas in the Aleutian Islands showed decreases in the 2016 survey.
2) Under an $F_{40\%}$ harvest strategy and assuming SSL RPA catch reductions in 2017 and 2018 female spawning biomass is projected to be above $B_{40\%}$ through 2029 (Fig. 17.25 and Table 17.16 Scenarios 1 and 2). If SSL RPA catch reductions are in place beyond 2018, expected female spawning biomass levels would be higher than projected after 2018.
3) The 2015 fishery data are dominated by the 2011-2012 year classes, and show significant numbers of 6 year olds of the 2009 year class (Table 17.4).
4) The 2014 survey age composition is dominated by 3 and 4-year olds of the 2011 and 2010 year classes, and 7 and 8-year olds of the 2007 and 2006 year olds. The bottom trawl surveys have been a consistently good indicator of incoming year class strengths.

We believe the recommended model configuration (Model 16.0) provides an appropriate and improved assessment of BSAI Atka mackerel. Given the current moderate stock size, an above average 2006 year class, and indications of average recruitment from the 2011 and 2012 year classes, the maximum permissible is acceptable for Atka mackerel. We note that the maximum permissible reference fishing mortality rate (F_{ABC}), which prior to 2015 been significantly higher than the natural mortality rate, is more in line with the natural mortality rate in the current and previous year's assessment. This is due to the fact that previously estimated fishery selectivity-at-age was significantly older than the maturity-at-age. The recent fisheries have targeted younger year classes, and the fishery selectivity-at-age is more in line with maturity-at-age. We note that actual fishing mortality rates have been below F_{ABC}. For perspective, a plot of relative harvest rate ($F_t/F_{35\%}$) versus relative female spawning biomass ($B_t/B_{35\%}$) is shown in Figure 17.26. For all of the time series (with the exception of the 1996 data point), the current assessment estimates that relative harvest rates have been below 1, and the relative spawning biomass rates have been greater than 1.0.

The 2017 yield associated with the Tier 3a maximum permissible F_{ABC} fishing mortality rate of 0.34 is 87,200 t, which is our 2017 ABC recommendation for BSAI Atka mackerel.

The 2018 yield associated with the Tier 3a maximum permissible F_{ABC} fishing mortality rate and assuming 2017 catch reductions, is 85,000 t, which is our 2018 ABC recommendation for BSAI Atka mackerel.

The 2017 ABC recommendation is 3% lower relative to the Council's 2016 ABC, but is 2% higher relative to the projections from last year's assessment for 2017.

Area Allocation of Harvests

Amendment 28 of the BSAI Fishery Management Plan divided the Aleutian subarea into 3 districts at 177° E and 177° W longitude, providing the mechanism to apportion the Aleutian Atka mackerel TACs. Previous to 2016, the Council used a 4-survey weighted average to apportion the BSAI Atka mackerel ABC. The rationale for the weighting scheme was described in Lowe *et al.* (2001). The SSC requested that the Atka mackerel assessment use the random effects model for setting subarea ABC allocations (Dec. 2015 SSC minutes). This method has been applied since the 2015 assessment. Based on applying this method to each area separately (Fig. 17.27), and then summing to get the overall BSAI biomass, the percentage apportionments for the Aleutian Islands subareas are shown below, and are similar to the 4-survey weighted average previously used to apportion ABC.

The method for computing apportionments by region for 2015 along with the recommended method using the random effects model are shown below:

	Survey Year				Wtd-4 Survey Average Apportionment	Random Effects Model
	2010	2012	2014	2016		
541[1]	51.16%	12.34%	41.97%	35.39%	34.90%	**40.01%**
542	21.38%	39.41%	28.30%	29.69%	30.08%	**34.78%**
543	27.46%	48.25%	29.73%	34.92%	35.03%	**25.20%**
Weights	8	12	18	27		

[1]Includes eastern Aleutian Islands and southern Bering Sea areas.

The apportionments of the 2017 and 2018 recommended ABCs based on the random effects model are:

	2017 (t)	2018 (t)
Eastern (541+S.BSea)	34,890	34,000
Central (542)	30,330	29,600
Western (543)	21,980	21,400
Total	87,200	85,000

Ecosystem Considerations

Steller sea lion food habits data (from analysis of scats) from the Aleutian Islands indicate that Atka mackerel is the most common prey item throughout the year (NMFS 1995, Sinclair and Zeppelin 2002, Sinclair *et al*. 2013). The prevalence of Atka mackerel and walleye pollock in sea lion scats reflected the distributions of each fish species in the Aleutian Islands region. The percentage occurrence of Atka mackerel was progressively greater in samples taken in the central and western Aleutian Islands, where most of the Atka mackerel biomass in the Aleutian Islands is located. Conversely, the percentage occurrence of pollock was greatest in the eastern Aleutian Islands.

Bottom contact fisheries could have direct negative impacts on Atka mackerel by destroying egg nests and/or removing the males that are guarding nests (Lauth *et al.* 2007b); however, this has not been examined quantitatively. Analyses of historic fishery CPUE revealed that the fishery may create temporary localized depletions of Atka mackerel, and historic fishery harvest rates in localized areas may have been high enough to affect prey availability of Steller sea lions (Section 12.2.2 of Lowe and Fritz 1997). The localized pattern of fishing for Atka mackerel could have created temporary reductions in the size and density of localized Atka mackerel populations which may have affected Steller sea lion foraging success during the time the fishery was operating and for a period of unknown duration after the fishery closed.

Ecosystem effects on BSAI Atka mackerel

Prey availability/abundance trends

Figure 17.28 shows the food web of the Aleutian Islands summer survey region, based on trawl survey and food habits data, with an emphasis on the predators and prey of Atka mackerel (see the current Ecosystem Assessment's ecosystem modeling results section for a description of the methodology for constructing the food web).

Adult Atka mackerel in the Aleutians consume a variety of prey, but are primarily zooplanktivors, consuming mainly euphausiids and calanoid copepods (Yang 1996, Yang 2003). Food habits data from 1990-1994 indicates that Atka mackerel feed on calanoid copepods (40%) and euphausiids (25%) followed by squids (10%), juvenile pollock (6%), and finally a range of zooplankton including fish larvae, benthic amphipods, and gelatinous filter feeders (Fig. 17.29a). While Figure 17.29a shows an aggregate diet for the Aleutians management regions, Atka mackerel diet data also show a longitudinal gradient, with euphausiids dominating diets in the east and copepods and other zooplankton dominating in the west. Greater piscivory, especially on myctophids, occurs in the island passes (Ortiz, 2007). Monitoring trends in Atka mackerel prey populations may, in the future, help elucidate Atka mackerel population trends. However, there is no long-term time series of zooplankton, squid, or small forage fish abundance information available.

Some preliminary results of sensitivity analysis suggest that Atka mackerel foraging in the Aleutian Islands may have a relatively strong competitive effect on walleye pollock distribution and abundance, as opposed to the Bering Sea where pollock may be more bottom-up (prey) controlled, or the GOA where pollock may be top-down (predator) controlled (Aydin *et al*. 2007). Since these sensitivity analyses treat the Aleutian Islands as a single "box model", it is possible that this is a mitigating or underlying factor for the geographical separation between Atka mackerel and pollock as a partitioning of foraging habitat.

Predator population trends

Atka mackerel are consumed by a variety of piscivores, including groundfish (e.g., Pacific cod, Pacific halibut, and arrowtooth flounder, Livingston *et al.* unpubl. manuscr.), marine mammals (e.g., northern fur seals and Steller sea lions, Kajimura 1984, NMFS 1995, Sinclair and Zeppelin 2002, Sinclair *et al*. 2013), skates, and seabirds (e.g., thick-billed murres, tufted puffins, and short-tailed shearwaters, Springer *et al.* 1999). Apportionment of Atka mackerel mortality between fishing, predation, and unexplained mortality, based on the consumption rates and food habits of predators averaged over 1990-1994 is shown in Figure 17.30. During these years, approximately 20% of the Atka mackerel exploitation rate (as calculated by stock assessment) was due to the fishery, 62% due to predation, and 18% "unexplained", where "unexplained" is the difference between the stock assessment total mortality and the sum of fisheries exploitation and quantified predation. This unexplained mortality may be due to data uncertainty, or Atka mackerel mortality due to disease, migration, senescence, etc.

Of the 62% of mortality due to predation, a little less than half (25% of total) is due to Pacific cod predation, and one quarter (15% of total) due to Steller sea lion predation, with the remainder spread across a range of predators (Fig. 17.29b), based on Steller sea lion diets published by Merrick *et al.* (1997) and summer fish food habits data from the REEM food habits database.

If converted to tonnages, this translates to 100,000-120,000 t/year of Atka mackerel consumed by predatory fish (of which approximately 60,000 t is consumed by Pacific cod), and 40,000-80,000 t/year consumed by Steller sea lions during the early 1990s. Estimating the consumption of Atka mackerel by birds is more difficult to quantify due to data limitations: based on colony counts and residency times, predation by birds, primarily kittiwakes, fulmars, and puffins, on all forage and rockfish combined in the Aleutian Islands is at most 70,000 t/year (Hunt *et al.* 2000). However, colony specific diet studies, for example for Buldir Island, indicate that the vast majority of prey found in these birds is sandlance, myctophids, and other smaller forage fish, with Atka mackerel never specifically identified as prey items, and "unidentified greenlings" occurring infrequently (Dragoo *et al.* 2001). The food web model's estimate, based on foraging overlap between species, estimates the total Atka mackerel consumption by birds to be less than 2,000 t/year. While this might be an underestimate, it should be noted that most predation would occur on juveniles (<1year old) which is not counted in the stock assessment's total exploitation rates.

The abundance trends of Aleutian Islands Pacific cod has been quite variable, alternating between increases and decreases in recent surveys, and Aleutian Islands arrowtooth flounder has been increasing. Northern fur seals are showing declines, and Steller sea lions have shown some slight increases except in the Western Aleutians. The population trends of seabirds are mixed, some increases, some decreases, and others stable. Seabird population trends could potentially affect juvenile Atka mackerel mortality. Declining trends in predator abundance could lead to possible decreases in Atka mackerel mortality, while increases in predator biomass could potentially increase the mortality.

During the 2012 NMFS Atka mackerel tag recovery survey, there was an opportunity to study the prey distribution of a Steller sea lion adult female that was tagged with a satellite-tracking tag in November 2011 by the AFSC National Marine Mammal Laboratory. A hydroacoustic transect was conducted, species composition data was collected from trawl hauls, and camera tows were conducted in the area where the sea lion was feeding (South Petrel Bank). This provided a unique opportunity to investigate possible prey species availability during the same time and in the same location where the tagged female sea lion was diving. The Steller sea lion appeared to be diving in an area with high prey diversity: 5 spatially close trawl hauls each a captured a different predominant prey species (including Pacific ocean perch, northern rockfish, walleye pollock, Pacific cod, and Atka mackerel (McDermott et al. 2014); http://www.afsc.noaa.gov/REFM/Stocks/fit/FITcruiserpts.htm).

Changes in habitat quality

Atka mackerel habitat associations

Another objective of the NMFS tagging studies (described in the Fishery section above), was to characterize Atka mackerel habitat by conducting underwater camera tows in each area where fish were recaptured. Underwater camera tows were used to explore habitat characteristics in areas of high Atka mackerel abundance. In camera tows from the Central and Eastern Aleutian Islands, Atka mackerel were associated almost exclusively with coarse-grained and rocky substrates. At Seguam and Petrel, greater than 60% of substrate identified during camera tows was rock (largely bedrock and boulders), while the remainder was largely gravel and cobble. At Tanaga, gravel and cobble composed 75% of all substrate. In all three study areas, fine-grained substrates (sand and mud) composed less than 1% of the substrate. At Seguam, nearly all substrate had between 26%-75% biocover (sponges and corals). Biocover at Tanaga and Petrel ranged from nearly bare to almost 100% (McDermott et al. 2014). Impacts to these habitats

could potentially affect Atka mackerel, but at this time only associations to these habitat types have been established.

Climate

Interestingly, strong year classes of AI Atka mackerel have occurred in years of hypothesized climate regime shifts 1977, 1988, and 1999, as indicated by indices such as the Pacific Decadal Oscillation (Francis and Hare 1994, Hare and Mantua 2000, Boldt 2005). Bailey *et al.* (1995) noted that some fish species show strong recruitment at the beginning of climate regime shifts and suggested that it was due to a disruption of the community structure providing a temporary release from predation and competition. It is unclear if this is the mechanism that influences Atka mackerel year class strength in the Aleutian Islands. El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO) events are another source of climate forcing that influences the North Pacific. Hollowed *et al.* (2001) found that gadids in the GOA have a higher proportion of strong year classes in ENSO years. There was, however, no relationship between strong year classes of AI Atka mackerel and ENSO events (Hollowed *et al.* 2001). Average eddy kinetic energy (EKE, cm^2 s^{-2}) from south of Amutka Pass in the Aleutian Islands was examined and found to be potentially informative (S. Lowe unpubl. data). Particularly strong eddies were observed in the fall of 1997/1998, 1999, 2004, and 2006/2007 suggesting increased volume, heat, salt, and nutrient fluxes. The 1999-2001 and the 2006 year classes were strong. The role of eddies may be the transport of larva which hatch in the fall, and or the increase in nutrients and favorable environment conditions. Further research is needed to determine the effects of climate on growth and year class strength, and the temporal and spatial scales over which these effects occur.

Bottom temperature

Atka mackerel demonstrate schooling behavior and prefer hard, rough and rocky bottom substrate. Eggs are deposited in nests on rocky substrates between 15 and 144 m depth (Lauth *et al.* 2007b). The spawning period in Alaska occurs in late July to October (McDermott and Lowe 1997, Lauth *et al.* 2007b). During the incubation period egg nests are guarded by males, who will be on the nests until mid-January, given that females have been observed to spawn as late as October and given the length of the egg incubation period (McDermott and Lowe 1997, Lauth *et al.* 2007b, Lauth *et al.* 2007a). The distribution of Atka mackerel spawning and nesting sites are thought to be limited by water temperature (Gorbunova 1962). Temperatures below 3 °C and above 15 °C are lethal to eggs or unfavorable for embryonic development depending on the exposure time (Gorbunova 1962). Temperatures recorded at Alaskan nesting sites, 3.9 - 10.7 ºC, do not appear to be limiting, as they were within this range (Lauth *et al.* 2007b).The 2000 and 2012 Aleutian Islands summer bottom temperatures indicated that 2000 and 2012 was the coldest years followed by summer bottom temperatures from the 2002 survey, which indicated the second coldest year (Fig. 17.5). The 2004 AI summer bottom temperatures indicated that 2004 was an average year, while the 2006 and 2010 bottom temperatures were slightly below average. The average bottom temperatures measured in the 2014 survey were the third highest of the Aleutian surveys, significantly higher than the 2000 and 2012 surveys and very similar to the 1991 and 1997 surveys. The 2016 survey bottom temperatures were the highest in the Aleutian survey time series. Bottom temperatures could possibly affect fish distribution, but there have been no directed studies, and there is no time series of data which demonstrates the effects on AI Atka mackerel.

Atka mackerel fishery effects on the ecosystem

Atka mackerel fishery contribution to bycatch

The levels of bycatch in the Atka mackerel fishery of prohibited species, forage fish, Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (HAPC) biota, marine mammals, birds, and other sensitive non-target species is relatively low except for the species which are noted in Table 17.17 and discussed below.

The Atka mackerel fishery has very low bycatch levels of some species of HAPC biota, e.g. seapens and whips. The bycatch of sponges and coral in the Atka mackerel fishery is highly variable. It is notable that in the last three years (2013-2015) the Atka mackerel fishery has taken on average about 15 and 17%, respectively of the total Aleutian Islands sponge and coral catches. It is unknown if the absolute levels of sponge and coral bycatch in the Atka mackerel fishery are of concern.

Fishing gear effects on spawning and nesting habitat

Bottom contact fisheries could have direct negative impacts on Atka mackerel by destroying egg nests and/or removing the males that are guarding nests (Lauth *et al.* 2007b); however, this has not been examined quantitatively. It was previously thought that all Atka mackerel migrated to shallow, nearshore areas for spawning and nesting sites. When nearshore bottom trawl exclusion zones near Steller sea lion rookeries were implemented this was hypothesized to eliminate much of the overlap between bottom trawl fisheries and Atka mackerel nesting areas (Fritz and Lowe 1998). Lauth *et al.* (2007b), however found that nesting sites in Alaska were "…widespread across the continental shelf and found over a much broader depth range…". The use of bottom contact fishing gear, such as bottom trawls, pot gear, and longline gear, utilized in July to January could, therefore, still potentially affect Atka mackerel nesting areas, despite trawl closures in nearshore areas around Steller sea lion rookeries.

Indirect effects of bottom contact fishing gear, such as effects on fish habitat, may also have implications for Atka mackerel. Living substrate that is susceptible to fishing gear includes sponges, seapens, sea anemones, ascidians, and bryozoans (Malecha *et al.* 2005). Of these, Atka mackerel sampled in the NMFS bottom trawl survey are primarily associated with emergent epifauna such as sponges and corals (Malecha *et al.* 2005, Stone 2006). Effects of fishing gear on these living substrates could, in turn, affect fish species that are associated with them.

Concentration of Atka mackerel catches in time and space

Steller sea lion protection measures have spread out Atka mackerel harvests in time and space through the implementation of seasonal and area-specific TACs and harvest limits within sea lion critical habitat. Most recently, RPAs from the 2010 BiOp closed the entire Western Aleutians (Area 543) to directed fishing for Atka mackerel, and several closures were implemented in critical habitat in the Central Aleutians (Area 542) and the TAC for Area 542 was reduced to no more than 47 percent of the Area 543 ABC. These measures were in place from 2011 to 2014. Revised RPAs were implemented in 2015. For the 2015 fishery, the Area 543 Atka mackerel TAC was set to less than or equal to 65 percent of the Area 543 ABC. In Area 542, there are expanded area closures and no requirement for a TAC reduction. Concentration of catches in time and space is still an issue of possible concern and research efforts continue to monitor and assess the availability of Atka mackerel biomass in areas of concern. Also, in some cases the sea lion protection measures have forced the fishery to concentrate in areas outside of critical habitat that had previously experienced lower levels of exploitation. The impact of the fishery in these areas outside of critical habitat is unknown.

Atka mackerel fishery effects on amount of large size Atka mackerel

The numbers of large size Atka mackerel are largely impacted by highly variable year class strength rather than by the directed fishery. Year to year differences are attributed to natural fluctuations.

Atka mackerel fishery effects on Atka mackerel age-at-maturity and fecundity

The effects of the fishery on the age-at-maturity and fecundity of Atka mackerel are unknown. Studies were conducted to determine age-at-maturity (McDermott and Lowe 1997, Cooper *et al*. 2010) and fecundity (McDermott 2003, McDermott *et al*. 2007) of Atka mackerel. These are recent studies and there are no earlier studies for comparison on fish from an unexploited population. Further studies would be

needed to determine if there have been changes over time and whether changes could be attributed to the fishery.

Atka mackerel fishery contribution to discards and offal production

There is no time series of the offal production from the Atka mackerel fishery. The Atka mackerel fishery has contributed on average about 511 t of non-target discards in the Aleutian Islands from 2013 to 2015. Most of the Atka mackerel fishery discards of target species are comprised of small Atka mackerel. The average discards of Atka mackerel in the Atka mackerel fishery have been about 372 t over 2013-2015.

Data Gaps and Research Priorities

More information on Atka mackerel habitat preferences would be useful to improve our understanding of Essential Fish Habitat (EFH), and improve our assessment of the impacts to habitat due to fishing. Better habitat mapping of the Aleutian Islands would provide information for survey stratification and the extent of trawlable and untrawlable habitat.

The high variability in survey abundance and trend estimates is a major source of uncertainty in the assessment. Other approaches for analyzing the survey data such as spatial models, incorporating spatial covariates, especially those that are habitat related, into predictive estimates are research priorities. Changes in survey tow duration starting in 2002 may have resulted in a higher encounter rate for this species and may have resulted in an inconsistency in estimating the biomass over the complete time series. An evaluation of the survey data in terms of tow duration changes, survey design and the development of alternate estimation approaches possibly incorporating habitat information are research priorities.

Regional and seasonal food habits data for Aleutian Islands is very limited. No time series of information is available on copepod and euphausiid abundance in the Aleutian Islands which would provide information on prey availability and abundance trends. Studies to determine the impacts of environmental indicators such as temperature regime on Atka mackerel are needed. Further studies to determine whether there have been any changes in life history parameters over time (e.g. fecundity, and weight- and length-at-age) would be informative.

Acknowledgements

We thank the AFSC survey personnel for the collection of data and providing the biomass estimates. We are especially grateful to all the fishery observers working with the Fishery Monitoring and Analysis (FMA) Division who collect vital data for the stock assessments. We also thank the staff of the AFSC Age and Growth Unit for the ageing of otoliths used to determine the age compositions in the assessment.

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Tables

Table 17.1. Time series of Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands Atka mackerel catches (including discards and CDQ catches), corresponding Acceptable Biological Catches (ABC), Total Allowable Catches (TAC), and Overfishing Levels (OFL) set by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council from 1978 to the present. Catches, ABCs, TACs, and OFLs are in metric tons.

Year	Catch	ABC	TAC	OFL
1977	21,763	a	a	
1978	24,249	24,800	24,800	
1979	23,264	24,800	24,800	
1980	20,488	24,800	24,800	
1981	19,688	24,800	24,800	
1982	19,874	24,800	24,800	
1983	11,726	25,500	24,800	
1984	36,055	25,500	35,000	
1985	37,860	37,700	37,700	
1986	31,990	30,800	30,800	
1987	30,061	30,800	30,800	
1988	22,084	21,000	21,000	
1989	17,994	24,000	20,285	
1990	22,206	24,000	21,000	
1991	26,626	24,000	24,000	
1992	48,532	43,000	43,000	435,000
1993	66,006	117,100	32,000	771,100
1994	65,360	122,500	68,000	484,000
1995	81,554	125,000	80,000	335,000
1996	103,942	116,000	106,157	164,000
1997	65,842	66,700	66,700	81,600
1998	57,097	64,300	64,300	134,000
1999	56,237	73,300	66,400	148,000
2000	47,230	70,800	70,800	119,000
2001	61,563	69,300	69,300	138,000
2002	45,288	49,000	49,000	82,300
2003	54,045	63,000	60,000	99,700
2004	60,562	66,700	63,000	78,500
2005	62,012	124,000	63,000	147,000
2006	61,894	110,000	63,000	130,000
2007	58,763	74,000	63,000	86,900
2008	58,090	60,700	60,700	71,400
2009	72,806	83,800	76,400	99,400
2010	68,619	74,000	74,000	88,200
2011	51,818	85,300	53,080	101,000
2012	47,826	81,400	50,763	96,500
2013	23,180	50,000	25,920	57,700
2014	30,951	64,131	32,322	74,492
2015	53,268	106,000	54,500	125,297
2016	55,000[b]	90,340	55,000	104,749

a) Atka mackerel was not a reported species group until 1978.
b) 2016 projected total year catch (the 2016 catch is assumed equal to the 2016 TAC of 55,000 t, based on recent post Oct. 1 catches)

Sources: compiled from NMFS Regional Office web site and various NPFMC reports.

Table 17.2. Time series of Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands Atka mackerel catches (including discards and CDQ catches) by region, corresponding Acceptable Biological Catches (ABC), and Total Allowable Catches (TAC) set by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council from 1995 to the present. Apportioned catches prior to 1995 are available in Lowe *et al*. (2013). Catches, ABCs, and TACs are in metric tons.

