

2027-2031 OFLs and ABCs for Three Groundfish Stocks

GROUNDFISH PDT

SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE

OCTOBER 7, 2026

NEW BEDFORD, MA AND WEBINAR



New England Fishery
Management Council

THREE STOCKS

1. Northern Windowpane Flounder
2. Southern Windowpane Flounder
3. Witch Flounder



TERMS OF REFERENCE

- A. Consider the results of the Northeast Fisheries Science Center's (NEFSC) 2025 data updates for Northern and Southern windowpane flounder, the 2026 data update for witch flounder, and information provided by the Council's Groundfish Plan Development Team.
- B. Recommend OFLs and ABCs for these three stocks for FY 2027 – 2031 that will prevent overfishing, be consistent with the Council's groundfish ABC control rule and rebuilding plans, and consider the Council's Risk Policy.



COUNCIL'S GROUNDFISH ABC CONTROL RULE

These ABC control rules will be used in the absence of better information that may allow a more explicit determination of scientific uncertainty for a stock or stocks. If such information is available - that is, if scientific uncertainty can be characterized in a more accurate fashion -- it can be used by the SSC to determine ABCs, these ABC control rules can be modified in a future Council action (an amendment, framework, or specification package):

- A. ABC should be determined as the catch associated with 75% of FMSY.
- B. If fishing at 75% of FMSY does not achieve the mandated rebuilding requirements for overfished stocks, ABC should be determined as the catch associated with the fishing mortality that meets rebuilding requirements (Frebuild).
- C. For stocks that cannot rebuild to BMSY in the specified rebuilding period, even with no fishing, the ABC should be based on incidental bycatch, including a reduction in bycatch rate (i.e., the proportion of the stock caught as bycatch).
- D. Interim ABCs should be determined for stocks with unknown status according to case-by- case recommendations from the SSC.



FRAMEWORK 74 – 2027-2031 SPECIFICATIONS ACTION

- Data updates for both windowpane stocks provided in 2025.
 - PDT also reviewed 2025 data.
 - Last assessment for each windowpane stock was 2023.
- Data update for witch flounder provided in 2026.
 - Last witch flounder assessment was 2024.
 - Updated empirical assessment expected in 2027.
- Additional stocks will be presented to the SSC on October 27, 2026.
- Framework 74 will also look at simplifying the existing AM criteria for southern windowpane flounder.
- Final Council action in December 2026.
- Implementation target is May 1, 2027.



POSSIBLE OFL AND ABC OPTIONS

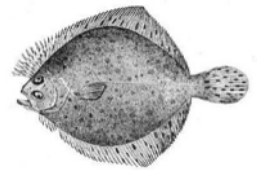
- Two possible constant OFL and ABC options were developed for each stock.
 - A.** Maintaining status quo catch advice.
 - B.** ABC adjusted by the updated survey biomass.
- The PDT discussed updated survey biomass indices and fishery catch data in the data updates in context with the most recent management track assessments.
- All three stocks have empirical survey-based assessments.
- The PDT discussed uncertainties associated with status quo catch advice and the adjusted ABC option.