Year		Eastern (541)	Central (542)	Western (543)	Total	Year		Eastern (541)	Central (542)	Western (543)	Total
1995	Catch	14,199	50,387	16,966	81,552	2006	Catch	7,422	39,836	14,638	61,896
	ABC	13,500	55,900	55,600	125,000		ABC	21,780	46,860	41,360	110,200
	TAC	13,500	50,000	16,500	80,000		TAC	7,500	40,000	15,500	63,000
1996	Catch	28,173	33,524	42,246	103,943	2007	Catch	22,943	26,723	9,097	58,763
	ABC	26,700	33,600	55,700	116,000		ABC	23,800	29,600	20,600	74,000
	TAC	26,700	33,600	45,857	10,657		TAC	23,800	29,600	9,600	63,000
1997	Catch	16,318	19,990	29,537	65,845	2008	Catch	19,112	22,926	16,045	58,083
	ABC	15,000	19,500	32,200	66,700		ABC	19,500	24,300	16,900	60,700
	TAC	15,000	19,500	32,200	66,700		TAC	19,500	24,300	16,900	60,700
1998	Catch	11,597	20,029	24,248	55,874	2009	Catch	26,417	30,137	16,253	72,807
	ABC	14,900	22,400	27,000	64,300		ABC	27,000	33,500	23,300	83,800
	TAC	14,900	22,400	27,000	64,300		TAC	27,000	32,500	16,900	76,400
1999	Catch	16,245	21,596	15,082	52,923	2010	Catch	23,608	26,388	18,650	68,646
	ABC	17,000	25,600	30,700	73,300		ABC	23,800	29,600	20,600	74,000
	TAC	17,000	22,400	27,000	66,400		TAC	23,800	29,600	20,600	74,000
2000	Catch	13,152	20,575	8,713	42,440	2011	Catch	40,891	10,713	205	51,809
	ABC	16,400	24,700	29,700	70,800		ABC	40,300	24,000	21,000	85,300
	TAC	16,400	24,700	29,700	70,800		TAC	40,300	11,280	1,500	53,080
2001	Catch	7,905	30,365	18,264	56,534	2012	Catch	37,308	10,323	195	47,826
	ABC	7,800	33,600	27,900	69,300		ABC	38,500	22,900	20,000	81,400
	TAC	7,800	33,600	27,900	69,300		TAC	38,500	10,763	1,500	50,763
2002	Catch	4,606	20,699	16,737	42,042	2013	Catch	15,777	7,284	120	23,181
	ABC	5,500	23,800	19,700	49,000		ABC	16,900	16,000	17,100	50,000
	TAC	5,500	23,800	19,700	49,000		TAC	16,900	7,520	1,500	25,920
2003	Catch	10,725	25,435	17,885	54,045	2014	Catch	21,185	9,520	242	30,947
	ABC	10,650	29,360	22,990	63,000		ABC	21,652	20,574	21,905	64,131
	TAC	10,650	29,360	19,990	60,000		TAC	21,652	9,670	1,000	32,322
2004	Catch	10,840	30,169	19,555	60,564	2015	Catch	26,343	16,672	10,253	53,268
	ABC	11,240	31,100	24,360	66,700		ABC	38,492	33,108	34,400	106,000
	TAC	11,240	31,100	20,660	63,000		TAC	27,000	17,000	10,500	54,500
2005	Catch	7,201	35,069	19,744	62,014	2016*	Catch	28,500	16,000	10,500	55,000
	ABC	24,550	52,830	46,620	124,000		ABC	30,832	27,216	32,292	90,340
	TAC	7,500	35,500	20,000	63,000		TAC	28,500	16,000	10,500	55,500

*2016 projected total year catches by region assumed equal to the 2016 TACs, based on recent post Oct. 1 catches

Table 17.3. Numbers of Atka mackerel length-weight data, length frequency, and aged samples based on NMFS observer data 1990-2014.

Year	Number of length-weight samples	Length frequency records	Number of aged samples
1990	731	8,618	718
1991	356	7,423	349
1992	90	13,532	86
1993	58	12,476	58
1994	913	13,384	837
1995	1,054	19,653	972
1996	1,039	24,758	680
1997	126	13,412	123
1998	733	15,060	705
1999	1,633	12,349	1,444
2000	2,697	9,207	1,659
2001	3,332	11,600	935
2002	3,135	12,418	820
2003	4,083	13,740	1,008
2004	4,205	14,239	870
2005	4,494	13,142	1,024
2006	4,194	13,598	980
2007	2,100	11,841	884
2008	1,882	19,831	922
2009	2,374	15,207	971
2010	2,462	16,347	879
2011	1,976	11,814	720
2012	1,495	13,794	1,012
2013	1,178	13,327	642
2014	1,301	14,210	1,061
2015	2,493	15,959	1,687

Table 17.4. Estimated catch-in-numbers at age (in millions) of Atka mackerel from the BSAI region, 1977-2015. These data were used in fitting the age-structured model.

Age	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11+
1977	6.83	31.52	20.06	15.11	1.22	0.39	0.20	---	---	---
1978	2.70	60.16	15.57	9.22	3.75	0.59	0.34	0.11	---	---
1979	0.01	4.48	26.78	13.00	2.20	1.11	---	---	---	---
1980	---	12.68	5.92	7.22	1.67	0.59	0.24	0.13	---	---
1981	---	5.39	17.11	0.00	1.61	8.10	---	---	---	---
1982	---	0.19	2.63	25.83	3.86	0.68	---	---	---	---
1983	---	1.90	1.43	2.54	10.60	1.59	---	---	---	---
1984	0.09	0.98	7.30	7.07	10.79	21.78	2.21	0.96	---	---
1985	0.63	15.97	8.79	9.43	6.01	5.45	11.69	1.26	0.27	---
1986	0.37	11.45	6.46	4.42	5.34	4.53	5.84	9.91	1.04	0.85
1987	0.56	10.44	7.60	4.58	1.89	2.37	2.19	1.71	6.78	0.75
1988	0.40	9.97	22.49	6.15	1.80	1.54	0.63	0.96	0.20	0.48
1989[a]										
1990	1.74	7.62	13.15	4.78	1.77	0.81	0.11	0.09	0.03	0.17
1991	0.00	4.15	6.49	7.78	5.71	3.94	1.04	0.18	0.35	0.22
1992	0.00	0.93	20.82	2.97	1.40	0.62	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
1993	0.00	13.55	18.33	38.88	12.16	6.76	4.17	0.61	0.59	0.00
1994	0.05	9.16	6.83	23.13	36.00	4.64	8.21	5.27	3.04	0.61
1995	0.13	20.65	33.67	9.81	18.78	33.09	4.01	5.84	7.90	2.98
1996	0.02	3.65	63.55	21.94	14.14	19.44	31.59	2.85	3.37	2.53
1997	0.00	17.11	4.66	66.28	3.72	1.56	0.67	3.56	0.36	0.00
1998	0.00	11.15	15.73	15.24	25.07	11.21	4.02	3.55	5.28	1.85
1999	1.17	1.08	38.31	8.85	7.09	9.93	5.24	1.80	1.49	1.79
2000	0.54	8.91	6.40	26.59	7.53	4.33	8.33	1.93	0.78	1.01
2001	1.87	20.59	13.57	8.68	27.20	8.16	4.60	3.86	0.78	0.50
2002	1.94	22.68	25.37	7.88	3.89	16.20	3.23	1.56	1.67	0.53
2003	0.78	19.96	49.54	20.63	5.95	3.27	7.02	0.78	0.49	0.85
2004	0.09	20.44	31.49	44.20	12.32	2.40	1.56	2.21	0.00	0.39
2005	1.43	3.96	35.31	27.23	28.97	9.68	1.54	0.25	0.85	0.00
2006	3.56	16.74	5.66	33.56	20.27	22.62	4.12	0.56	0.36	0.26
2007	2.25	19.63	11.63	5.39	19.94	15.90	12.46	2.69	0.77	0.08
2008	5.49	13.29	16.90	7.61	6.29	20.04	10.53	11.63	1.64	0.54
2009	4.69	31.92	15.73	20.00	8.81	8.56	16.59	8.24	8.71	1.79
2010	1.67	19.00	47.22	13.06	13.59	6.46	3.82	7.90	4.66	1.75
2011	1.05	3.02	17.61	22.41	6.68	4.89	1.16	2.73	4.44	4.82
2012	0.18	7.41	3.54	21.16	20.78	5.69	3.21	2.69	2.36	9.96
2013	1.56	7.42	19.99	4.59	14.75	11.71	2.52	1.32	0.85	3.44
2014	0.48	23.50	2.71	8.10	2.87	4.02	2.86	0.44	0.59	1.27
2015	0.58	16.21	13.06	10.55	13.24	6.86	14.11	7.73	1.98	1.42

[a] Too few fish were sampled for age structures in 1989 to construct an age-length key.

Table 17.5. Atka mackerel estimated biomass in metric tons from the U.S.-Japan cooperative bottom trawl surveys, by subregion, depth interval, and survey year, with the corresponding Aleutian-wide coefficients of variation (*CV*). These historical data are presented, but are not used in the assessment model.

			Biomass	
Area	Depth (m)	1980	1983	1986
Aleutian	1-100	193	239,502	1,013,678
	101-200	62,376	247,256	107,092
	201-300	646	2,565	368
	301-500	0	164	10
	Total	63,215	489,487	1,121,148
	CV	0.80	0.24	0.80
Western	1-100	193	49,115	1,675
543	101-200	692	124,806	40,675
	201-300		1,559	111
	301-500	0	164	0
	Total	885	175,644	42,461
Central	1-100	0	103,588	1,011,991
542	101-200	58,666	1,488	20,582
	201-300	504	303	36
	301-500	0	0	10
	Total	59,170	105,379	1,032,619
Eastern	1-100		86,800	11
541	101-200	3,018	120,962	45,835
	201-300	143	703	222
	301-500	0	0	0
	Total	3,161	208,465	46,068
Southern	1-100	6	0	429
Bering Sea	101-200	20,239	9	5
	201-300	2	0	1
	301-500		0	0
	Total	20,247	9	435

Table 17.6a. Aleutian Islands Atka mackerel survey biomass by bottom-depth category by region and subareas including area percentages of total (for each year) and coefficients of variation (*CV*) for 1991, 1994, and 1997.

		Biomass		
Area	**Depth (m)**	**1991**	**1994**	**1997**
Aleutian Islands + S. BS	1-100	429,873	211,562	284,176
	101-200	277,907	472,725	177,672
	201-300	520	1,691	130
	301-500	0	30	20
	Total	708,299	686,007	461,997
Regional area % of Total		100%	100%	100%
	CV	*14%*	*32%*	*31%*
Western 543	1-100	168,968	93,847	90,824
	101-200	174,182	231,733	43,478
	201-300	276	1,656	66
	301-500	-	6	-
	Total	343,426	327,242	134,367
Regional area % of Total		48%	48%	29%
	CV	*18%*	*57%*	*56%*
Central 542	1-100	187,194	50,513	70,458
	101-200	100,329	33,255	116,295
	201-300	70.4	13	53.4
	301-500	0	2.9	5.7
	Total	287,594	83,784	186,813
Regional area % of Total		41%	12%	40%
	CV	*17%*	*48%*	*36%*
Eastern 541	1-100	73,663	641	27,222
	101-200	3,392	207,707	17,890
	201-300	162.8	18.6	10.6
	301-500	0	12.3	14
	Total	77,218	208,379	45,137
Regional area % of Total		11%	30%	10%
	CV	*83%*	*44%*	*68%*
Bering Sea	1-100	47	66,562	95,672
	101-200	3	30	9
	201-300	11.4	3.1	0
	301-500	0	8	0
	Total	61	66,603	95,680
Regional area % of Total		0%	10%	21%
	CV	*37%*	*99%*	*99%*

Table 17.6b. Aleutian Islands Atka mackerel survey biomass by bottom-depth category by region and subareas including area percentages of total (for each year) and coefficients of variation (*CV*) for 2000, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2010, 2012, 2014, and 2016.

		Biomass (t)							
Area	**Depth (m)**	**2000**	**2002**	**2004**	**2006**	**2010**	**2012**	**2014**	**2016**
Aleutian Islands + S. BS	1-100	160,940	394,092	518,232	374,774	304,909	130,616	286,064	143,338
	101-200	344,674	393,159	631,150	326,426	624,294	145,351	436,506	302,604
	201-300	8,636	48,723	7,410	40,091	1,008	886	716	2,093
	301-500	82	221	292	67	41	23	642	130
	Total	514,332	836,195	1,157,084	741,358	930,252	276,877	723,928	448,166
Regional area % of Total		100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
	CV	*29%*	*20%*	*17%*	*28%*	*35%*	*18%*	*24%*	*31%*
Western 543	1-100	120,257	50,481	140,669	64,429	59,449	62,247	115,359	16,808
	101-200	52,948	154,820	229,675	35,926	195,819	70,983	99,102	139,608
	201-300	7,910	48,362	6,033	318	134	350	172	17
	301-500	-	8	36	21	17	8	602	0
	Total	181,115	253,671	376,414	100,693	255,419	133,588	215,235	156,433
Regional area % of Total		35%	30%	33%	14%	27%	48%	30%	35%
	CV	*56%*	*32%*	*24%*	*35%*	*58%*	*28%*	*29%*	*56%*
Central 542	1-100	38,805	131,770	198,243	192,832	102,211	62,238	86,097	122,628
	101-200	290,766	199,743	70,267	85,215	96,457	46,861	118,612	10,338
	201-300	674.2	168.9	367.1	102.6	207	16.2	119.7	37
	301-500	9.3	142.5	194.1	0	0	15.1	39.8	18
	Total	330,255	331,824	269,071	278,150	198,874	109,130	204,868	133,022
Regional area % of Total		64%	40%	23%	38%	21%	39%	28%	30%
	CV	*34%*	*24%*	*35%*	*24%*	*28%*	*27%*	*50%*	*54%*
Eastern 541	1-100	25	152,159	54,424	107,230	44,981	6,029	84,252	3,802
	101-200	772	38,492	188,592	205,108	327,105	26,685	217,748	152,623
	201-300	48.4	94.2	970.5	37828.9	338.7	435.2	381.8	1,989
	301-500	73.1	71.3	57.2	40.1	4.9	0	0	112
	Total	919	190,817	244,043	350,206	372,429	33,149	302,383	158,525
Regional area % of Total		0%	23%	21%	47%	40%	12%	42%	35%
	CV	*74%*	*58%*	*33%*	*55%*	*74%*	*46%*	*43%*	*50%*
Bering Sea	1-100	1,853	59,682	124,896	10,284	98,268	103	356	100
	101-200	187	103	142,616	176	4,914	822	1,044	35
	201-300	3.5	97.7	39.3	1841.8	327.4	84.7	42.2	50
	301-500	0	0	3.8	6	18.7	0	0	0
	Total	2,044	59,883	267,556	12,308	103,529	1,010	1,443	186
Regional area % of Total		0%	7%	23%	2%	11%	0%	0%	0%
	CV	*88%*	*99%*	*43%*	*44%*	*86%*	*77%*	*73%*	*39%*

Table 17.7. Estimated survey numbers at age (in millions) of Atka mackerel from the Aleutian Islands trawl surveys and numbers of Atka mackerel otoliths aged (*n*).

Age	*n*	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11+
1986	712	157.53	985.94	532.35	344.94	274.32	230.87	135.80	40.74	10.86	2.72
1991	478	72.44	846.64	137.33	261.09	81.49	87.53	15.09	6.04	0.00	0.00
1994	745	12.37	166.06	114.83	185.49	217.29	51.23	68.01	22.08	37.98	6.18
1997	433	65.67	142.93	115.25	148.73	45.71	23.18	31.55	43.14	6.44	13.52
2000	831	269.32	76.68	25.25	226.30	68.26	71.07	118.76	37.41	18.70	23.38
2002	789	77.33	933.52	531.22	95.13	32.08	78.05	35.78	14.47	12.71	1.53
2004	598	66.94	726.25	584.22	560.93	120.42	29.00	16.47	19.23	10.67	15.32
2006	525	166.24	159.26	63.30	192.03	200.48	290.68	93.74	11.92	0.27	19.16
2010	560	45.18	386.11	400.88	82.19	86.99	39.26	50.56	98.85	67.84	112.04
2012	417	63.17	100.11	40.52	97.73	66.74	20.26	20.26	17.88	8.34	61.98
2014	478	109.92	155.54	150.30	130.30	87.45	172.27	149.99	44.11	22.87	63.07

Table 17.8. Year-specific fishery and survey and the population weight-at-age (kg) values used to obtain expected survey and fishery catch biomass and population biomass. The population weight-at-age values are derived from the Aleutian trawl survey from the average of years 2006, 2010, and 2012. The 2016 fishery weight-at-age values are the average of the last three years (2013-2015).

		Age										
	Year	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11+
Survey	1991	0.045	0.185	0.449	0.637	0.652	0.751	0.811	0.693	1.053	1.764	0.878
	1994	0.045	0.177	0.450	0.653	0.738	0.846	0.941	0.988	0.906	0.907	0.516
	1997	0.045	0.191	0.486	0.686	0.753	0.805	0.887	0.970	0.919	1.375	0.935
	2000	0.045	0.130	0.387	0.623	0.699	0.730	0.789	0.810	0.792	0.864	0.871
	2002	0.045	0.139	0.342	0.615	0.720	0.837	0.877	0.773	0.897	0.955	1.084
	2004	0.045	0.138	0.333	0.497	0.609	0.739	0.816	0.956	0.928	0.745	0.824
	2006	0.045	0.158	0.332	0.523	0.516	0.675	0.764	0.719	0.855	1.653	0.991
	2010	0.045	0.161	0.369	0.633	0.667	0.744	0.974	1.075	0.981	1.041	1.244
	2012	0.045	0.161	0.360	0.517	0.627	0.705	0.762	0.820	0.863	0.809	0.949
	2014	0.045	0.162	0.465	0.524	0.662	0.709	0.856	0.951	0.920	0.808	1.017
Avg 2010,2012, 2014		0.045	0.161	0.398	0.558	0.652	0.720	0.864	0.949	0.921	0.886	1.070
Fishery	1977	0.069	0.132	0.225	0.306	0.400	0.470	0.507	0.379	0.780	0.976	1.072
Foreign	1978	0.069	0.072	0.225	0.300	0.348	0.388	0.397	0.371	0.423	0.976	1.072
	1979	0.069	0.496	0.319	0.457	0.476	0.475	0.468	0.546	0.780	0.976	1.072
	1980	0.069	0.365	0.317	0.450	0.520	0.585	0.630	0.546	0.780	0.976	1.072
	1981	0.069	0.365	0.317	0.450	0.520	0.585	0.630	0.546	0.780	0.976	1.072
	1982	0.069	0.365	0.273	0.443	0.564	0.695	0.795	0.546	0.780	0.976	1.072
	1983	0.069	0.365	0.359	0.499	0.601	0.686	0.810	0.546	0.780	0.976	1.072
	1984	0.069	0.297	0.410	0.617	0.707	0.777	0.802	0.890	0.910	0.976	1.072
	1985	0.069	0.302	0.452	0.552	0.682	0.737	0.775	0.807	1.007	1.011	1.072
	1986	0.069	0.146	0.334	0.528	0.546	0.786	0.753	0.829	0.858	0.954	1.052
	1987	0.069	0.265	0.435	0.729	0.908	0.859	0.964	1.023	1.054	1.088	1.098
	1988	0.069	0.196	0.351	0.470	0.564	0.624	0.694	0.783	0.818	0.850	1.064
Domestic	1989	0.069	0.295	0.440	0.577	0.739	0.838	0.664	0.817	0.906	1.010	1.065
	1990	0.069	0.362	0.511	0.728	0.877	0.885	0.985	1.386	1.039	1.445	1.442
	1991	0.069	0.230	0.207	0.540	0.729	0.685	0.655	0.755	1.014	0.743	1.021
	1992	0.069	0.230	0.390	0.607	0.715	0.895	0.973	0.839	0.865	0.916	1.010
	1993	0.069	0.230	0.572	0.626	0.682	0.773	0.826	0.782	1.041	0.812	1.010
	1994	0.069	0.150	0.363	0.568	0.649	0.697	0.777	0.749	0.744	0.736	0.922
	1995	0.069	0.092	0.228	0.520	0.667	0.687	0.691	0.707	0.721	0.641	0.909
	1996	0.069	0.188	0.294	0.474	0.633	0.728	0.743	0.770	0.799	0.846	0.973
	1997	0.069	0.230	0.397	0.664	0.686	0.862	0.904	0.971	0.884	0.951	1.108
	1998	0.069	0.230	0.296	0.494	0.580	0.644	0.682	0.775	0.707	0.798	0.858
	1999	0.069	0.240	0.406	0.568	0.707	0.755	0.839	0.979	1.170	1.141	0.961
	2000	0.069	0.215	0.497	0.594	0.689	0.734	0.778	0.854	0.813	0.904	0.988
	2001	0.069	0.224	0.418	0.563	0.719	0.765	0.841	0.826	0.946	0.912	1.109
	2002	0.069	0.253	0.293	0.459	0.600	0.601	0.723	0.722	0.791	0.851	0.940
	2003	0.069	0.208	0.304	0.420	0.539	0.667	0.747	0.731	0.669	0.824	0.996
	2004	0.069	0.176	0.316	0.444	0.567	0.624	0.679	0.810	0.728	0.916	1.015
	2005	0.069	0.247	0.406	0.480	0.536	0.558	0.657	0.966	1.184	0.942	1.010
	2006	0.069	0.265	0.393	0.503	0.551	0.613	0.647	0.714	0.848	0.856	0.984
	2007	0.069	0.247	0.437	0.547	0.715	0.697	0.768	0.778	0.776	1.272	1.033
	2008	0.069	0.265	0.388	0.540	0.615	0.727	0.719	0.700	0.798	0.786	0.998
	2009	0.069	0.215	0.395	0.494	0.605	0.667	0.734	0.745	0.770	0.816	0.813
	2010	0.069	0.204	0.362	0.565	0.583	0.673	0.684	0.758	0.723	0.762	0.803
	2011	0.069	0.220	0.445	0.640	0.807	0.753	0.770	0.798	0.931	0.913	0.899
	2012	0.069	0.230	0.374	0.509	0.612	0.658	0.713	0.772	0.822	0.894	0.949
	2013	0.069	0.266	0.280	0.606	0.677	0.740	0.867	0.822	0.803	0.822	1.093
	2014	0.069	0.316	0.569	0.634	0.709	0.735	0.840	0.838	0.791	0.942	0.923
	2015	0.069	0.178	0.375	0.604	0.620	0.679	0.702	0.736	0.770	0.763	0.864
Ave. 2013-15	2016	0.069	0.253	0.408	0.615	0.669	0.718	0.803	0.799	0.788	0.842	0.960

Table 17.9. Schedules of age and length specific maturity of Atka mackerel from McDermott and Lowe (1997) by Aleutian Islands subareas. Eastern - 541, Central - 542, and Western - 543.

	INPFC Area				
Length (cm)	541	542	543	Age	Proportion mature
25	0	0	0	1	0
26	0	0	0	2	0.04
27	0	0.01	0.01	3	0.22
28	0	0.02	0.02	4	0.69
29	0.01	0.04	0.04	5	0.94
30	0.01	0.07	0.07	6	0.99
31	0.03	0.14	0.13	7	1
32	0.06	0.25	0.24	8	1
33	0.11	0.4	0.39	9	1
34	0.2	0.58	0.56	10	1
35	0.34	0.73	0.72		
36	0.51	0.85	0.84		
37	0.68	0.92	0.92		
38	0.81	0.96	0.96		
39	0.9	0.98	0.98		
40	0.95	0.99	0.99		
41	0.97	0.99	0.99		
42	0.99	1	1		
43	0.99	1	1		
44	1	1	1		
45	1	1	1		
46	1	1	1		
47	1	1	1		
48	1	1	1		
49	1	1	1		
50	1	1	1		

Table 17.10. Estimates of key results from AMAK for Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands Atka mackerel from Model 16.0 and last year's assessment model with updated data (Model 14.1). Coefficients of variation (*CV*) for some key reference values are given, appearing directly below.

Assessment Model	**Model_14.1**	**Model_16.0**
Model setup		
Survey catchability	1.07	1.20
Steepness	0.8	0.8
SigmaR	0.46	0.44
Natural mortality	0.3	0.3
Fishery Average Effective *N*	242	250
Survey Average Effective *N*	103	112
RMSE Survey	0.371	0.341
-log Likelihoods		
Number of Parameters	506	506
Survey index	6.89	7.2
Catch biomass	0.0	0.0
Fishery age comp	96.4	84.0
Survey age comp	42.4	40.1
Sub total	138.8	124.1
-log Penalties		
Recruitment	-5.2	-8.5
Selectivity constraint	93.1	86.3
Prior	0.1	0.4
	88.0	78.2
Total	233.7	209.5
Fishing mortalities (full selection)		
F_{2015}	0.295	0.312
$F_{2015}/F_{40\%}$	0.870	0.864
$F_{40\%}$	0.339	0.336
$F_{35\%}$	0.389	0.404
Stock abundance		
Initial Biomass (t, 1977)	680,156	688,517
CV	23%	20%
Assessment year total biomass (t)	629,880	588,326
CV	23%	20%
2001 year class (millions at age 1)	1,490	1,467
CV	17%	14%
2006 year class (millions at age 1)	992	959
CV	17%	15%
Recruitment Variability	0.539	0.518

Table 17.11. Estimates of Atka mackerel fishery (over time, 1977-2015) and survey selectivity at age (normalized to have a maximum of 1.0). The average selectivity over 2011-2015 listed below, is used for projections and computation of ABC.

	Age										
Year	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**11+**
1977	0.010	0.097	0.571	1.000	0.750	0.315	0.140	0.073	0.044	0.033	0.033
1978	0.009	0.118	0.972	1.000	0.899	0.491	0.226	0.111	0.063	0.046	0.046
1979	0.005	0.033	0.274	1.000	0.847	0.440	0.214	0.103	0.055	0.037	0.037
1980	0.005	0.039	0.265	0.841	1.000	0.623	0.396	0.186	0.083	0.048	0.048
1981	0.004	0.031	0.206	0.396	0.400	0.601	1.000	0.283	0.086	0.045	0.045
1982	0.004	0.021	0.094	0.338	1.000	0.897	0.450	0.192	0.088	0.052	0.052
1983	0.004	0.024	0.136	0.339	0.646	1.000	0.616	0.231	0.103	0.063	0.063
1984	0.004	0.026	0.125	0.391	0.696	1.000	0.915	0.420	0.185	0.101	0.101
1985	0.006	0.057	0.493	0.801	0.878	0.972	1.000	0.817	0.427	0.228	0.228
1986	0.005	0.045	0.323	0.499	0.574	0.667	0.858	1.000	0.761	0.361	0.361
1987	0.008	0.072	0.504	0.842	0.837	0.773	0.864	1.000	0.961	0.858	0.858
1988	0.005	0.041	0.367	1.000	0.616	0.392	0.353	0.325	0.293	0.235	0.235
1989	0.008	0.065	0.390	0.987	1.000	0.686	0.480	0.375	0.316	0.281	0.281
1990	0.006	0.054	0.454	1.000	0.787	0.477	0.339	0.265	0.227	0.201	0.201
1991	0.010	0.057	0.264	0.741	1.000	0.890	0.663	0.486	0.385	0.340	0.340
1992	0.011	0.054	0.220	0.634	0.987	1.000	0.840	0.667	0.548	0.488	0.488
1993	0.010	0.044	0.170	0.448	0.788	1.000	0.922	0.774	0.649	0.581	0.581
1994	0.008	0.035	0.150	0.419	0.804	1.000	0.967	0.913	0.779	0.647	0.647
1995	0.007	0.032	0.143	0.451	0.705	0.897	1.000	0.976	0.890	0.787	0.787
1996	0.005	0.025	0.106	0.339	0.583	0.804	0.966	1.000	0.859	0.750	0.750
1997	0.005	0.024	0.109	0.322	0.590	0.796	0.948	1.000	0.959	0.903	0.903
1998	0.003	0.021	0.107	0.390	0.658	0.758	0.915	1.000	0.974	0.902	0.902
1999	0.002	0.019	0.129	0.552	0.675	0.730	0.819	1.000	0.885	0.713	0.713
2000	0.001	0.015	0.207	0.511	0.687	0.757	0.814	1.000	0.709	0.487	0.487
2001	0.001	0.012	0.169	0.523	0.775	0.908	1.000	0.893	0.605	0.373	0.373
2002	0.001	0.012	0.107	0.375	0.563	0.730	1.000	0.755	0.484	0.324	0.324
2003	0.002	0.016	0.181	0.447	0.639	0.830	1.000	0.911	0.507	0.329	0.329
2004	0.004	0.036	0.293	0.779	1.000	0.975	0.998	0.938	0.634	0.381	0.381
2005	0.005	0.052	0.294	0.757	1.000	1.000	0.983	0.669	0.425	0.299	0.299
2006	0.007	0.093	0.672	0.693	0.929	0.998	1.000	0.602	0.387	0.281	0.281
2007	0.006	0.081	0.592	0.780	0.681	0.775	1.000	0.756	0.437	0.276	0.276
2008	0.006	0.068	0.490	0.727	0.711	0.850	1.000	0.927	0.752	0.357	0.357
2009	0.005	0.048	0.316	0.650	0.815	0.806	1.000	0.870	0.648	0.427	0.427
2010	0.005	0.044	0.267	0.779	0.933	1.000	0.932	0.843	0.686	0.349	0.349
2011	0.004	0.029	0.181	0.519	0.854	1.000	0.833	0.676	0.766	0.635	0.635
2012	0.003	0.025	0.170	0.353	0.745	1.000	0.951	0.767	0.816	0.856	0.856
2013	0.003	0.038	0.315	0.800	0.765	0.956	1.000	0.766	0.605	0.542	0.542
2014	0.003	0.059	1.000	0.609	0.880	0.948	0.825	0.729	0.576	0.459	0.459
2015	0.003	0.026	0.203	0.305	0.473	0.645	0.861	1.000	0.589	0.272	0.272
2016	0.003	0.026	0.203	0.305	0.473	0.645	0.861	1.000	0.589	0.272	0.272
Ave. 2011-2015	0.003	0.035	0.374	0.517	0.744	0.910	0.894	0.788	0.670	0.553	0.553
Survey	0.011	0.141	0.567	0.758	0.712	0.740	0.961	1.000	0.779	0.650	0.650

Table 17.12. Estimated BSAI Atka mackerel begin-year numbers at age in millions, 1977-2016.

	Age										
Year	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**11+**
1977	340	452	314	131	116	73	63	51	39	30	101
1978	1,623	251	329	209	81	74	51	46	37	29	97
1979	489	1,201	183	209	132	52	51	36	33	27	92
1980	359	362	886	130	135	87	36	37	27	24	88
1981	445	266	267	639	89	91	61	26	27	20	83
1982	318	330	197	194	455	63	64	41	19	20	76
1983	421	235	244	145	141	316	44	46	30	14	70
1984	491	312	174	180	106	101	225	32	34	22	62
1985	574	363	230	127	127	72	67	150	23	24	62
1986	473	425	268	162	86	86	48	45	102	16	62
1987	635	350	313	190	113	60	59	32	29	69	55
1988	463	470	258	224	133	79	42	41	22	20	87
1989	1,282	343	347	184	150	93	56	30	29	16	77
1990	610	949	253	252	130	106	66	41	22	21	68
1991	374	452	701	183	176	92	76	48	30	16	66
1992	525	277	333	508	128	120	63	53	34	21	59
1993	860	388	204	241	353	85	80	43	37	24	56
1994	398	636	286	147	166	230	54	51	28	25	54
1995	380	294	468	206	101	106	142	33	32	18	52
1996	948	281	216	333	134	61	61	79	19	18	41
1997	220	701	206	152	211	76	31	29	37	9	31
1998	341	162	516	148	104	133	45	18	16	21	24
1999	952	252	120	370	97	63	78	25	10	9	25
2000	2,048	705	186	86	243	62	39	48	15	6	22
2001	1,273	1,517	520	132	57	156	39	25	29	10	18
2002	1,467	943	1,120	369	85	35	91	22	15	18	19
2003	321	1,086	697	810	251	55	22	54	14	10	26
2004	419	238	803	500	555	166	36	14	34	9	25
2005	563	310	175	577	343	372	112	24	9	24	24
2006	376	417	229	126	396	229	249	75	17	6	34
2007	959	279	306	157	86	264	152	165	52	12	29
2008	750	710	204	211	106	59	178	100	111	36	29
2009	238	555	521	141	141	71	39	114	65	74	46
2010	486	176	407	359	90	87	44	23	70	41	81
2011	338	360	129	285	227	55	52	27	14	45	84
2012	558	250	265	93	196	149	35	34	18	9	87
2013	541	413	185	191	65	129	93	22	22	12	62
2014	423	401	305	134	134	46	89	64	16	16	53
2015	467	313	296	209	95	93	32	62	45	11	49
2016	484	346	230	206	142	61	57	18	34	28	41
Average	631	469	347	246	167	110	73	48	32	22	56

Table 17.13a. Estimates of Atka mackerel biomass in metric tons with approximate lower and upper 95% confidence bounds for age 1+ biomass and female spawning biomass (labeled as LCI and UCI; computed for period 1977-2016).

	Age 1+ biomass (t)			Female spawning biomass (t)		
Year	Estimate	LCI	UCI	Estimate	LCI	UCI
1977	688,517	465,672	1,018,010	194,135	127,644	295,263
1978	717,949	481,008	1,071,600	187,696	120,549	292,246
1979	761,291	505,715	1,146,030	184,824	115,876	294,797
1980	858,085	570,655	1,290,290	198,180	125,113	313,920
1981	857,600	569,858	1,290,630	245,803	158,063	382,248
1982	805,691	535,190	1,212,910	257,912	165,892	400,976
1983	750,711	499,961	1,127,220	243,375	157,381	376,358
1984	725,823	487,468	1,080,730	227,795	146,794	353,491
1985	690,729	463,616	1,029,100	204,616	130,264	321,408
1986	663,106	446,378	985,060	185,122	117,037	292,814
1987	660,151	449,748	968,987	180,099	114,943	282,191
1988	675,105	467,900	974,067	186,380	121,028	287,022
1989	719,779	514,358	1,007,240	191,005	127,093	287,057
1990	790,137	584,128	1,068,800	201,256	138,214	293,053
1991	875,059	662,819	1,155,260	216,924	154,159	305,242
1992	873,055	666,876	1,142,980	245,262	179,634	334,866
1993	834,299	637,941	1,091,090	242,320	177,260	331,257
1994	791,605	601,399	1,041,970	213,464	153,329	297,182
1995	762,905	572,956	1,015,830	190,682	133,118	273,139
1996	695,283	510,612	946,742	169,352	112,572	254,773
1997	612,216	435,194	861,245	149,411	95,991	232,559
1998	607,901	431,091	857,228	141,020	89,590	221,974
1999	580,751	406,445	829,807	151,702	97,753	235,425
2000	652,582	463,285	919,226	143,116	91,292	224,359
2001	845,197	615,710	1,160,220	138,829	88,161	218,617
2002	1,100,740	816,204	1,484,470	187,098	125,157	279,692
2003	1,240,550	929,131	1,656,360	275,350	193,256	392,317
2004	1,247,140	935,326	1,662,910	333,747	239,065	465,927
2005	1,133,070	843,696	1,521,680	354,805	255,472	492,762
2006	1,012,760	745,738	1,375,390	326,248	231,800	459,179
2007	921,151	673,231	1,260,370	282,022	197,532	402,653
2008	873,215	637,795	1,195,530	245,929	169,906	355,966
2009	846,147	616,440	1,161,450	214,408	145,349	316,279
2010	781,071	559,536	1,090,320	208,870	140,469	310,579
2011	685,594	480,426	978,380	204,269	136,388	305,937
2012	639,917	444,544	921,153	182,981	119,751	279,598
2013	605,885	416,570	881,237	172,271	112,742	263,230
2014	623,010	431,149	900,249	170,225	112,490	257,593
2015	624,539	431,495	903,948	162,615	105,578	250,463
2016	610,087	397,325	871,144	154,396	96,925	244,397
2017	598,791	371,838	865,169	145,258	88,954	236,406

Table 17.13b. Estimates of Atka mackerel age 3+ biomass and female spawning biomass in metric tons from the current recommended assessment model, Model 16.0 (1977-2016) compared to last year's (2015) assessment results.

	Age 3+ biomass (t)		Female spawning biomass (t)	
Year	Current	2014	Current	2014
1977	600,325	599,600	194,135	194,570
1978	604,684	601,180	187,696	187,100
1979	545,585	539,910	184,824	183,300
1980	783,585	768,400	198,180	195,290
1981	794,704	777,880	245,803	240,770
1982	738,223	723,080	257,912	252,140
1983	693,872	680,880	243,375	238,160
1984	653,539	642,680	227,795	223,200
1985	606,376	595,940	204,616	200,780
1986	573,316	570,160	185,122	182,380
1987	575,154	580,020	180,099	179,670
1988	578,463	597,760	186,380	189,190
1989	606,970	638,750	191,005	198,240
1990	609,609	637,120	201,256	212,120
1991	785,368	882,170	216,924	233,480
1992	804,875	921,770	245,262	277,890
1993	733,085	836,950	242,320	282,000
1994	671,131	772,360	213,464	250,710
1995	698,388	847,390	190,682	231,820
1996	607,462	743,630	169,352	218,400
1997	489,281	608,970	149,411	195,270
1998	566,426	680,400	141,020	181,630
1999	497,421	592,790	151,702	189,980
2000	447,096	532,010	143,116	175,910
2001	543,336	633,790	138,829	168,620
2002	882,832	998,810	187,098	220,210
2003	1,050,846	1,176,800	275,350	315,120
2004	1,190,008	1,315,000	333,747	376,620
2005	1,057,734	1,169,600	354,805	397,170
2006	928,604	1,030,700	326,248	365,480
2007	833,231	928,960	282,022	317,160
2008	725,049	809,870	245,929	277,780
2009	745,900	821,780	214,408	242,720
2010	730,883	788,430	208,870	233,410
2011	612,418	657,100	204,269	223,640
2012	574,538	613,690	182,981	198,120
2013	515,011	528,580	172,271	183,540
2014	539,387	581,180	170,225	177,910
2015	553,053	589,050	162,615	177,290
2016	510,847		154,396	171,170
2017			145,258	

Table 17.14. Estimates of age-1 Atka mackerel recruitment (millions of recruits) and standard deviation (Std. dev.). Estimates of age-1 recruitment from last year's assessment (2015) is shown for comparison.

	Age 1 recruitment		
Year	Current	Std. dev	2015 assessment
1977	340	90	331
1978	1,623	360	1,579
1979	489	122	480
1980	359	96	358
1981	445	117	444
1982	318	87	319
1983	421	107	413
1984	491	118	514
1985	574	133	601
1986	473	119	536
1987	635	144	692
1988	463	110	452
1989	1,282	219	1,619
1990	610	134	703
1991	374	93	373
1992	525	114	598
1993	860	159	1,136
1994	398	88	403
1995	380	78	424
1996	948	148	1,025
1997	220	48	207
1998	341	69	384
1999	952	163	1,055
2000	2,048	294	2,225
2001	1,273	187	1,379
2002	1,467	207	1,546
2003	321	61	346
2004	419	74	455
2005	563	94	617
2006	376	66	405
2007	959	142	994
2008	750	123	728
2009	238	51	237
2010	486	97	506
2011	338	78	259
2012	558	127	727
2013	541	147	524
2014	423	126	474
2015	467	188	507
2016	484	198	
Average 78-15	638		691
Median 78-15	486		527

Table 17.15. Estimates of full-selection fishing mortality rates and exploitation rates (Catch/Biomass) for BSAI Atka mackerel.

Year	*F*	Catch/Biomass Rate[b]
1977	0.186	0.036
1978	0.157	0.040
1979	0.135	0.043
1980	0.097	0.026
1981	0.100	0.025
1982	0.064	0.027
1983	0.040	0.017
1984	0.115	0.055
1985	0.108	0.062
1986	0.124	0.056
1987	0.066	0.052
1988	0.101	0.038
1989	0.053	0.030
1990	0.057	0.036
1991	0.081	0.034
1992	0.104	0.060
1993	0.160	0.090
1994	0.186	0.097
1995	0.288	0.117
1996	0.459	0.171
1997	0.271	0.135
1998	0.309	0.101
1999	0.220	0.113
2000	0.205	0.106
2001	0.261	0.113
2002	0.232	0.051
2003	0.173	0.051
2004	0.100	0.051
2005	0.102	0.059
2006	0.112	0.067
2007	0.122	0.071
2008	0.142	0.080
2009	0.226	0.098
2010	0.204	0.094
2011	0.144	0.085
2012	0.165	0.083
2013	0.071	0.045
2014	0.076	0.057
2015	0.290	0.096
2016	0.312	0.108

[a] Catch/Biomass rate is the ratio of catch to beginning year age 3+ biomass.

Table 17.16. Projections of female spawning biomass in metric tons, full-selection fishing mortality rates (*F*) and catch in metric tons for Atka mackerel for the 7 scenarios. The values for $B_{100\%}$, $B_{40\%}$, and $B_{35\%}$ are 313,220 t, 125,288 t, and 109,627 t, respectively.

Catch	*Scenario 1*	*Scenario 2*	*Scenario 3*	*Scenario 4*	*Scenario 5*	*Scenario 6*	*Scenario 7*
2016	55,000	55,000	55,000	55,000	55,000	55,000	55,000
2017	55,000	55,000	55,000	55,000	0	102,722	87,383
2018	53,000	53,000	53,000	53,000	0	81,340	75,959
2019	86,977	86,977	18,772	24,192	0	75,706	82,795
2020	82,328	82,328	21,265	27,104	0	80,432	83,275
2021	82,480	82,480	23,698	29,956	0	85,386	86,404
2022	84,328	84,328	25,826	32,440	0	89,139	89,460
2023	85,980	85,980	27,470	34,342	0	91,509	91,592
2024	86,138	86,138	28,391	35,371	0	91,618	91,644
2025	85,797	85,797	28,912	35,933	0	91,056	91,072
2026	85,486	85,486	29,194	36,218	0	90,594	90,604
2027	84,996	84,996	29,359	36,371	0	90,143	90,147
2028	85,257	85,257	29,567	36,598	0	90,549	90,550
2029	85,479	85,479	29,735	36,783	0	90,830	90,831
Fishing M.	*Scenario 1*	*Scenario 2*	*Scenario 3*	*Scenario 4*	*Scenario 5*	*Scenario 6*	*Scenario 7*
2016	0.194	0.194	0.194	0.194	0.194	0.194	0.194
2017	0.202	0.202	0.202	0.202	0.000	0.404	0.336
2018	0.200	0.200	0.200	0.200	0.000	0.365	0.323
2019	0.335	0.335	0.066	0.086	0.000	0.343	0.360
2020	0.320	0.320	0.066	0.086	0.000	0.348	0.355
2021	0.315	0.315	0.066	0.086	0.000	0.353	0.356
2022	0.315	0.315	0.066	0.086	0.000	0.358	0.359
2023	0.316	0.316	0.066	0.086	0.000	0.361	0.361
2024	0.316	0.316	0.066	0.086	0.000	0.361	0.361
2025	0.315	0.315	0.066	0.086	0.000	0.360	0.360
2026	0.316	0.316	0.066	0.086	0.000	0.360	0.360
2027	0.315	0.315	0.066	0.086	0.000	0.360	0.360
2028	0.315	0.315	0.066	0.086	0.000	0.360	0.360
2029	0.315	0.315	0.066	0.086	0.000	0.359	0.359
Spawning biomass	*Scenario 1*	*Scenario 2*	*Scenario 3*	*Scenario 4*	*Scenario 5*	*Scenario 6*	*Scenario 7*
2016	154,516	154,516	154,516	154,516	154,516	154,516	154,516
2017	145,258	145,258	145,258	145,258	145,258	132,968	136,979
2018	138,791	138,791	138,791	138,791	138,791	113,741	120,826
2019	130,530	130,530	146,610	145,364	150,888	107,555	112,725
2020	127,641	127,641	167,287	163,882	179,342	110,972	113,386
2021	128,244	128,244	187,151	181,649	207,178	114,699	115,728
2022	129,206	129,206	203,509	196,101	231,152	116,801	117,242
2023	130,496	130,496	217,361	208,253	252,100	118,376	118,568
2024	131,204	131,204	227,706	217,189	268,560	119,085	119,174
2025	130,521	130,521	233,824	222,219	279,597	118,411	118,460
2026	129,880	129,880	237,848	225,426	287,473	117,872	117,897
2027	129,542	129,542	241,163	228,065	294,061	117,609	117,619
2028	129,505	129,505	243,465	229,888	298,798	117,627	117,631
2029	130,252	130,252	245,975	232,036	303,184	118,356	118,358

Table 17.17. Ecosystem effects.