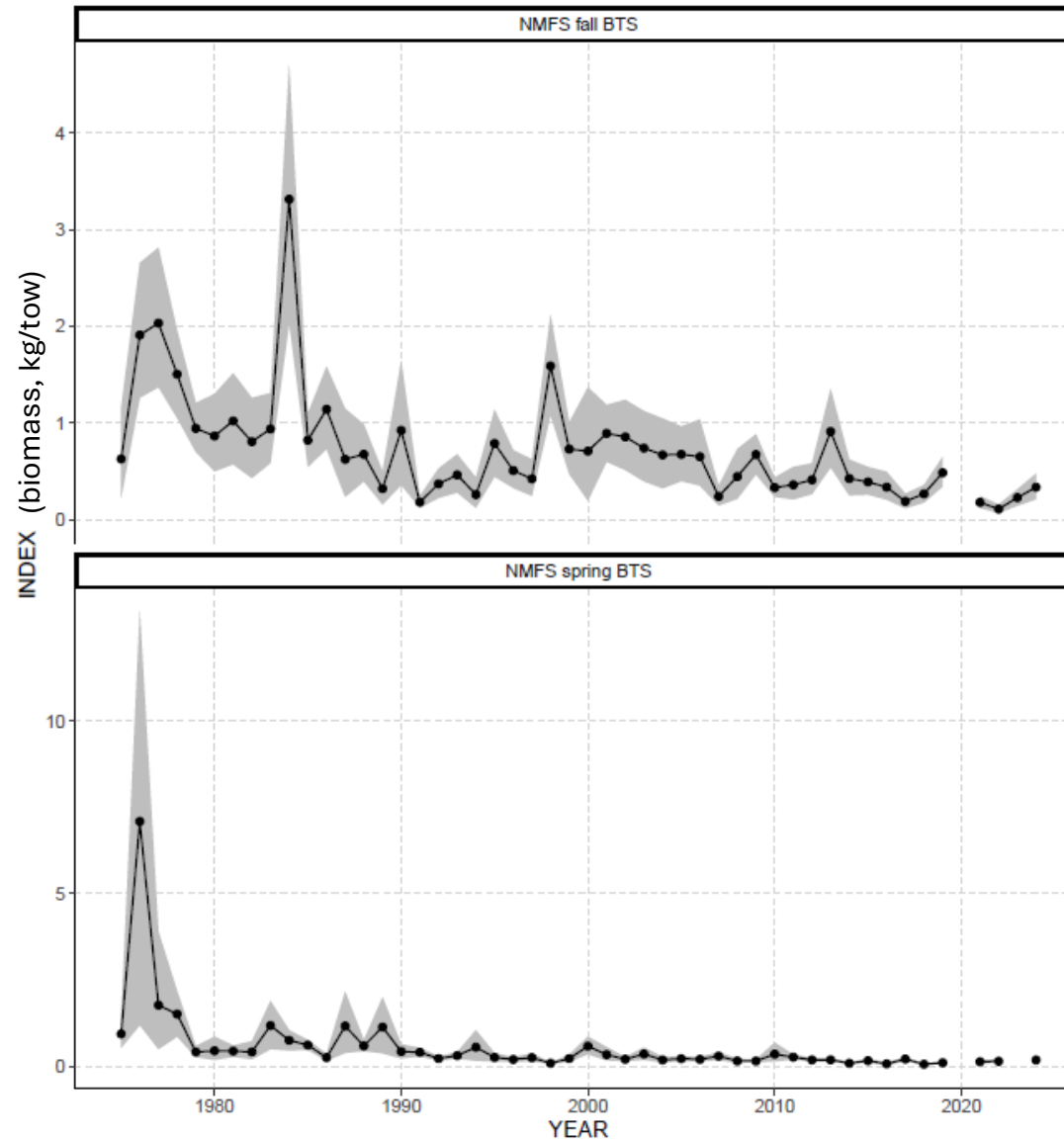
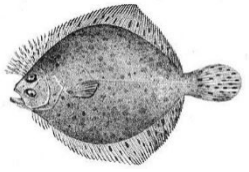
BACKGROUND: NORTHERN WINDOWPANE 2023 MT ASSESSMENT

MODEL	Empirical area swept
STOCK STATUS	Unknown (Official NOAA stock status: Overfished, Overfishing is not occurring)
REBUILDING	2029 ($70\%F_{MSY}$ Frebuild, no projection)
UNCERTAINTIES	Data limited assessment. Potential unexplained mortality, with a lack of response seen in the survey biomass index despite apparently low exploitation rates. Inability to generate biological reference points (BRPs). Uncertainty in catch input because the catch is almost entirely comprised of discards (zero possession).