Ecosystem effects on Atka mackerel			
Indicator	Observation	Interpretation	Evaluation
Prey availability or abundance trends			
Zooplankton	Stomach contents, ichthyoplankton surveys	None	Unknown
Predator population trends			
Marine mammals	Fur seals – Pribilof Island rookeries declining, Bogoslof breeding rookery increasing. Steller sea lions western stock increasing slightly	Mixed potential impact, possibly increased mortality on Atka mackerel	No concern
Birds	Stable, some increasing some decreasing	Affects young-of-year mortality	No concern
Fish (Pacific cod, arrowtooth flounder)	Arrowtooth abundance trends are stabilizing, possibly slight declining trend	Possible changes in predation on Atka mackerel	No concern
Changes in habitat quality			
Temperature regime	2016 AI summer bottom temperature was highest in the time series	Could possibly affect fish distribution	Unknown
***The Atka mackerel* effects on ecosystem**			
Indicator	Observation	Interpretation	Evaluation
Fishery contribution to bycatch			
Prohibited species	Variable, heavily monitored	Likely to be a minor contribution to mortality	Unknown
Forage (including herring, Atka mackerel, cod, and pollock)	Stable, heavily monitored	Bycatch levels small relative to forage biomass	Unknown
HAPC biota (seapens/whips, corals, sponges, anemones)	Low bycatch levels of seapens/whips, sponge and coral catches are variable	Unknown	Possible concern for sponges and corals
Marine mammals and birds	Very minor direct-take	Likely to be very minor contribution to mortality	No concern
Fishery concentration in space and time	Steller sea lion protection measures spread out Atka mackerel catches in time and space. Western Aleutians (WAI) closed to directed Atka mackerel fishery (2011-2014); Atka mackerel TAC reduced in Central Aleutians (≤47% CAI ABC). WAI opened to directed fishing 2015; WAI TAC reduced to ≤65% WAI ABC. Fishery has become highly concentrated in areas outside of critical habitat	Mixed potential impact (fur seals vs Steller sea lions). Areas outside of critical habitat may be experiencing higher exploitation rates.	Possible concern
Fishery effects on amount of large size target fish	Depends on highly variable year-class strength	Natural fluctuation (environmental)	Probably no concern
Fishery contribution to discards and offal production	Offal production—unknown From 2013-2015, the Atka mackerel fishery contributed an average of 511 and 372 t of the total AI trawl non-target and Atka mackerel discards, respectively.	The Atka mackerel fishery is one of the few trawl fisheries operating in the AI. Numbers and rates should be interpreted in this context.	Unknown
Fishery effects on age-at-maturity and fecundity	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown

Figures

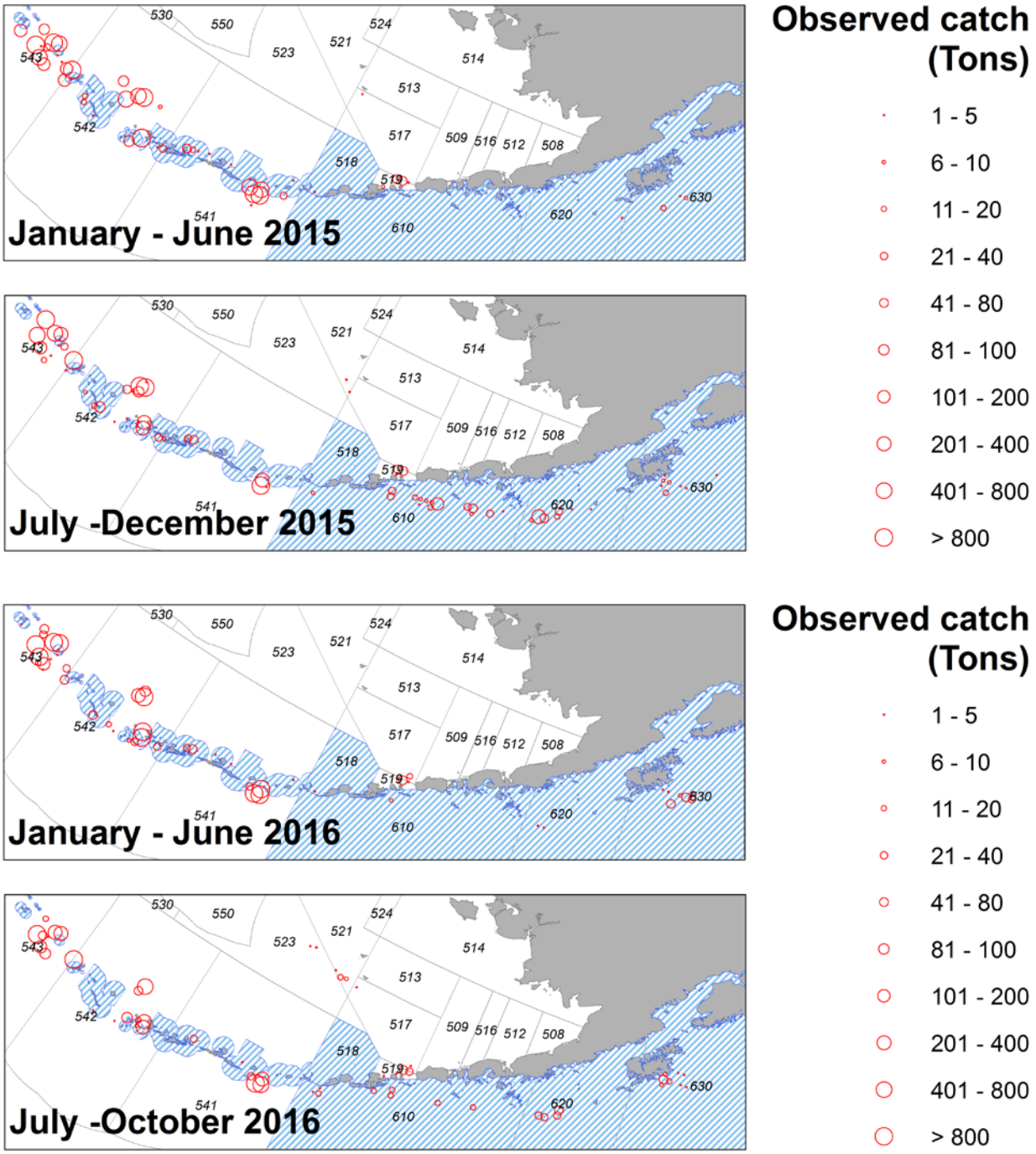


Figure 17.1. Observed catches of Atka mackerel summed for 20 km^2 cells for 2015 and 2016 where observed catch per haul was greater than 1 t. Shaded areas represent areas closed to directed Atka mackerel fishing.

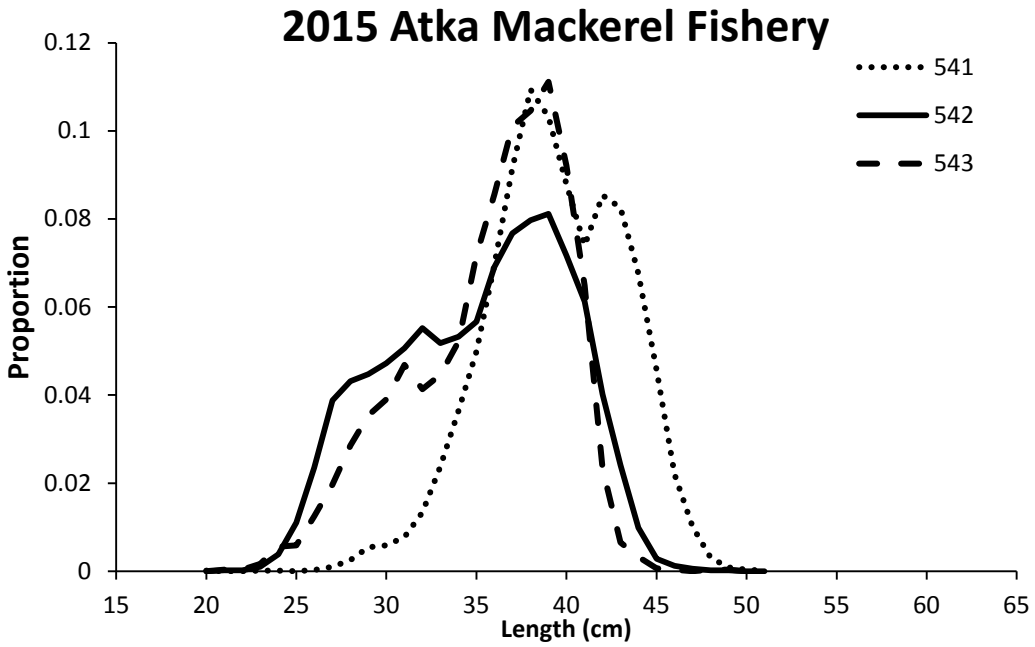


Figure 17.2. 2015 Atka mackerel fishery length-frequency data by area fished (see Figure 17.1). Numbers refer to management areas. Too few fish were measured in areas 517 and 519 for presentation.

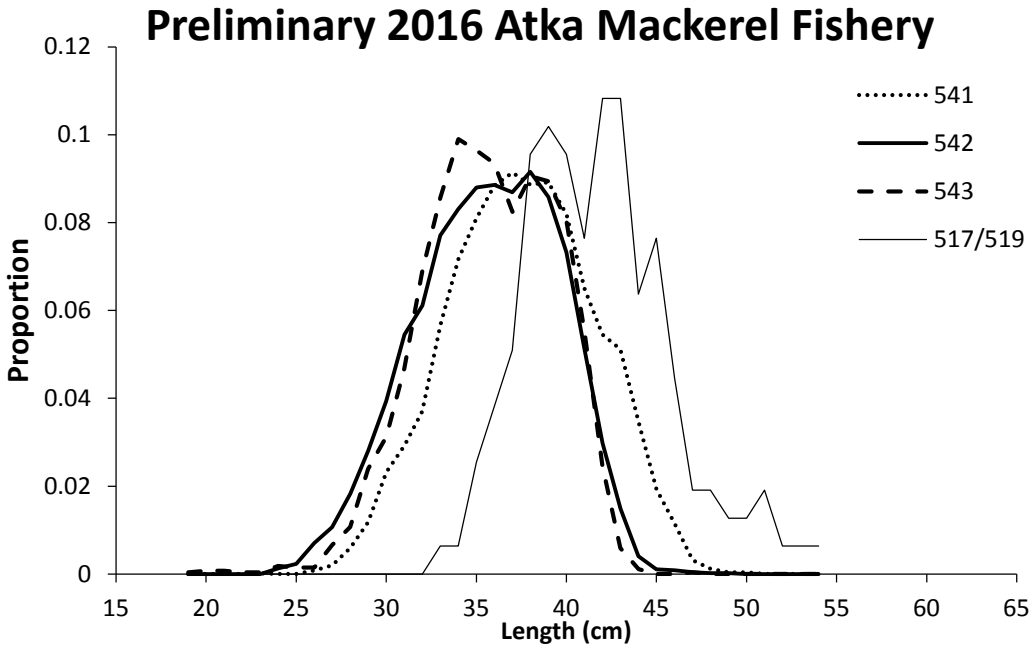


Figure 17.3. Preliminary 2016 Atka mackerel fishery length-frequency data by area fished (see Figure 17.1). Numbers refer to management areas.

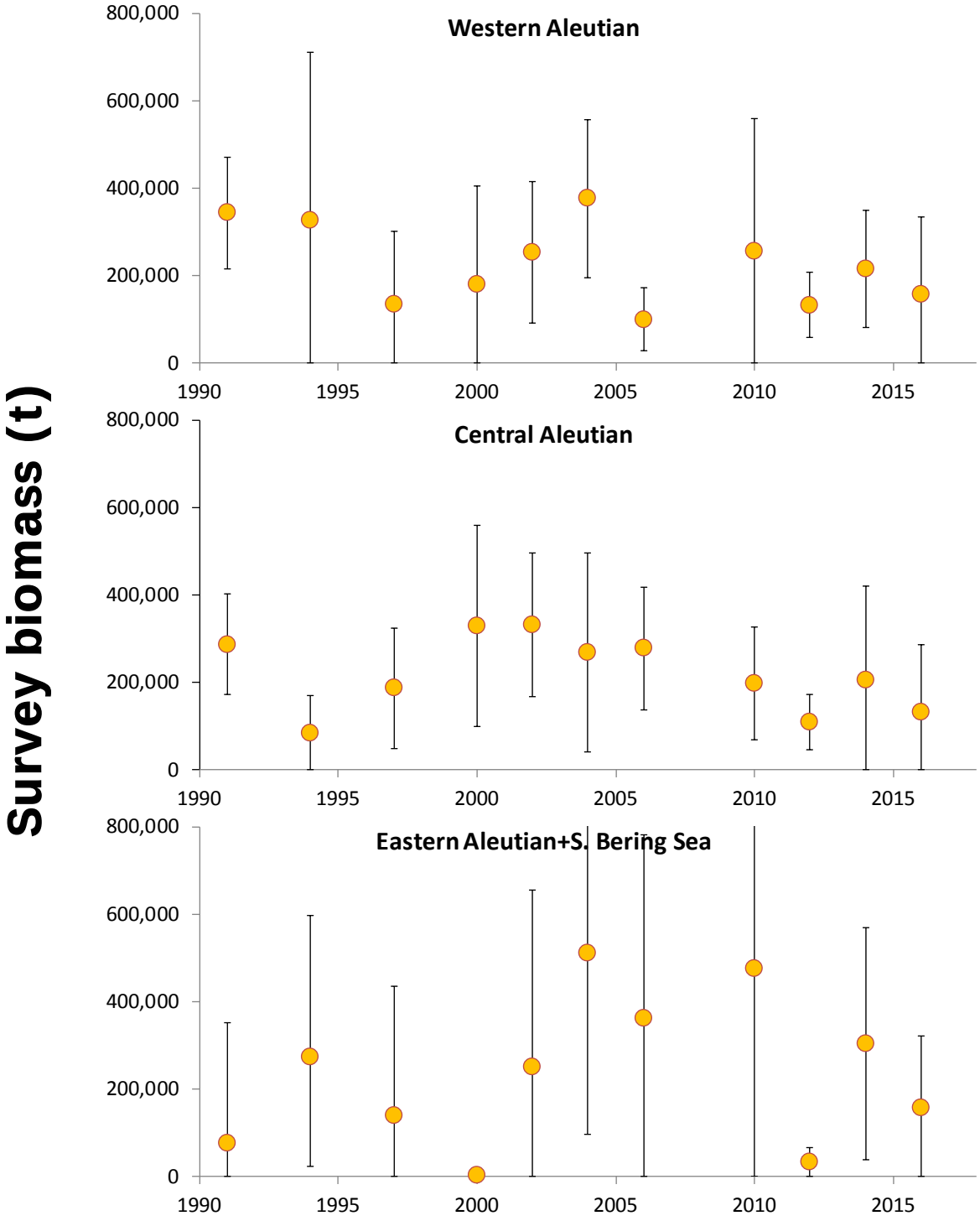


Figure 17.4. Atka mackerel Aleutian Islands survey biomass estimates by area and survey year. Bars represent 95% confidence intervals based on sampling error.

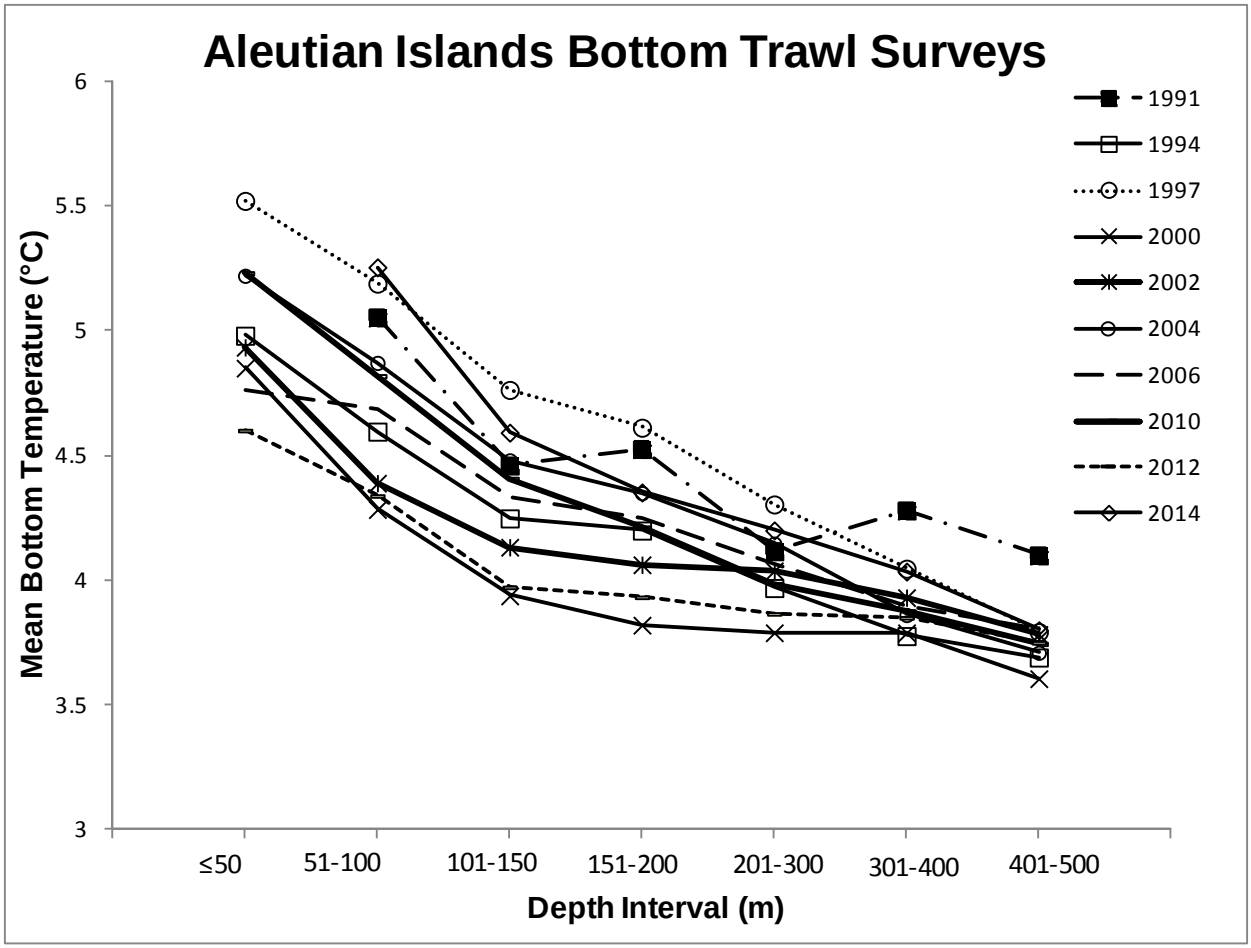


Figure 17.5. Average bottom temperatures by depth interval from Aleutian Islands summer bottom-trawl surveys, 1991 to 2014.

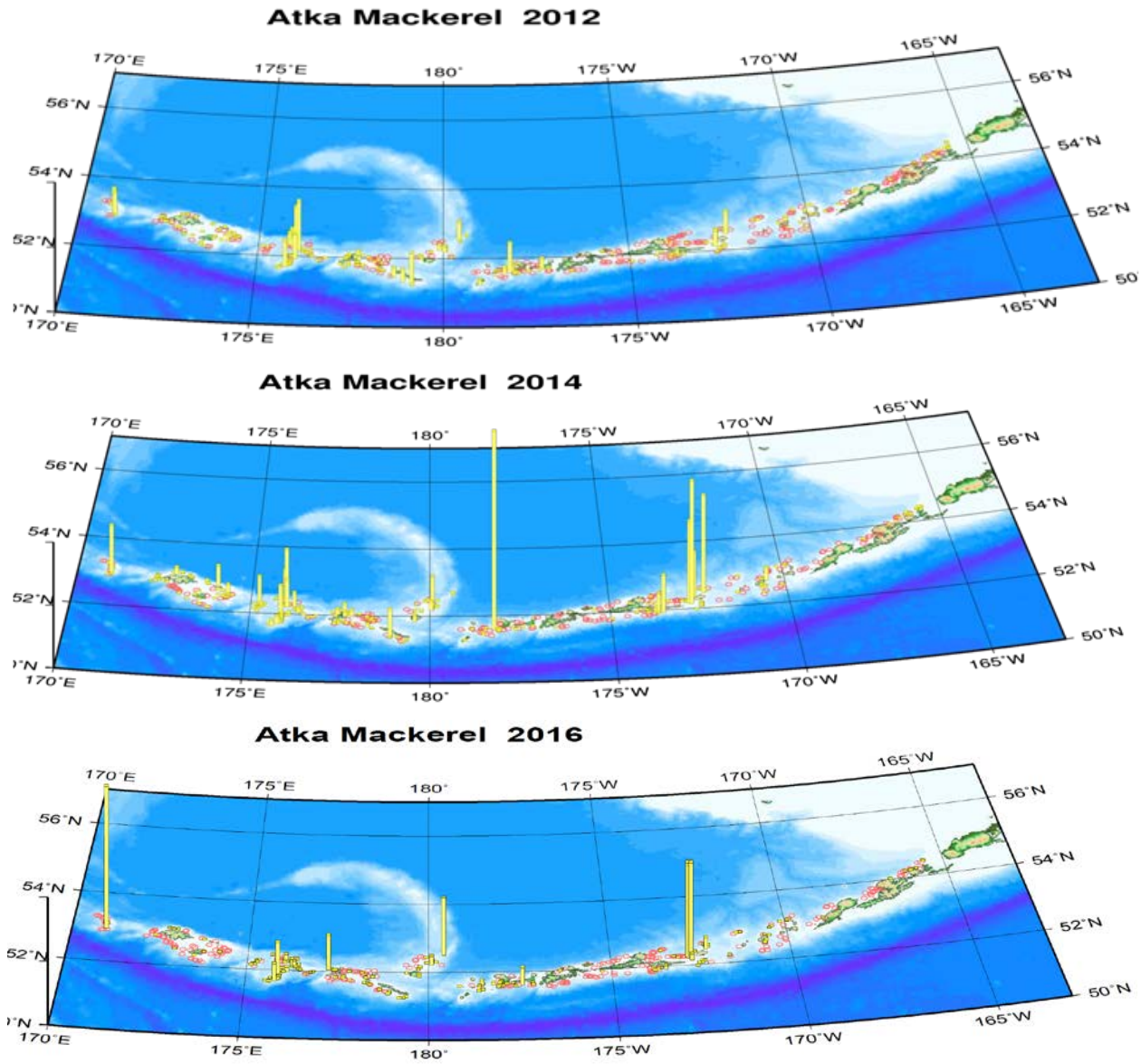
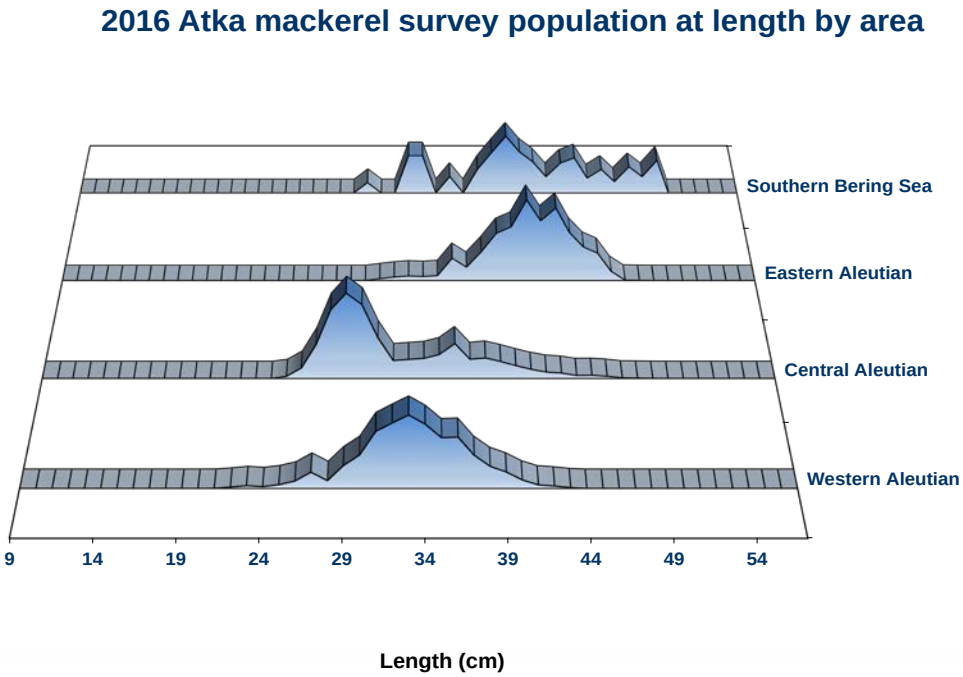


Figure 17.6. Bottom-trawl survey CPUE distributions of Atka mackerel catches during the summers of 2012, 2014, and 2016.



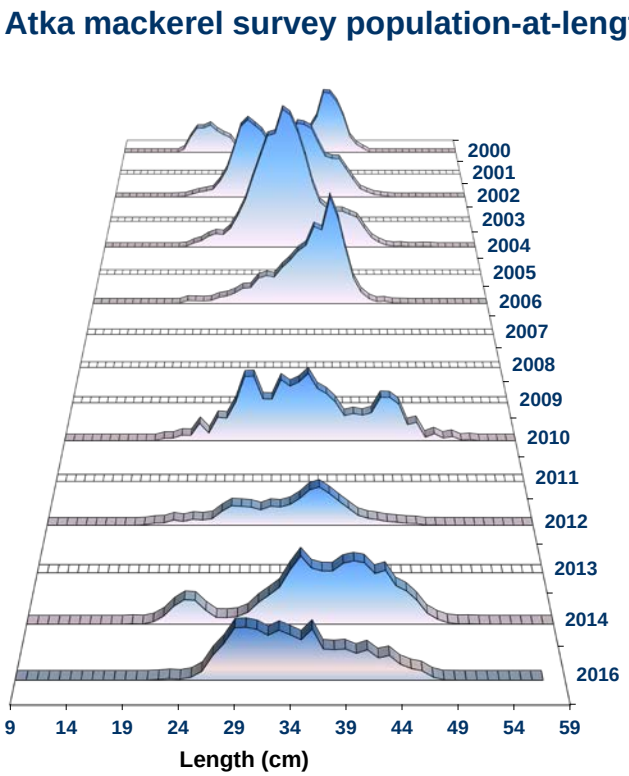


Figure 17.7. Atka mackerel bottom trawl survey length frequency data by subarea in 2016 (top) and for all areas, 2000-2016 (bottom). Vertical scale is proportion in top panel and estimated absolute numbers at age bottom panel.

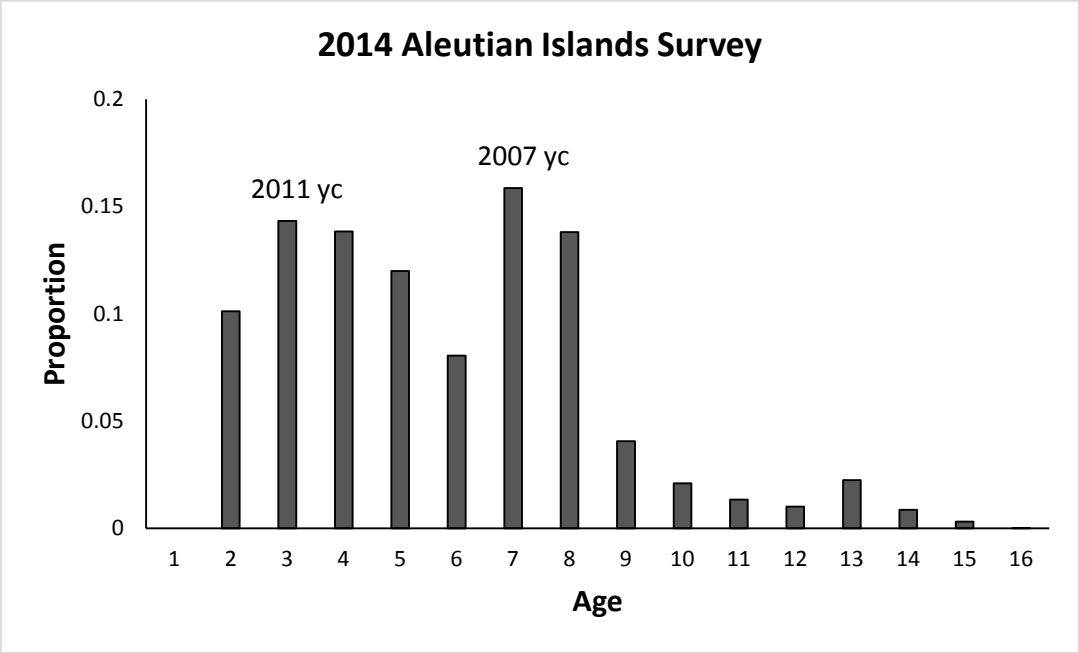


Figure 17.8. Atka mackerel age distribution from the Aleutian Islands 2014 bottom trawl survey. A total of 478 otoliths were aged; mean age from the 2014 survey is 5.8 years.

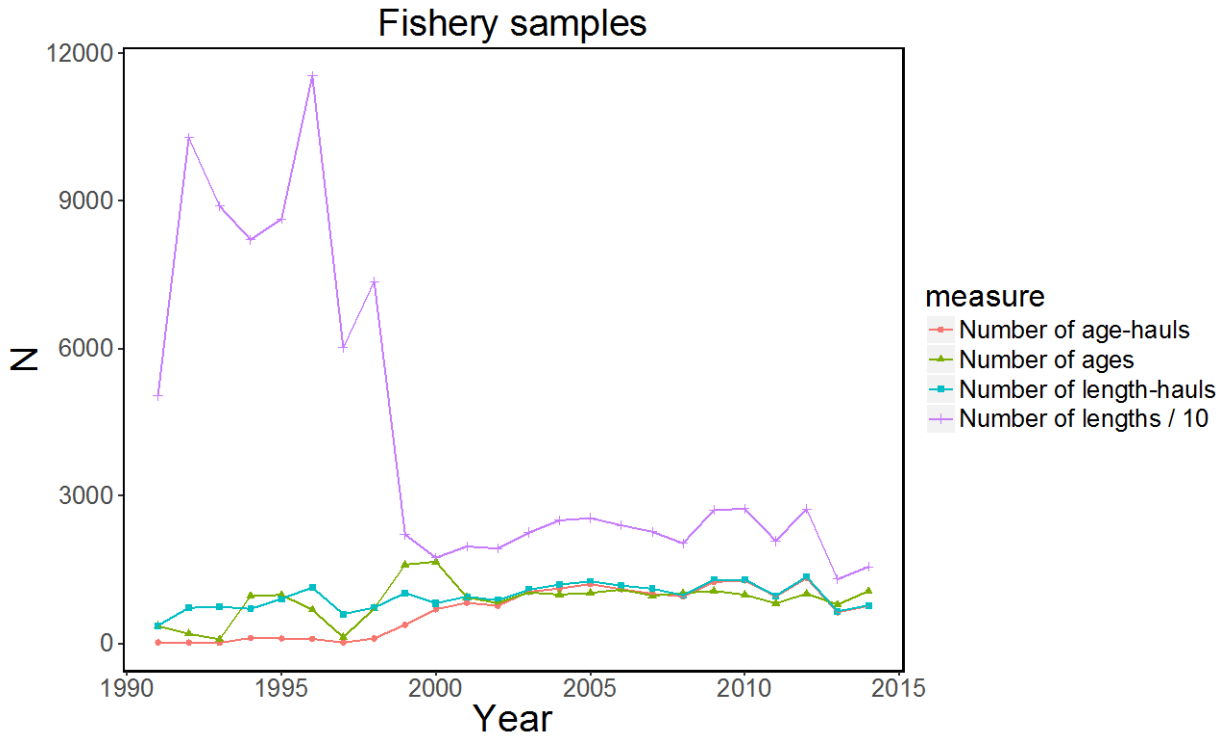


Figure 17.9. Observer sampling patterns for Atka mackerel in the Aleutian Islands fishery, 1991-2015.

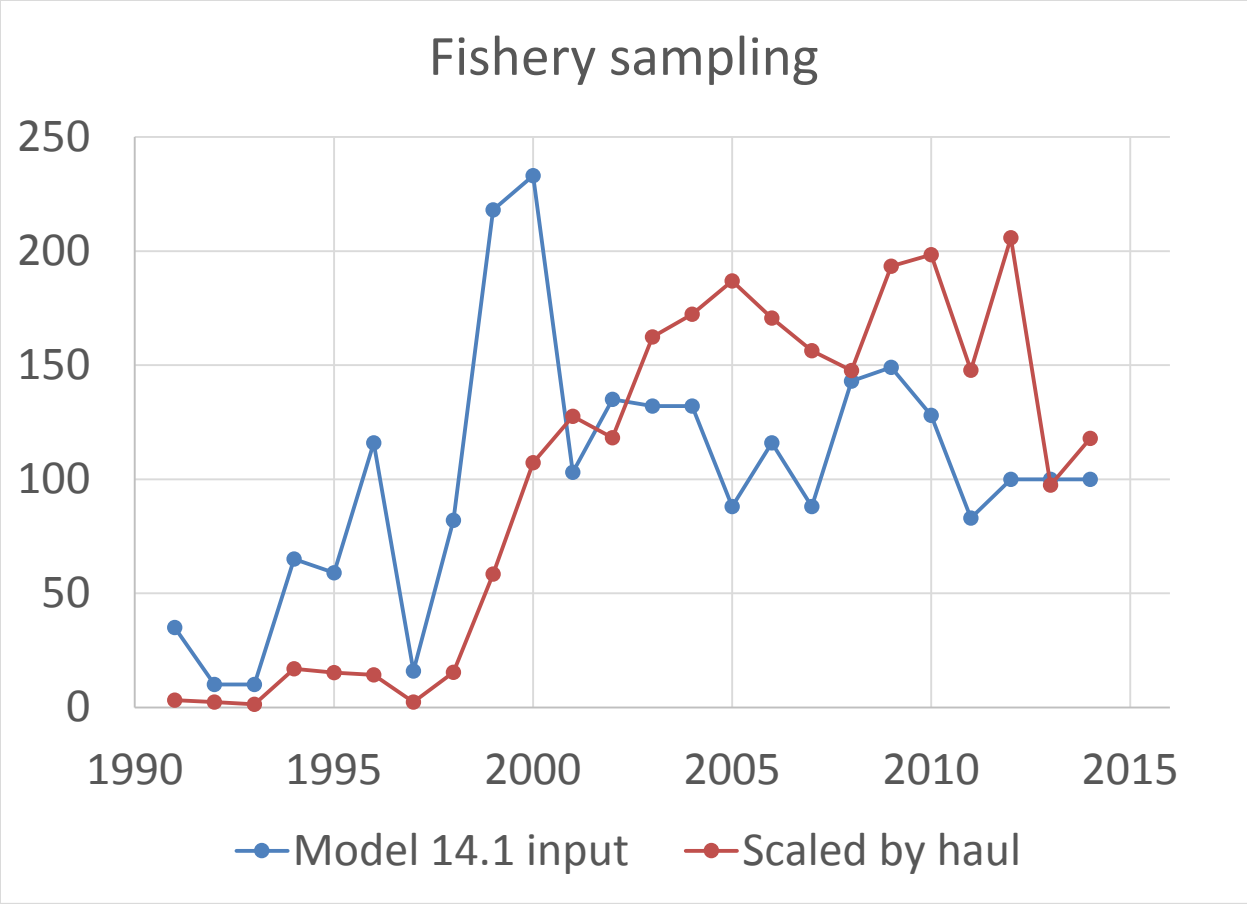


Figure 17.10. Observer sampling patterns for Atka mackerel in the Aleutian Islands fishery, 1991-2015 showing the previously input (and scaled) sample sizes compared to the scaled number of hauls sampled for otoliths over time used for Model 16.0.

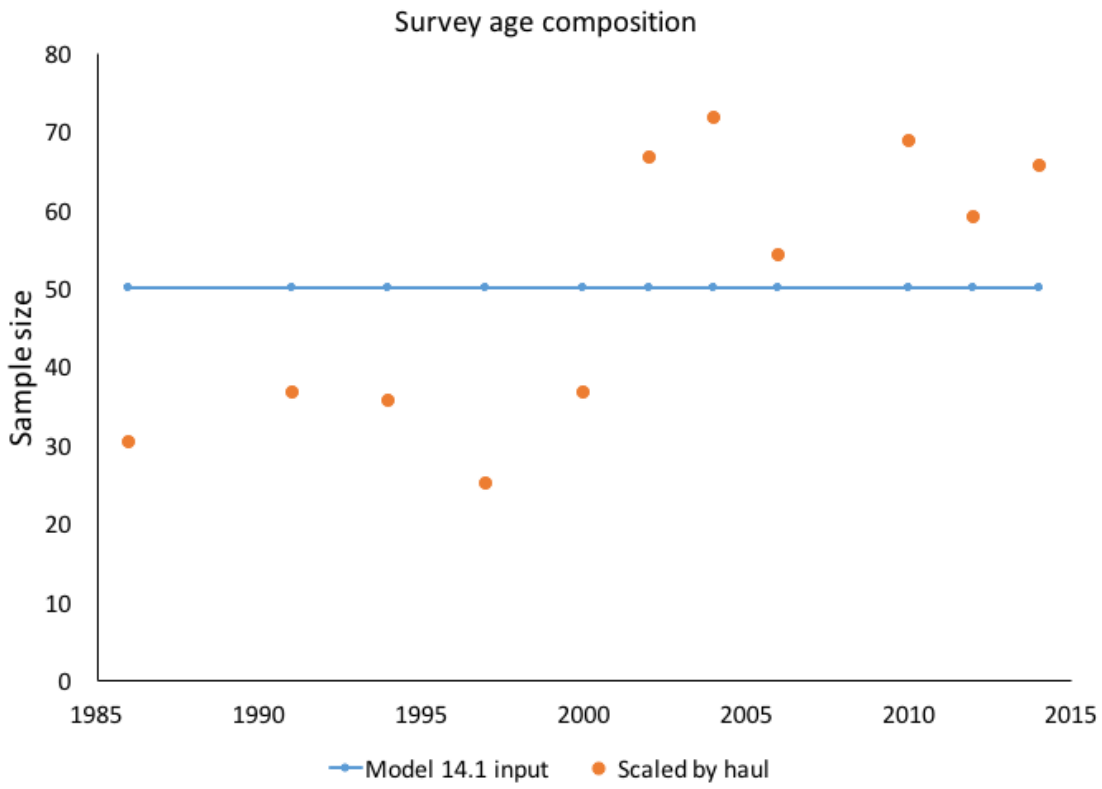


Figure 17.11. Sample sizes assumed for survey age compositions in Model 14.1 compared to that used for Model 16.0 scaled to the relative number of hauls sampled for otoliths over time.

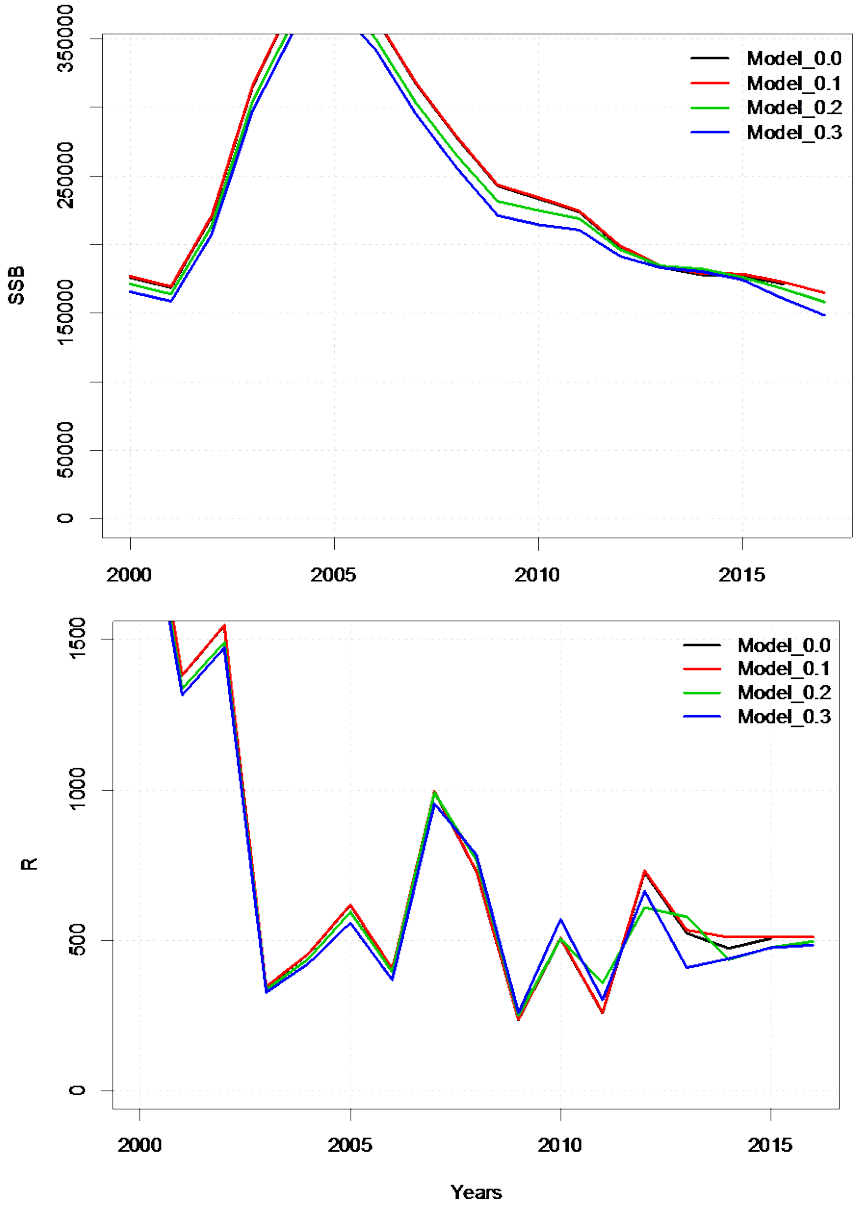


Figure 17.12. Model 14.1 evaluation of the incremental impact of new data introduced this year for Atka mackerel. Model 0.0 is the 2015 assessment, 0.1 is extended to 2016 with updated catch estimates, 0.2 includes 2015 fishery age composition data, and 0.3 incorporates the 2016 survey biomass estimates. Atka mackerel female spawning biomass (t) is shown in the top figure and recruitment (millions) is shown in the bottom panel.

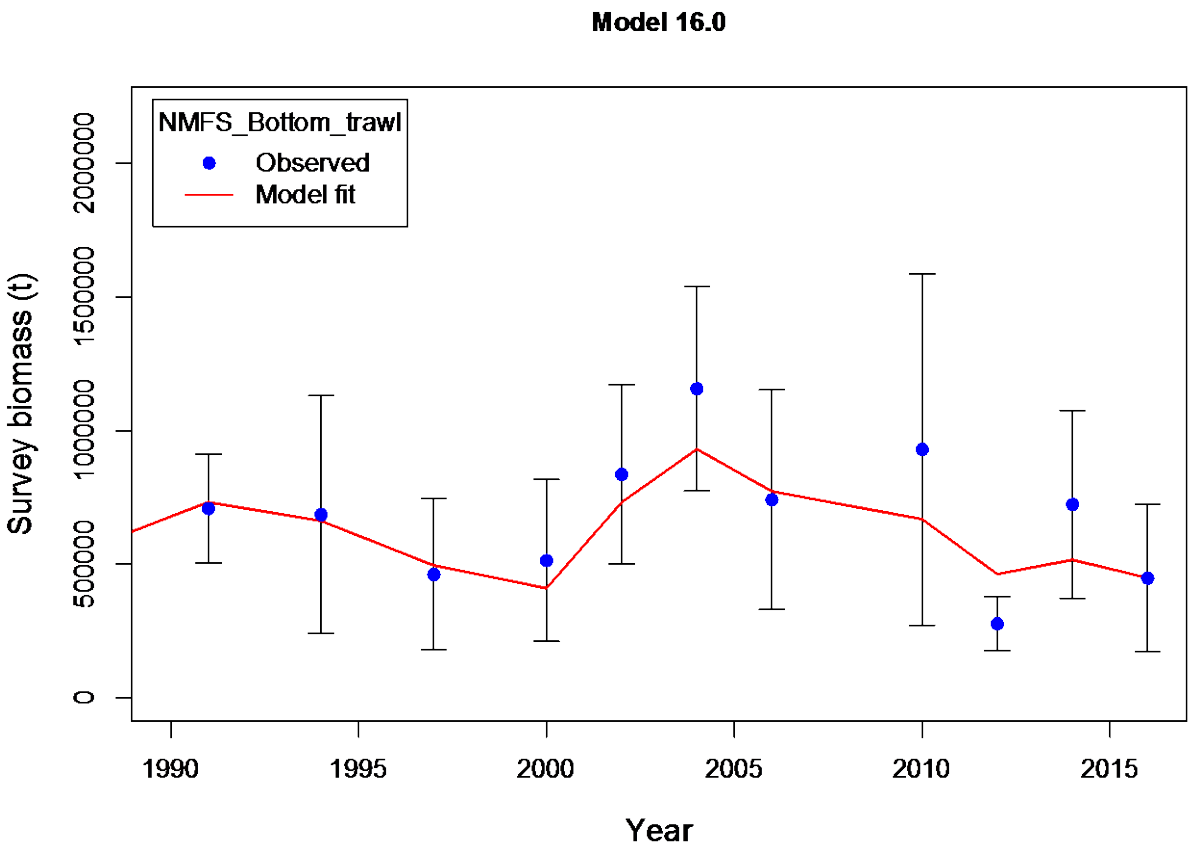


Figure 17.13. Observed (dots) and predicted (trend line) survey biomass estimates (t) for Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands Atka mackerel. Error bars represent two standard errors (based on sampling) from the survey estimates.

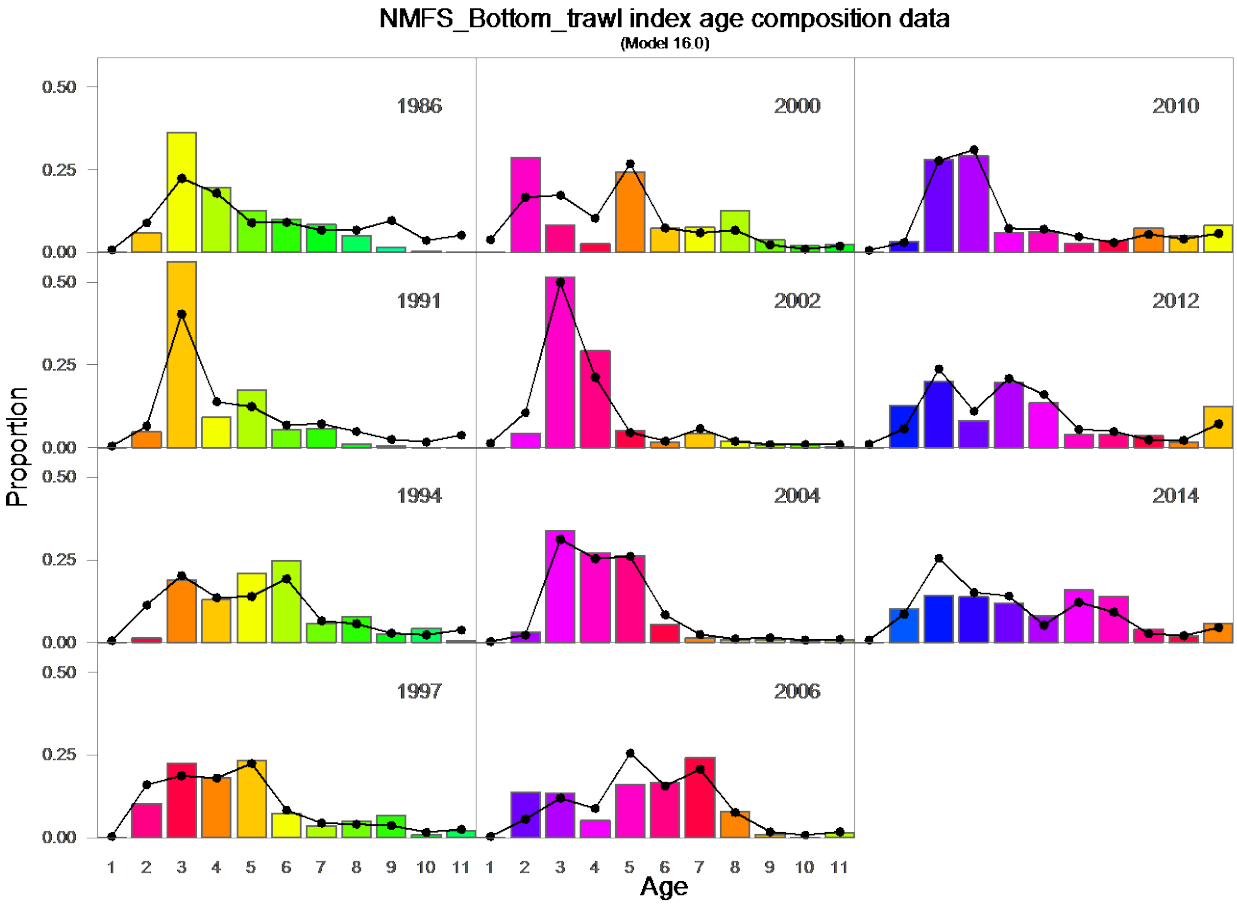


Figure 17.14. Observed and predicted **survey** proportions-at-age for BSAI Atka mackerel. Lines with "•" symbol are the model predictions and columns are the observed proportions at age.

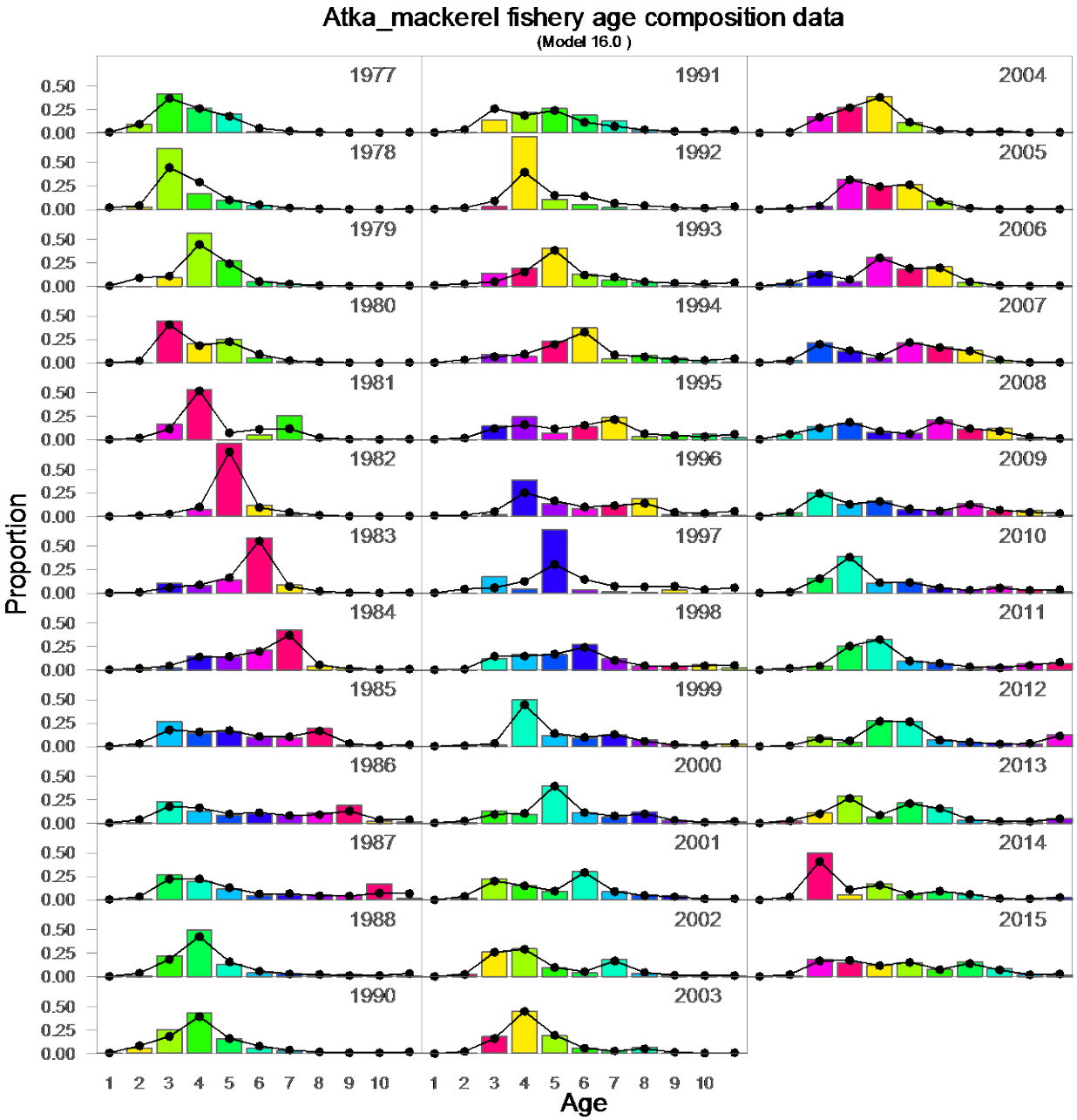


Figure 17.15. Observed and predicted Atka mackerel **fishery** proportions-at-age for BSAI Atka mackerel. Lines with "•" symbol are the model predictions and columns are the observed proportions at age (with colors corresponding to cohorts)

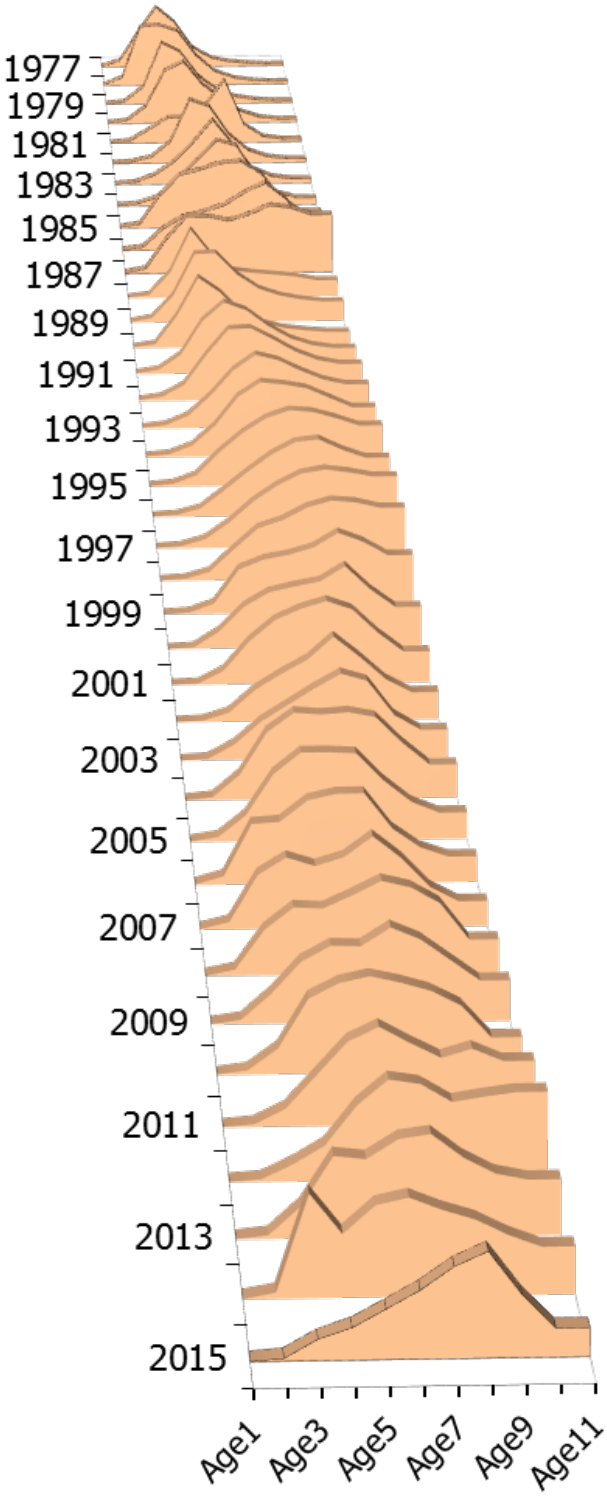


Figure 17.16. Fishery selectivity estimates over time for BSAI Atka mackerel.

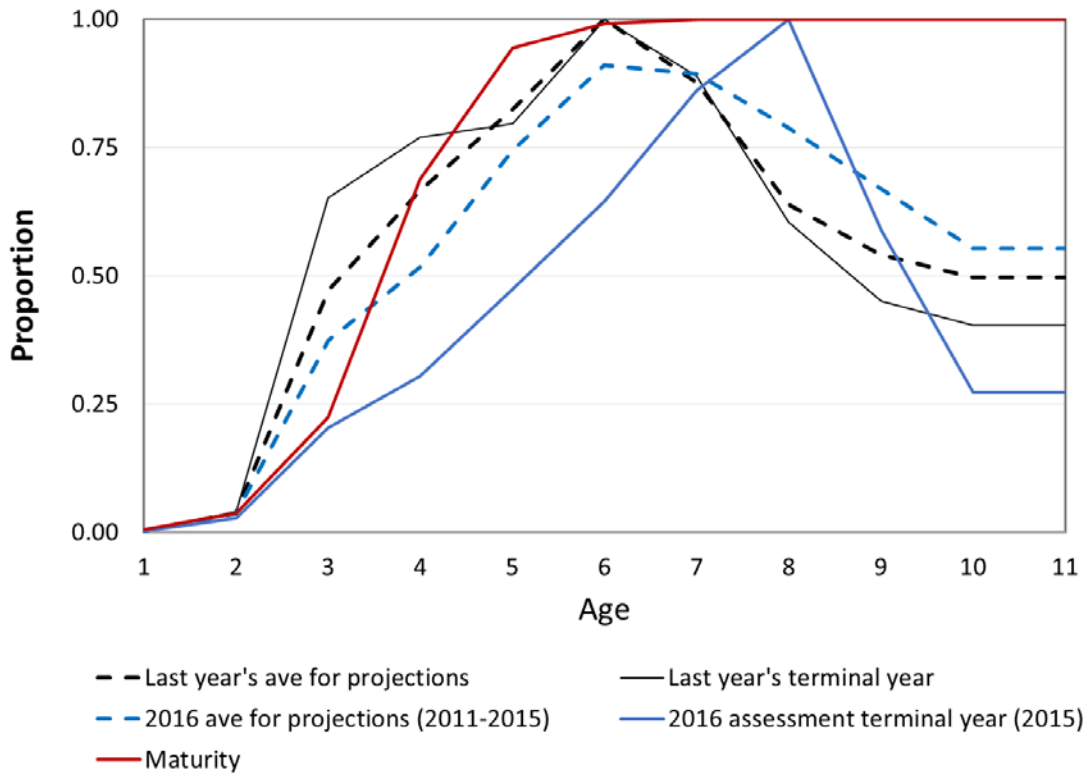


Figure 17.17. Estimated fishery selectivity patterns in the current assessment with a) last year's average for projections, b) the 2016 assessment average selectivity used for projections (2011-2015), c) last year's assessment terminal year, and d) the 2016 assessment terminal year (2015) compared with the maturity-at-age estimates for BSAI Atka mackerel.

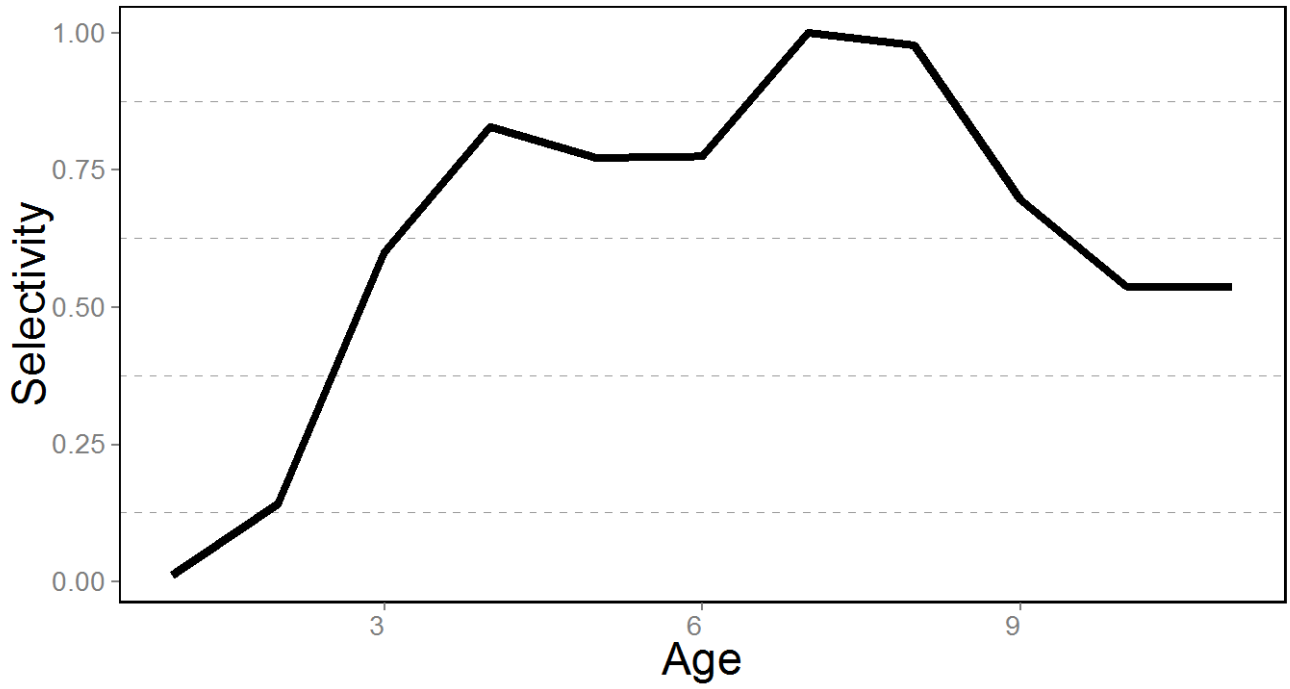


Figure 17.18. Estimated BSAI Atka mackerel survey selectivity-at-age from the current recommended model configuration (Model 16.0). Selectivity estimates have been normalized to a maximum value of 1.0 for presentation.

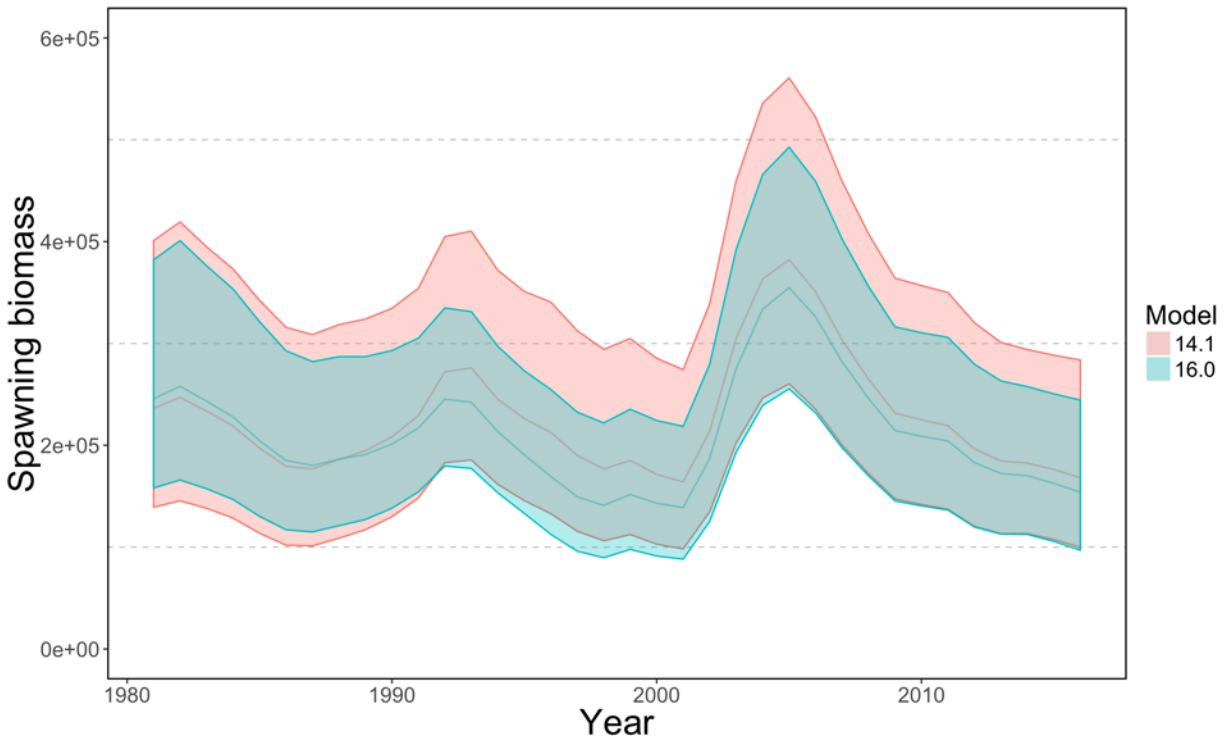


Figure 17.19. Time series of estimated Aleutian Islands Atka mackerel spawning biomass with approximate 95% confidence bounds compared to last year's (2015 assessment) selected model.

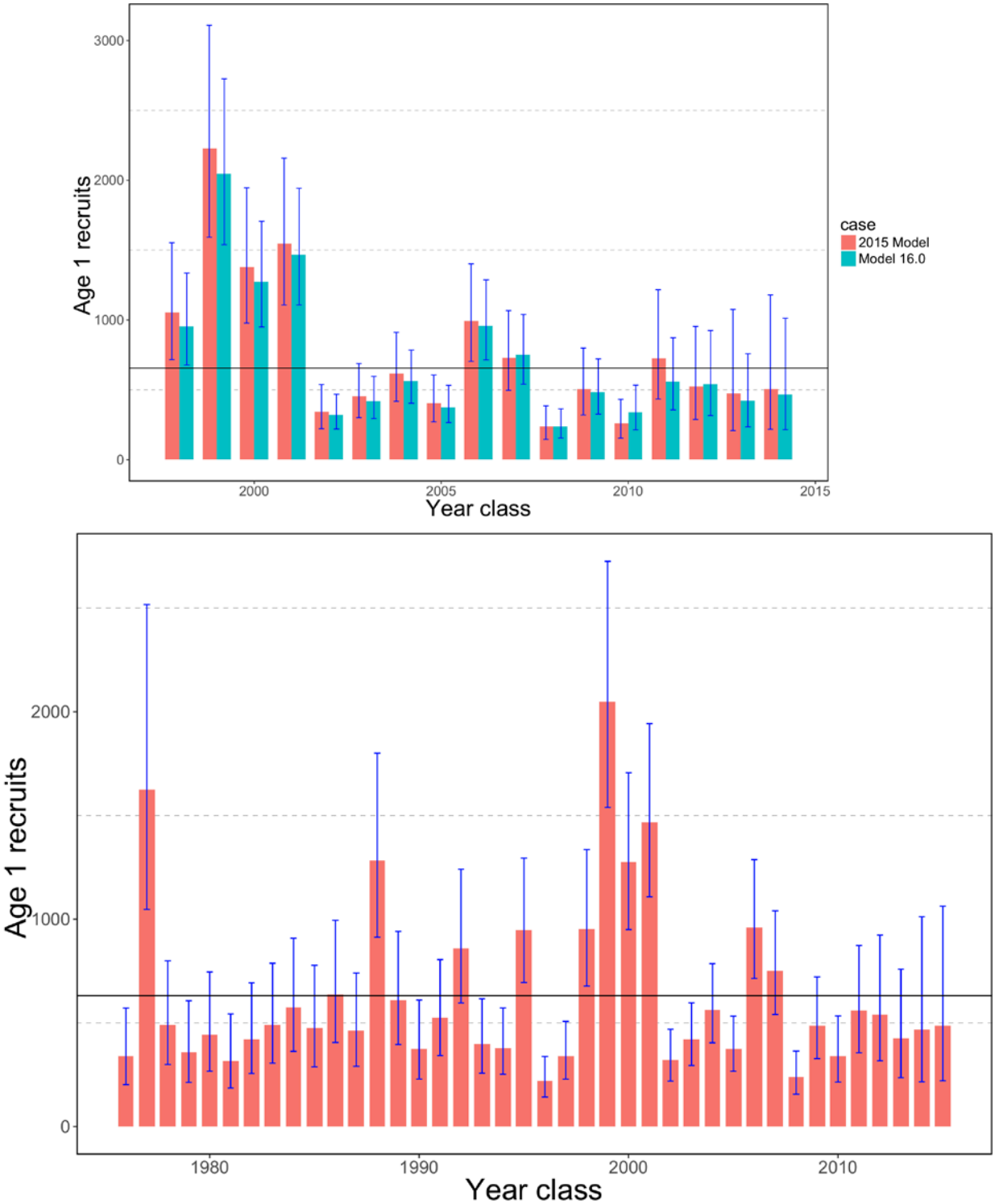


Figure 17.20. Age 1 recruitment from the current assessment (2016 Model 16.0) with the horizontal line indicating average recruitment (638 million) over 1978-2014 year classes compared with 2015 assessment estimates (top) and the current 1978-2015 model estimates (bottom).

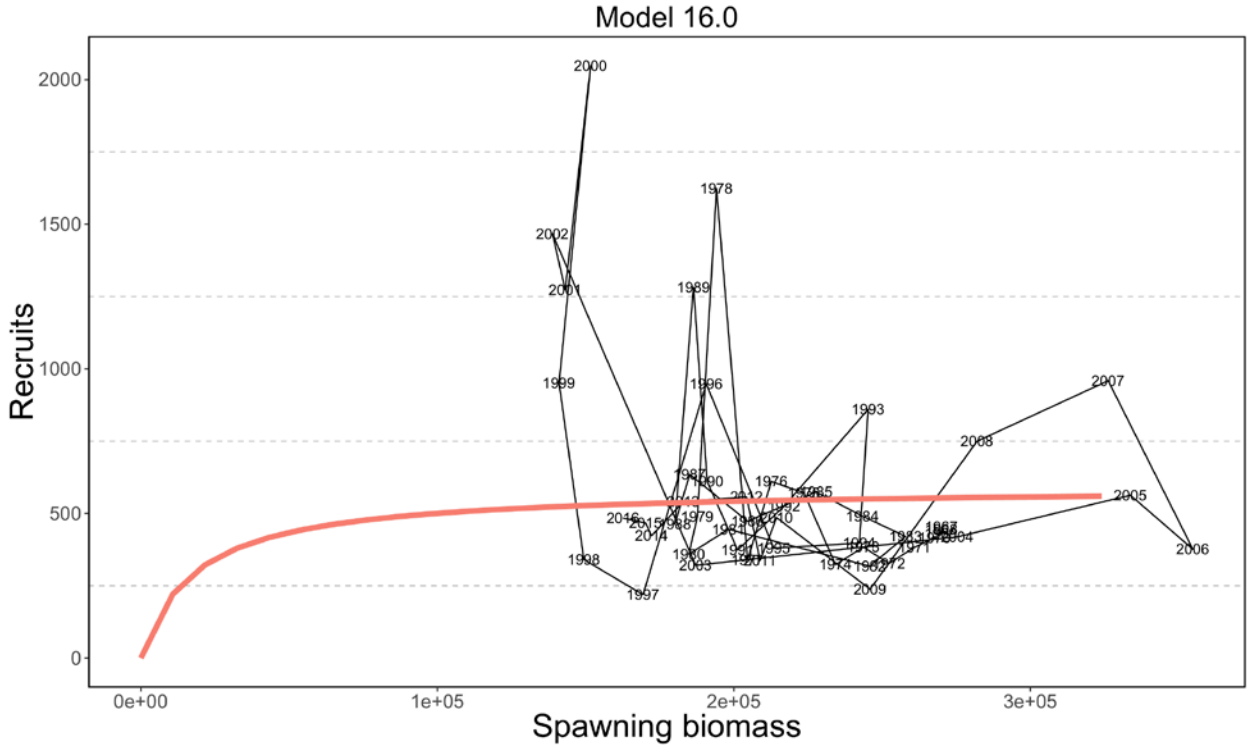


Figure 17.21. Estimated age 1 recruits (millions) versus female spawning biomass (t) for BSAI Atka mackerel. Solid line indicates Beverton-Holt stock recruitment curve (with steepness

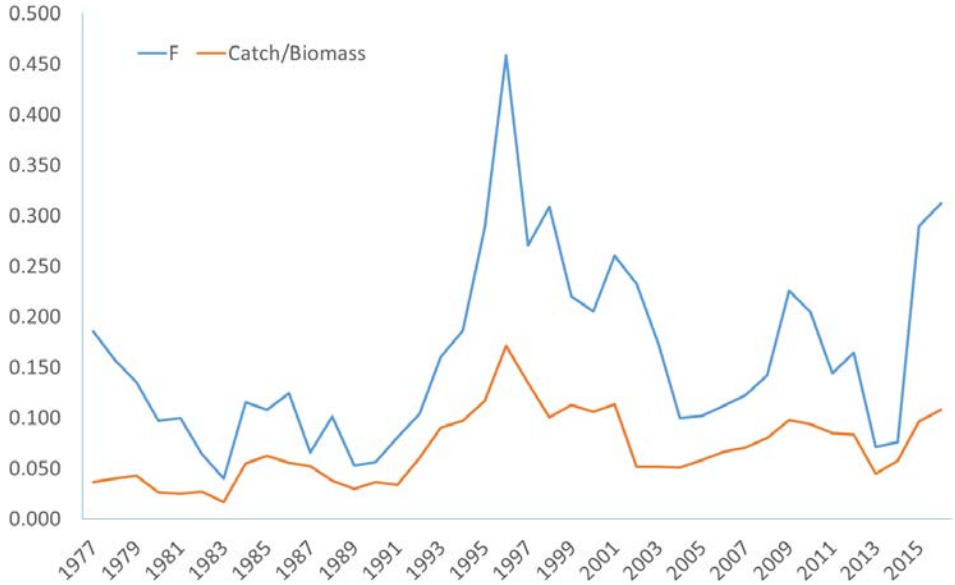


Figure 17.22. Estimated time series of Model 16.0 full-selection fishing mortality and catch/biomass exploitation rates of Atka mackerel, 1977-2015. Catch/biomass rates are the ratios of catch to beginning year age 3+ biomass.

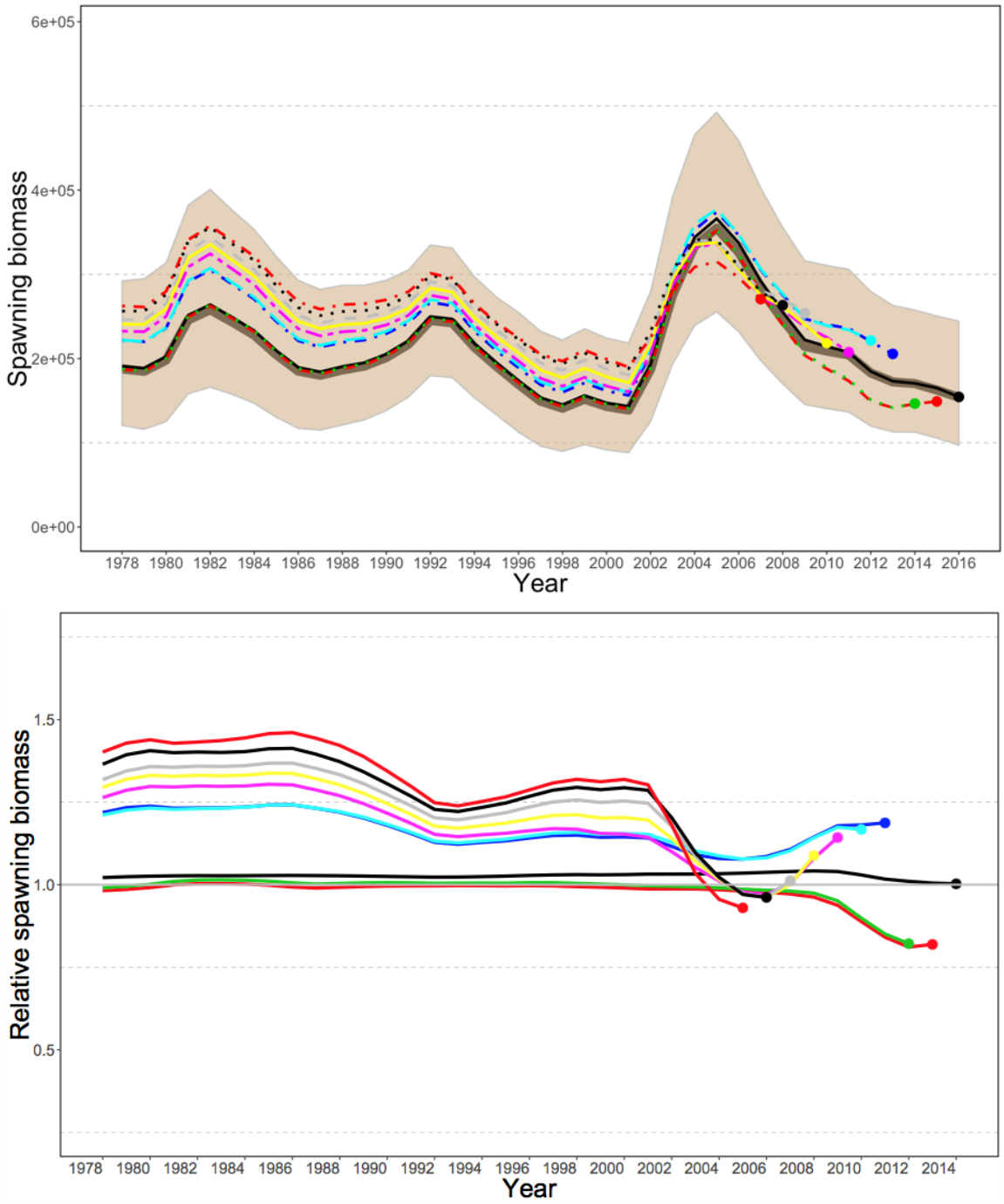


Figure 17.23. Retrospective plots showing the BSAI Atka mackerel spawning biomass over time (top) and the relative difference (bottom) over 10 different "peels".

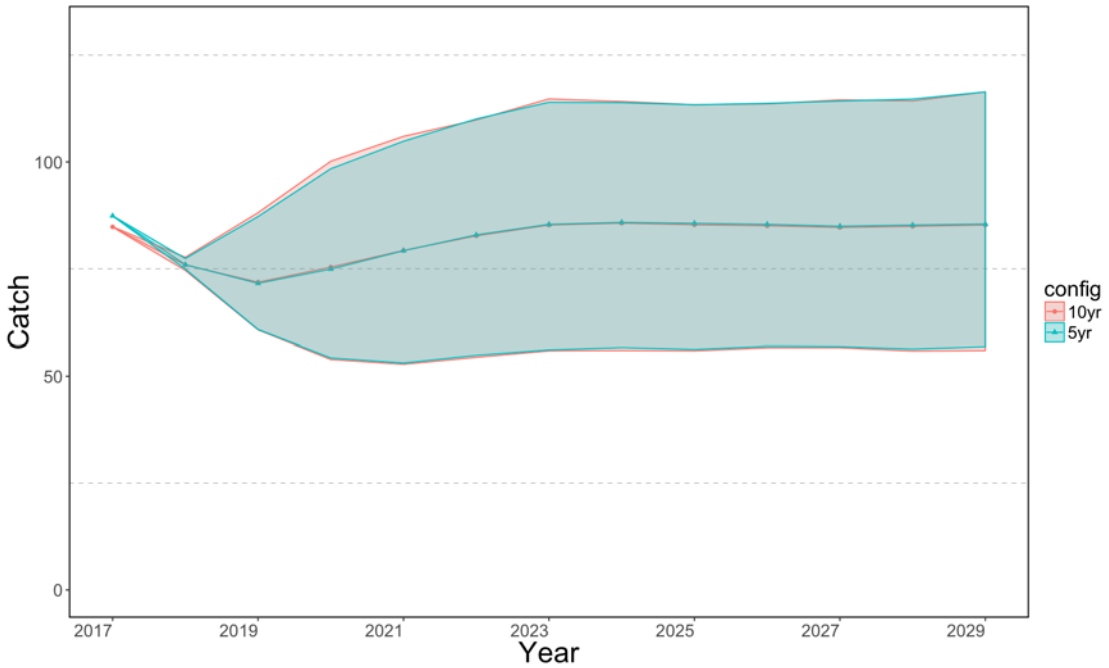


Figure 17.24. As requested by the SSC and BSAI Plan Team, projections were conducted based on a 5-year average selectivity (up to 2015 when the most recent data were available) and a 10-year average.

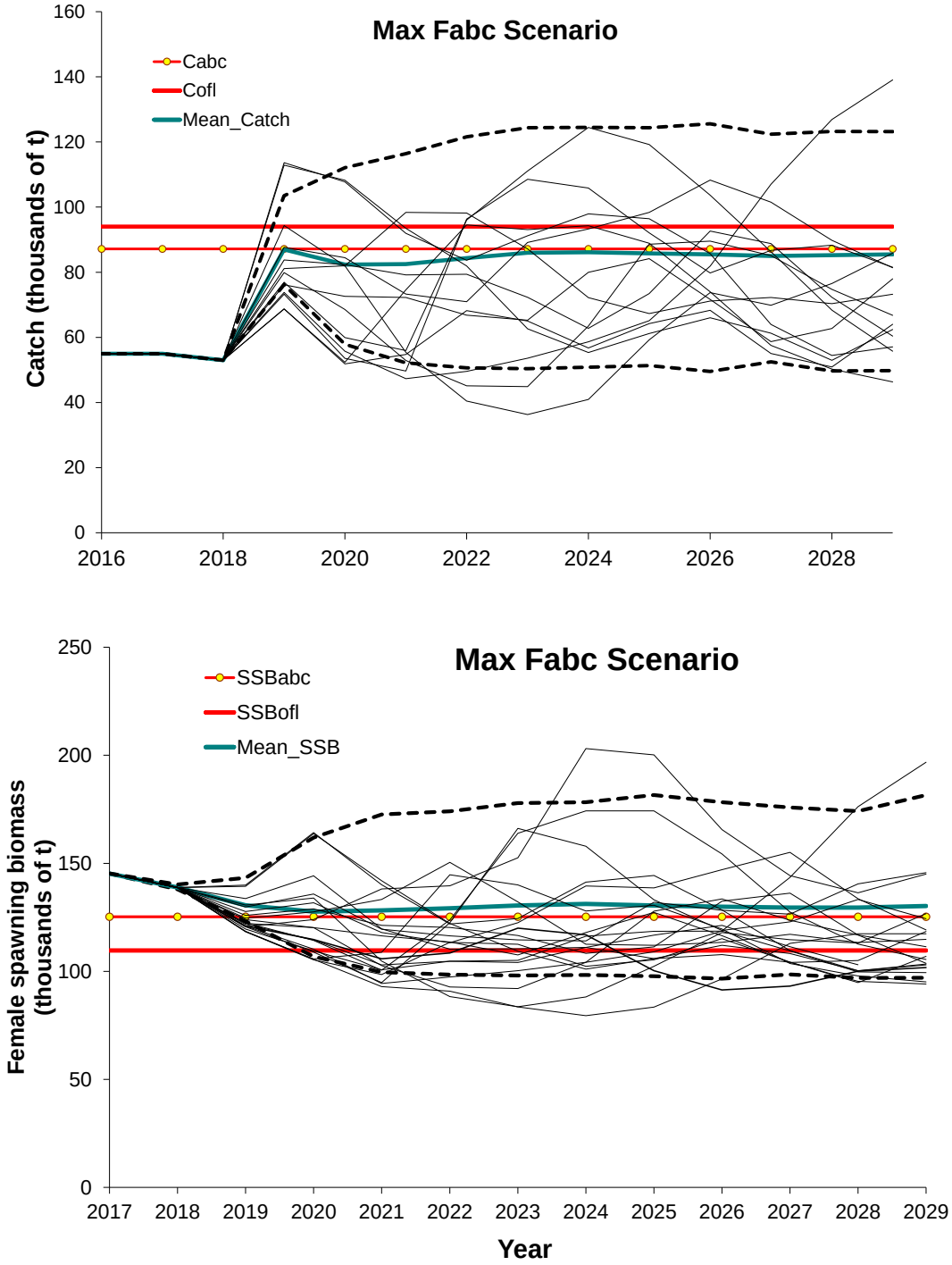


Figure 17.25. Projected Atka mackerel catch (assuming TAC taken in 2016 and reduced 2017 and 2018 catches; top) and spawning biomass (bottom) in thousands of metric tons under maximum permissible Tier 3a harvest specification. The individual thin lines represent samples of simulated trajectories.

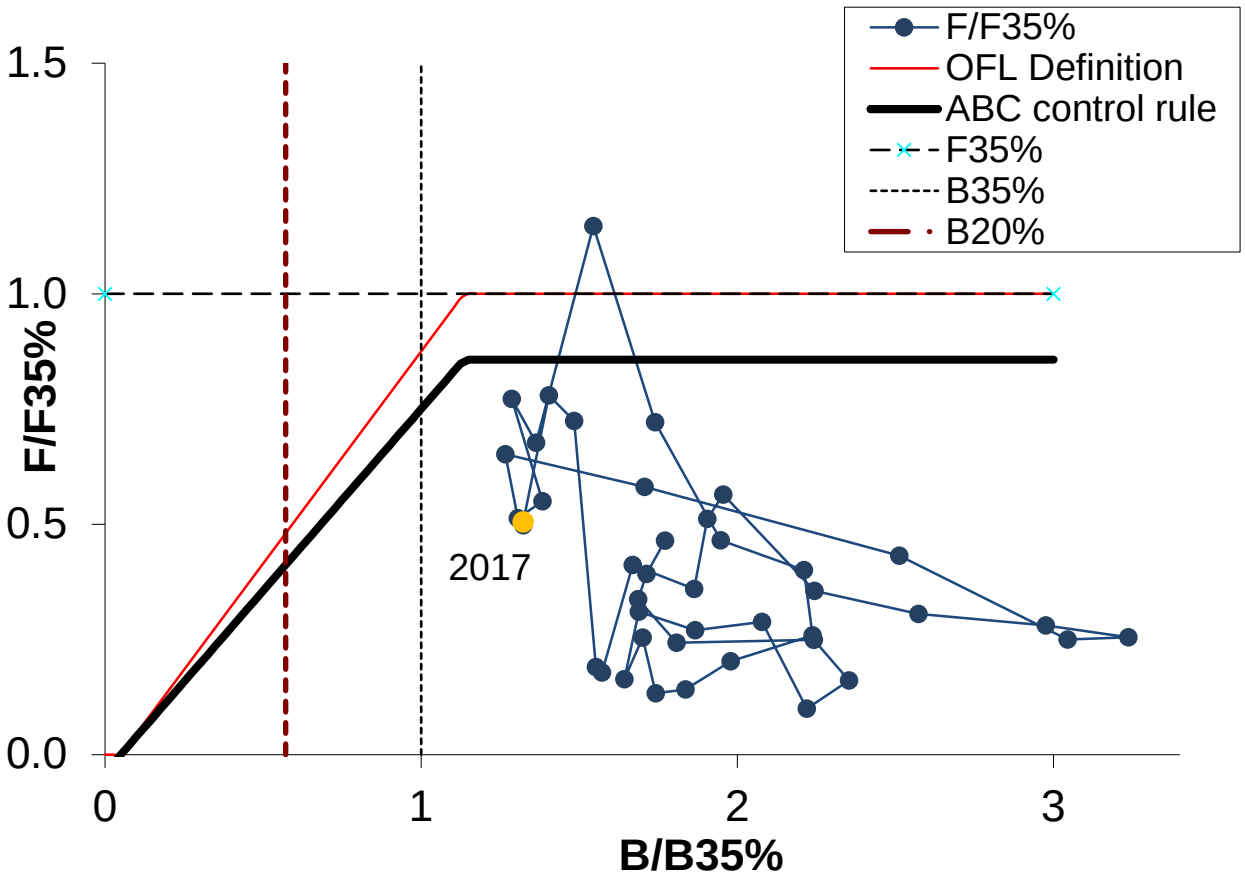


Figure 17.26. Aleutian Islands Atka mackerel spawning biomass relative to $B_{35\%}$ and fishing mortality relative to F_{OFL} (1977-2018). The ratio of fishing mortality to F_{OFL} is calculated using the estimated selectivity pattern in that year. Estimates of spawning biomass and $B_{35\%}$ are based on current estimates of weight-at-age and mean recruitment. Because these estimates change as new data become available, this figure can only be used in a general way to evaluate management performance relative to biomass and fishing mortality reference levels.

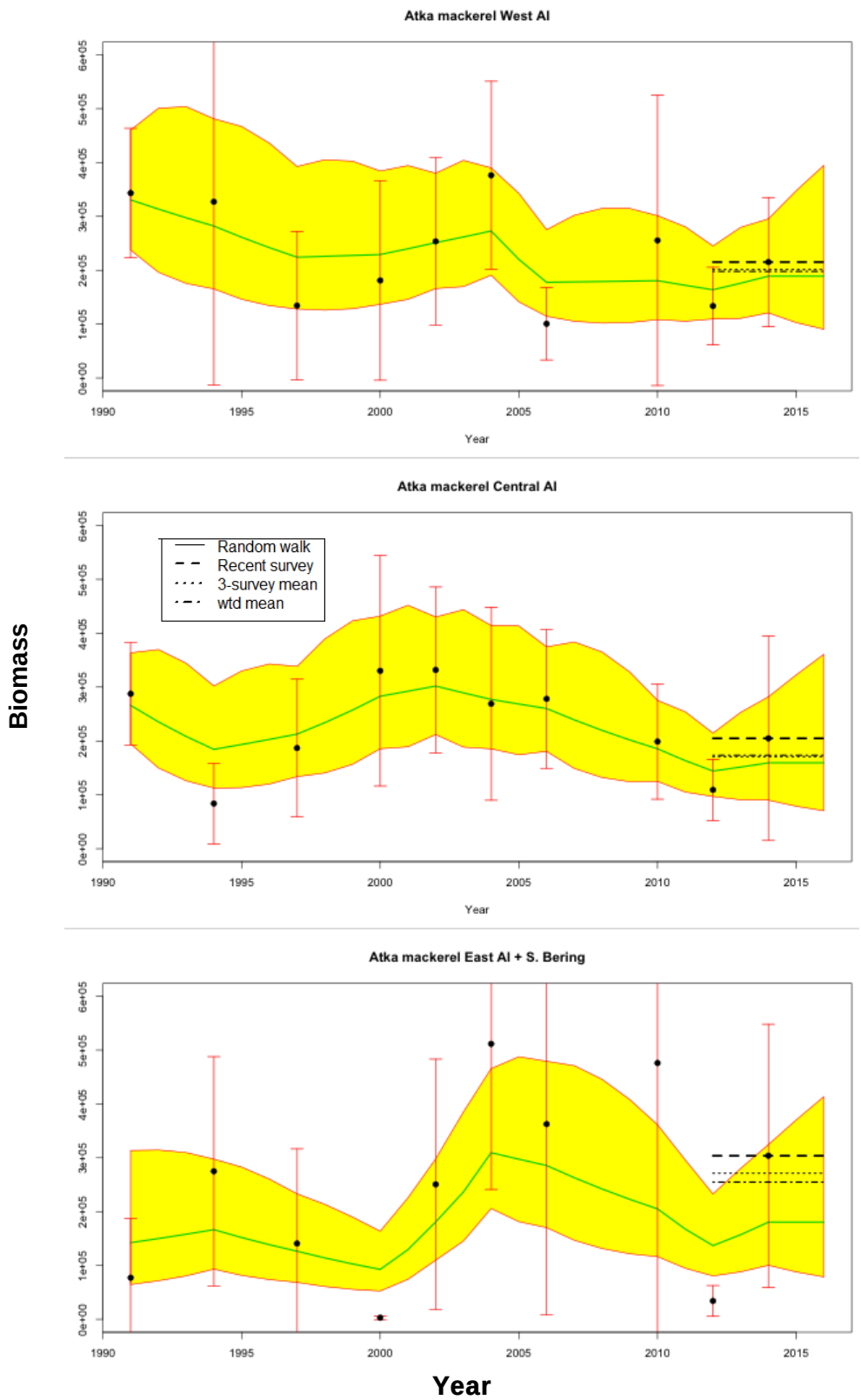


Figure 17.27. Atka mackerel bottom trawl survey biomass by subarea 1991-2016 with random effects model fitting for area apportionment purposes. Dashed lines represent alternative methods for averaging surveys.

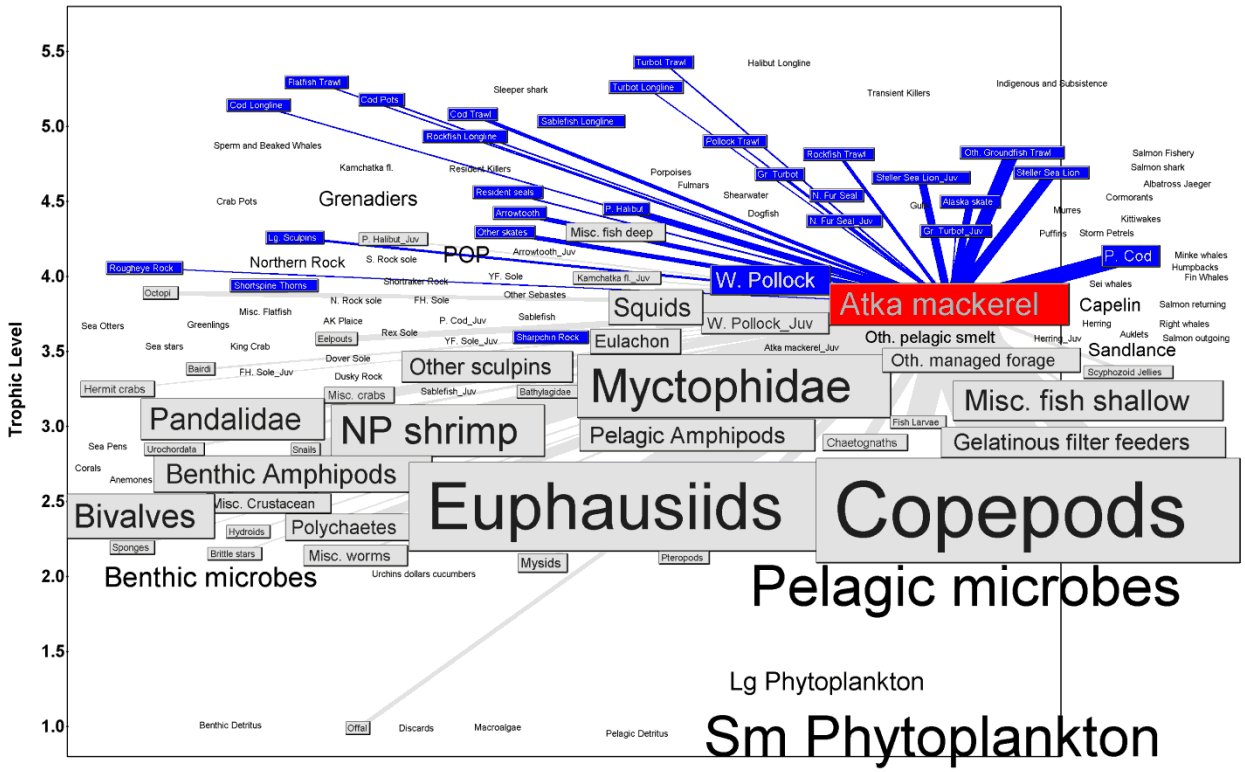
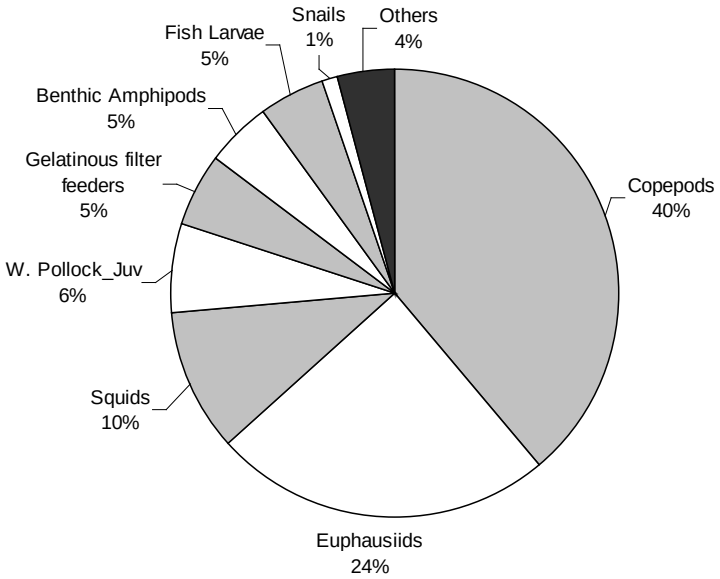
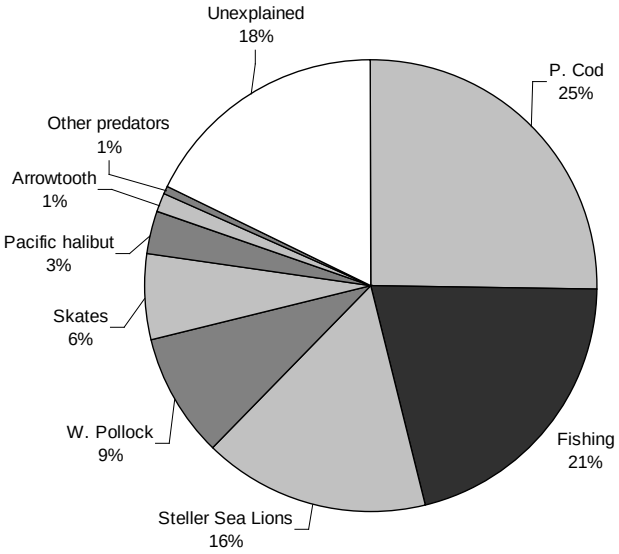


Figure 17.28. The food web of the Aleutian Islands survey region, 1990-1994, emphasizing the position of age 1+ Atka mackerel. Outlined species represent predators of Atka mackerel (dark boxed with light text) and prey of Atka mackerel (light boxes with dark text). Box and text size are proportional to each species' standing stock biomass, while line widths are proportional to the consumption between boxes (t/year). Trophic levels of individual species may be staggered up to +/-0.5 of a trophic level for visibility.



(A)



(B)

Figure 17.29. (A) Diet of age 1+ Atka mackerel, 1990-1994, by percentage wet weight in diet weighted by age-specific consumption rates. (B) Percentage mortality of Atka mackerel by mortality source, 1990-1994. “Unexplained” mortality is the difference between the stock assessment total exploitation rate averaged for 1990-1994, and the predation and fishing mortality, which are calculated independently of the assessment using predator diets, consumption rates, and fisheries catch.

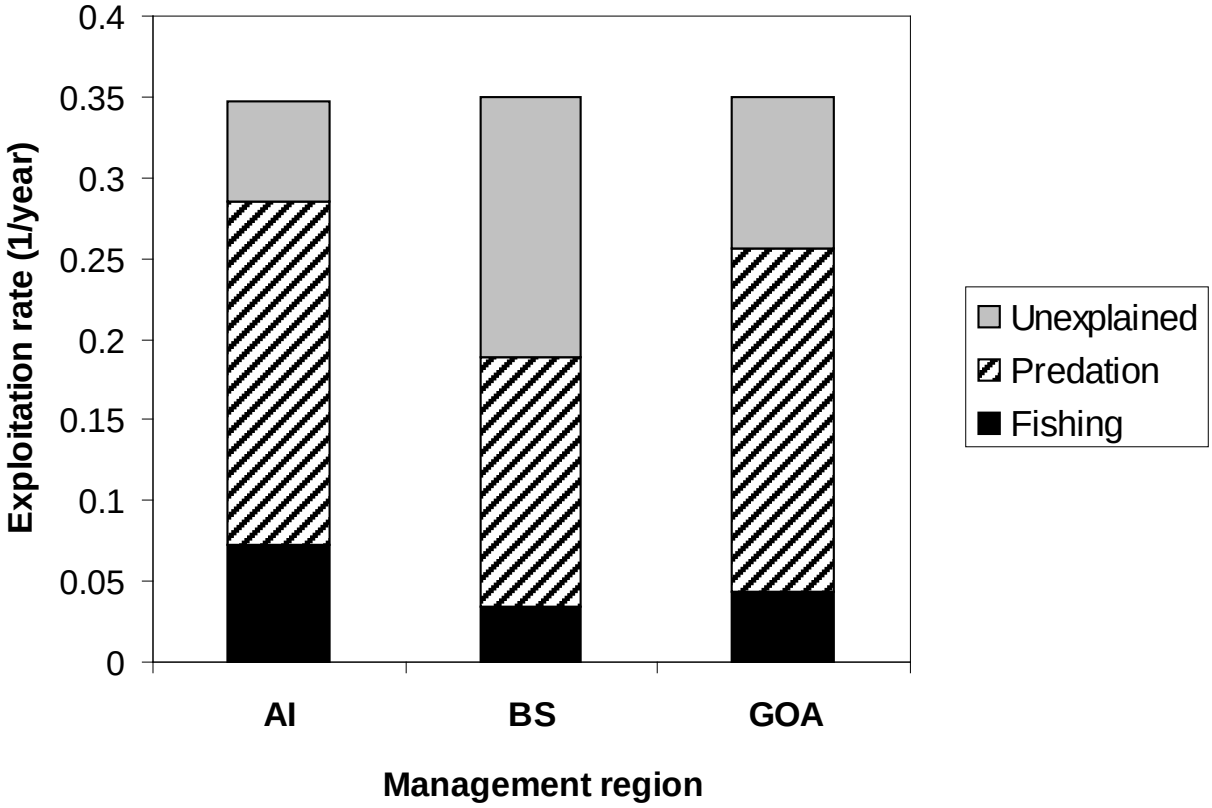


Figure 17.30. Total exploitation rate of age 1+ Atka mackerel, 1990-1994, proportioned into exploitation by fishing (black), predation (striped) and "unexplained" mortality (grey). "Unexplained" mortality is the difference between the stock assessment total exploitation rate averaged for 1990-1994, and the predation and fishing mortality, which are calculated independently of the assessment using predator diets, consumption rates, and fisheries catch.

Appendix 17A

Table A-1. Variable descriptions and model specification.

General Definitions	Symbol/Value	Use in Catch at Age Model
Year index: i = {1977, …., 2016}	i	
Age index: j = {1, 2, 3, …, A}	j	
Mean weight by age j	W_j	
Maximum age beyond which selectivity is constant	*Maxage*	Selectivity parameterization
	σ_d^2	Dome-shape penalty variance term
Instantaneous Natural Mortality	M	Fixed M=0.30, constant over all ages
Proportion females mature at age j	p_j	Definition of spawning biomass
Sample size for proportion at age j in year i	T_i	Scales multinomial assumption about estimates of proportion at age
Survey catchability coefficient	q^s	Prior distribution = lognormal(1.0 , σ_q^2)
Stock-recruitment parameters	R_0	Unfished equilibrium recruitment
	h	Stock-recruitment steepness
	σ_R^2	Recruitment variance
Estimated parameters		
	$\phi_i(37),\ R_0,\ \varepsilon_i(47),\ \sigma_R^2,\ \mu^f,\ \mu^s,\ M,\ \eta_j^s(10),\ \eta_j^f(10),\ F_{50\%},\ F_{40\%},\ F_{30\%},\ q^s$	

Note that the number of selectivity parameters estimated depends on the model configuration.

Table A-2. Variables and equations describing implementation of the Assessment Model for Alaska (AMAK).

Description	Symbol/Constraints	Key Equation(s)
Survey abundance index (*s*) by year	Y_i^s	$\hat{Y}_i^s = q_i^s \sum_{j=1}^{A} s_j^s W_{ij} e^{Z_{i,j}\frac{7}{12}} N_{ij}$
Catch-at-age by year	C_{ij}	$\hat{C}_{ij} = N_{ij} \frac{F_{ij}}{Z_{ij}} \left(1 - e^{-Z_{ij}}\right)$
Catch biomass	$\hat{C}_i^B$	$\hat{C}_i^B = \sum_j W_{ij} \hat{C}_{ij}$
Initial numbers at age	$j = 1$	$N_{1977,1} = e^{\mu_R + \varepsilon_{1977}}$
	$1 < j < A$	$N_{1977,j} = e^{\mu_R + \varepsilon_{1978-j}} \prod_{j=1}^{j} e^{-M}$
Maximum age	$j = A$	$N_{1977,A} = N_{1977,A-1} \left(1 - e^{-M}\right)^{-1}$
Subsequent years ($i > 1977$)	$j = 1$	$N_{i,1} = e^{\mu_R + \varepsilon_i}$
	$1 < j < A$	$N_{i,j} = N_{i-1,j-1} e^{-Z_{i-1,j-1}}$
	$j = A$	$N_{i,15^+} = N_{i-1,14}\, e^{-Z_{i-1,14}} + N_{i-1,15}\, e^{-Z_{i-1,15}}$
Year effect, i = 1967, …, 2016	$\varepsilon_i,\ \sum_{i=1967}^{2015} \varepsilon_i = 0$	$N_{i,1} = e^{\mu_R + \varepsilon_i}$
Index catchability Mean effect	$\mu^s,\ \mu^f$	$q_i^s = e^{\mu^s}$
Age effect	$\eta_j^s,\ \sum_{j=1}^{A} \eta_j^s = 0$	$s_j^s = e^{\eta_j^s}$ $\quad j \le \text{maxage}$
		$s_j^s = e^{\eta_{\text{maxage}}^s}$ $\quad j > \text{maxage}$
Instantaneous fishing mortality		$F_{ij} = e^{\mu_f + \eta_j^f + \phi_i}$
mean fishing effect	μ_f	
Annual effect of fishing in year i	$\phi_i,\ \sum_{i=1977}^{2015} \phi_i = 0$	
Age effect of fishing (regularized) in year time variation allowed	$\eta_{ij}^f,\ \sum_{j=1}^{A} \eta_{ij} = 0$	$s_{ij}^f = e^{\eta_j^f}$, $\quad j \le \text{maxage}$
		$s_{ij}^f = e^{\eta_{\text{maxage}}^f}$ $\quad j > \text{maxage}$
In years where selectivity is constant over time	$\eta_{i,j}^f = \eta_{i-1,j}^f$	$i \ne \text{change year}$
Natural Mortality	M	
Total mortality		$Z_{ij} = F_{ij} + M$
Recruitment Beverton-Holt form	$\tilde{R}_i$	$\tilde{R}_i = \frac{\alpha B_i}{\beta + B_i}$, $\alpha = \frac{4hR_0}{5h-1}$ and $\beta = \frac{B_0(1-h)}{5h-1}$ where $B_0 = \tilde{R}_0 \varphi$ $\varphi = \frac{e^{-AM} W_A p_A}{1 - e^{-M}} + \sum_{j=1}^{A} e^{-M(j-1)} W_j p_j$

Table A-3. Specification of objective function that is minimized (i.e., the penalized negative of the log-likelihood).

Likelihood /penalty component		Description / notes
Abundance indices	$L_1 = \lambda_1 \sum_i \ln\left(Y_i^s \big/ \hat{Y}_i^s \right)^2 \frac{1}{2\sigma_i^2}$	Survey abundance
Prior on smoothness for selectivities	$L_2 = \sum_l \lambda_2^l \sum_{j=1}^{A} \left(\eta_{j+2}^l + \eta_j^l - 2\eta_{j+1}^l \right)^2$	Smoothness (second differencing), Note: *l={s,* or *f}* for survey and fishery selectivity
Prior on extent of dome-shape for fishery selectivity	$L_3 = \sum_l \lambda_3^l \sum_{j=5}^{A} \left(I_j d_j \right)^2$ $d_j = \left(\ln\left(s_j^f\right) - \ln\left(s_{j-1}^f\right) \right)$ $I_j = \begin{cases} 1 \text{ if } d_j > 0 \\ 0 \text{ if } d_j \le 0 \end{cases}$	Allows model some flexibility on degree of declining selectivity at age
Prior on recruitment regularity	$L_4 = \lambda_4 \sum_{i=1967}^{2015} \varepsilon_i^2 +$ $0.5 \sum_{t=1977}^{2015} \left(\ln R_t - \ln \hat{R}_t \right) / \sigma_R^2$	Influences estimates where data are lacking (e.g., if no signal of recruitment strength is available, then the recruitment estimate will converge to median value).
Catch biomass likelihood	$L_5 = \lambda_5 \sum_{i=1977}^{2015} \ln\left(C_i^B \big/ \hat{C}_i^B \right)^2$	Fit to survey
Proportion at age likelihood	$L_6 = -\sum_{l,i,j} T_{ij}^l P_{ij}^l \ln\left(\hat{P}_{ij}^l \cdot P_{ij}^l \right)$	*l={s, f}* for survey and fishery age composition observations
Fishing mortality regularity	$L_{\cdot} = \lambda_6 \sum_{i=1978}^{2015} \phi_i^2$	(relaxed in final phases of estimation)
Priors	$L_7 = \left[\lambda_7 \frac{\ln\left(M/\hat{M} \right)^2}{2\sigma_M^2} + \lambda_8 \frac{\ln\left(q/\hat{q} \right)^2}{2\sigma_q^2} \right]$	Prior on natural mortality, and survey catchability (reference case assumption that *M is* precisely known at 0.3).
Overall objective function to be minimized	$\dot{L} = \sum_{i=1}^{7} L_i$	

Appendix 17B. Supplemental catch data

In order to comply with the Annual Catch Limit (ACL) requirements, two new datasets have been generated to help estimate total catch and removals from NMFS stocks in Alaska.

The first dataset, non-commercial removals, estimates total available removals that do not occur during directed groundfish fishing activities. These include removals incurred during research, subsistence, personal use, recreational, and exempted fishing permit activities, but do not include removals taken in fisheries other than those managed under the groundfish FMP. These estimates represent additional sources of removals to the existing Catch Accounting System (CAS) estimates. Estimates for Atka mackerel from this dataset are shown along with trawl survey removals from 1977-2015 in Table 17B-1. Recent removals from activities other than directed fishing totaled 140 t in 2010, 1,529 t in 2011, 62 t in 2012, <1 t in 2013, 111 t in 2014, and 58 t in 2015. This is approximately 0.2, 2.0, <0.1, <0.1, 0.2, and <0.1% of the 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, and 2015 ABCs respectively, and represent a very low risk to the stock. These removals were not incorporated in the stocks assessment. If these removals were accounted for in the stock assessment model, the recommended ABCs for 2017 and 2018 would likely change very little.

The second dataset, Halibut Fishery Incidental Catch Estimation (HFICE), is an estimate of the incidental catch of groundfish in the halibut IFQ fishery in Alaska, which is currently unobserved. To estimate removals in the halibut fishery, methods were developed by the HFICE working group and approved by the Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands Groundfish Plan Teams and the Scientific and Statistical Committee of the North Pacific Fishery Management Council. A detailed description of the methods is available in Tribuzio et al. (2011). There are no reported catches >0.5 t of BSAI Atka mackerel from this dataset.

References

Cahalan J., J. Mondragon., and J. Gasper. 2010. Catch Sampling and Estimation in the Federal Groundfish Fisheries off Alaska. NOAA Technical Memorandum NMFS-AFSC-205. 42 p.

Tribuzio, C.A., S. Gaichas, J. Gasper, H. Gilroy, T. Kong, O. Ormseth, J. Cahalan, J. DiCosimo, M. Furuness, H. Shen, and K. Green. 2011. Methods for the estimation of non-target species catch in the unobserved halibut IFQ fleet. August Plan Team document. Presented to the Joint Plan Teams of the North Pacific Fishery Management Council.

Table 17B-1. Total removals of BSAI Atka mackerel (t) from activities not related to directed fishing, since 1977. "Trawl" refers to a combination of the NMFS echo-integration; small-mesh; large-mesh; and Aleutian Islands bottom trawl surveys; and occasional short-term research projects involving trawl gear. "Longline" refers to either the NMFS or IPHC longline survey. "Other" refers to recreational, personal use, and subsistence harvest.

			Longline			
Year	Source	Trawl	NMFS	IPHC	Other	Total
1977	AFSC	0				0
1978	AFSC	0				0
1979	AFSC	0				0
1980	AFSC	48				48
1981	AFSC	0				0
1982	AFSC	1				1
1983	AFSC	151				151
1984	AFSC	0				0
1985	AFSC	0				0
1986	AFSC	130				130
1987	AFSC	0				0
1988	AFSC	0				0
1989	AFSC	0				0
1990	AFSC	0				0
1991	AFSC	77				77
1992	AFSC	0				0
1993	AFSC	0				0
1994	AFSC	147				147
1995	AFSC	0				0
1996	AFSC	0				0
1997	AFSC	85				85
1998	AFSC	0				0
1999	AFSC	0				0

Table 17B-1cont. Total removals of BSAI Atka mackerel (t) from activities not related to directed fishing, since 1977. "Trawl" refers to a combination of the NMFS echo-integration; small-mesh; large-mesh; and Aleutian Islands bottom trawl surveys; and occasional short-term research projects involving trawl gear. "Longline" refers to either the NMFS or IPHC longline survey. "Other" refers to recreational, personal use, and subsistence harvest.

			Longline			
Year	Source	Trawl	NMFS	IPHC	Other	Total
2000	AFSC	105				105
2001	AFSC	0				0
2002	AFSC	171				171
2003	AFSC	0				0
2004	AFSC	240				240
2005	AFSC	0				0
2006	AFSC	99				99
2007	AFSC	0				0
2008	AFSC	0				0
2009	AFSC	0				0
2010	AFSC	140				140
2011	AFSC	1,529				1,529
2012	AFSC	62				62
2013	AFSC	0				0
2014	AFSC	111				111
2015	AFSC	58				58

Appendix 17C

Atka mackerel (BSAI) Economic Performance Report for 2015

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Atka mackerel is predominantly caught in the Aleutian Islands, and almost exclusively by the Amendment 80 Fleet. The fishery for Atka mackerel has been a catch share fishery since 2008 when Amendment 80 was implemented rationalizing the fleet of catcher/processor vessels in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands region targeting flatfish, Atka mackerel and Pacific ocean perch.[3] In 2015 Atka mackerel total catch increased to 54 thousand t bringing it back to roughly 2011 catch levels after significant reductions in the TAC in 2012 and 2013 when catch levels dropped to approximately 40% of the 2001-2010 average (Table 1). The lower catch was due to area closures to protect endangered Steller sea lions and survey-based changes in the spatial apportionment of TAC. Recent increases in TAC reflect the continued health of the stock and expanded fishing opportunities in the Aleutian Islands. Commensurate with the change in catch, first-wholesale production increased. The result was a 17.4% growth in first-wholesale revenue to $74 million, despite a 25.4% decrease in the wholesale price.

The U.S. (Alaska), Japan and Russian are the major producers of Atka mackerel.[4] Approximately 90% of the Alaska caught Atka mackerel production volume is processed as head-and-gut (H&G), while the remainder is mostly sold as whole fish (Table 1). Virtually all of Alaska's Atka mackerel production is exported, mostly to Asian markets. In Asia it undergoes secondary processing into products like surimi, salted-and-split and other consumable product forms (Table 2). Industry reports that the domestic market is minimal and data indicate U.S. imports are approximately 0.1% of global production. The upward trend in first-wholesale and export prices have been influenced by international factors. In particular, global supply of Atka mackerel has been in decline because of substantial decreases in catch volume both in the US and Japan. Global production dropped from an average of 265 thousand t between 2001-2010 to 154 thousand tons in between 2011 and 2014 (Table 2). The reductions in international supply mean that the U.S. has captured a larger share of global production global production in recent years relative to the 2001-2010 average (Table 2). The global supply reductions have upward pressure on the price. Additionally, the recent opening of previously restricted areas off the Aleutians has given industry more access to larger fish which yield a higher price per pound in the market. The increased price of Atka mackerel in recent years has had the effect of actually increasing first-wholesale value (excluding 2013) above the 2001-2010 average despite the reduced production volume (Table 1). International production of Atka mackerel has been on the decline primarily because of reductions in Japanese catch and production which persisted through 2015. The U.S. exchange rate was a likely factor in the 2015 first-wholesale price decrease as the value of the Dollar increased 12.5% over the Yen between 2014 and 2015 and Japan constitutes roughly 70% of the export value (Table 2). Additionally, industry reports that the

[3] Because Atka mackerel is only targeted by at-sea catcher/processor vessel there is not an effective ex-vessel market for it. Though ex-vessel statistics are computed for national reporting purposes.

[4] Japan and Russia catch the distinct species Okhotsk atka mackerel which are substitutes as the markets treat the two species identically.

price in 2014 may have overshot a level that the market can sustain and buyers may be anticipating future harvest increases.

Table 1. Atka mackerel catch and first-wholesale market data. Total and retained catch (thousand metric tons), number of vessel, first-wholesale production (thousand metric tons), value (million US$), price (US$ per pound), and head and gut share of production; 2001-2010 average and 2011-2015.

	2001-2010 Average	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Total catch K mt	62.0	53.4	49	24.5	32	54.5
Retained catch K mt	55.9	51.1	47.2	23.4	31.5	53.4
Vessels #	15	14	14	14	11	14
First-wholesale production K mt	32.92	32.74	30.17	14.57	20.88	32.87
First-wholesale value M US$	$42.89	$74.90	$74.80	$39.40	$63.30	$74.30
First-wholesale price/lb US$	$0.59	$1.04	$1.12	$1.23	$1.38	$1.03
H&G share of value	90%	93%	90%	87%	93%	95%

Source: NMFS Alaska Region Blend and Catch-accounting System estimates; NMFS Alaska Region At-sea Production Reports; and ADF&G Commercial Operators Annual Reports (COAR). Data compiled and provided by the Alaska Fisheries Information Network (AKFIN).

Table 2. Atka mackerel U.S. trade and global market data. Global production (thousand metric tons), U.S. share of global production, U.S. export volume (thousand metric tons), U.S. export value (million US$), U.S. export price (US$ per pound) and the share of U.S. export value from Japan; 2001-2010 average and 2011-2016.

	2001-2010 Average	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016 (thru June)
Global production K mt	256.98	179.85	186.01	130.42	120.17	-	-
US share global production	22%	28%	25%	18%	26%	-	-
Export value M US$	$34.38	$29.88	$40.45	$34.75	$53.18	$84.10	$35.98
Export quantity K mt	22.235	21.85	20.1	12.73	19.53	30.13	13.05
Export price/lb US$	$0.69	$0.62	$0.91	$1.24	$1.24	$1.27	$1.25
Japan's share of export value	73%	56%	61%	62%	66%	73%	73%
Exchange rate, Yen/Dollar	110.00	79.81	79.79	97.60	105.94	121.04	107.32

Source: FAO Fisheries & Aquaculture Dept. Statistics http://www.fao.org/fishery/statistics/en. NOAA Fisheries, Fisheries Statistics Division, Foreign Trade Division of the U.S. Census Bureau, http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/commercial-fisheries/foreign-trade/index. U.S. Department of Agriculture http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/agricultural-exchange-rate-data-set.aspx.

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