- OFL unknown
- ABC for FYs 2024-2026 was calculated as the average of the exploitation rates of the no possession years (2010-2022) x 3-year average of the fall survey index.
 - Year 1 = Average of 2019 and 2021 (2020 missing)
 - Year 2 = 2021
 - Year 3 = 2022

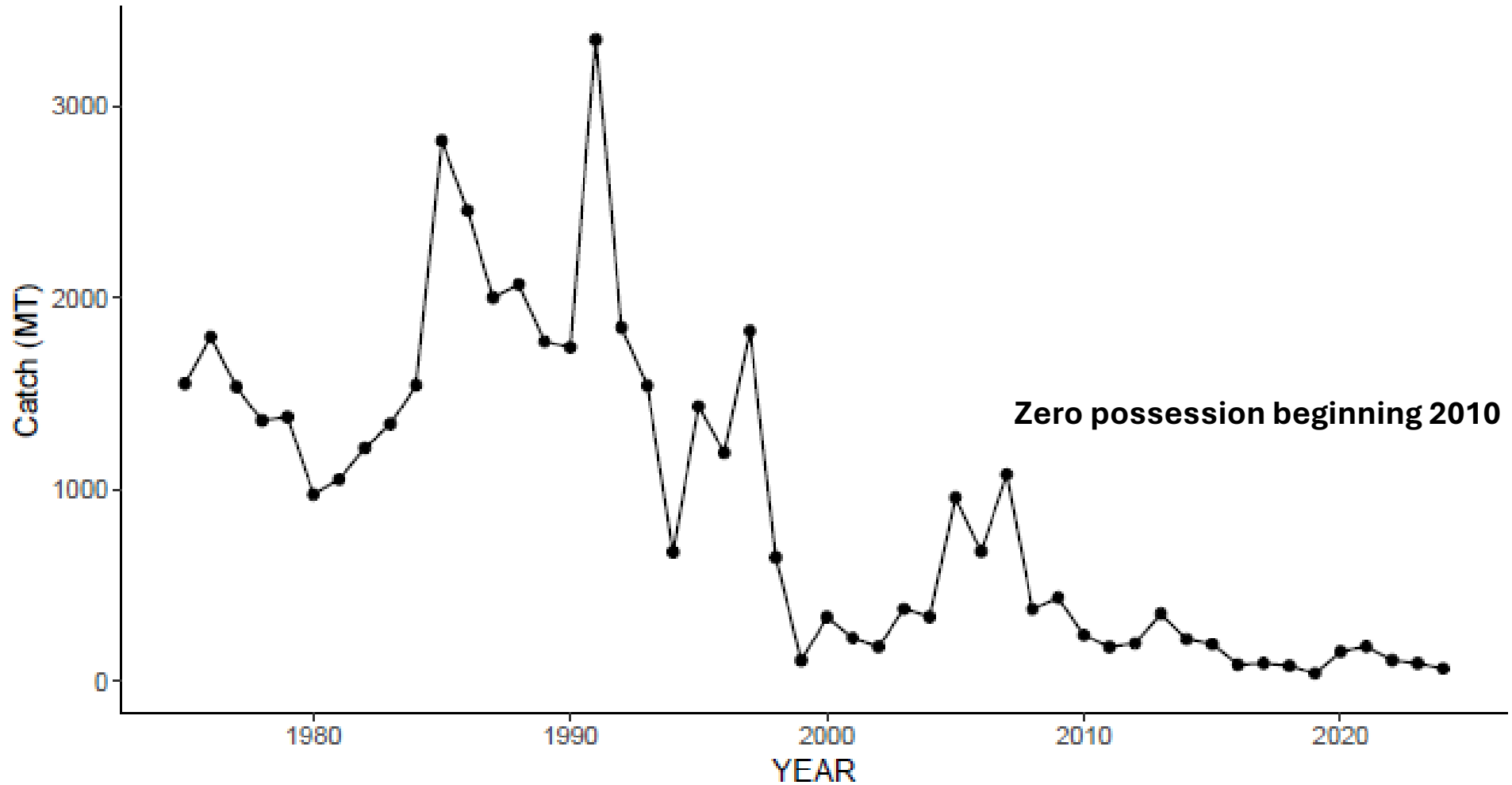
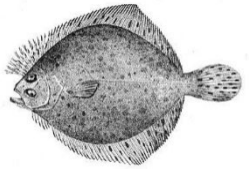


2025 DATA UPDATE – SURVEY BIOMASS INDICES

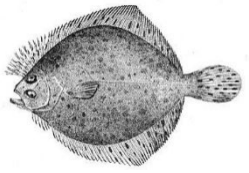


Only fall index used
in the assessment

2025 DATA UPDATE – TOTAL CATCH



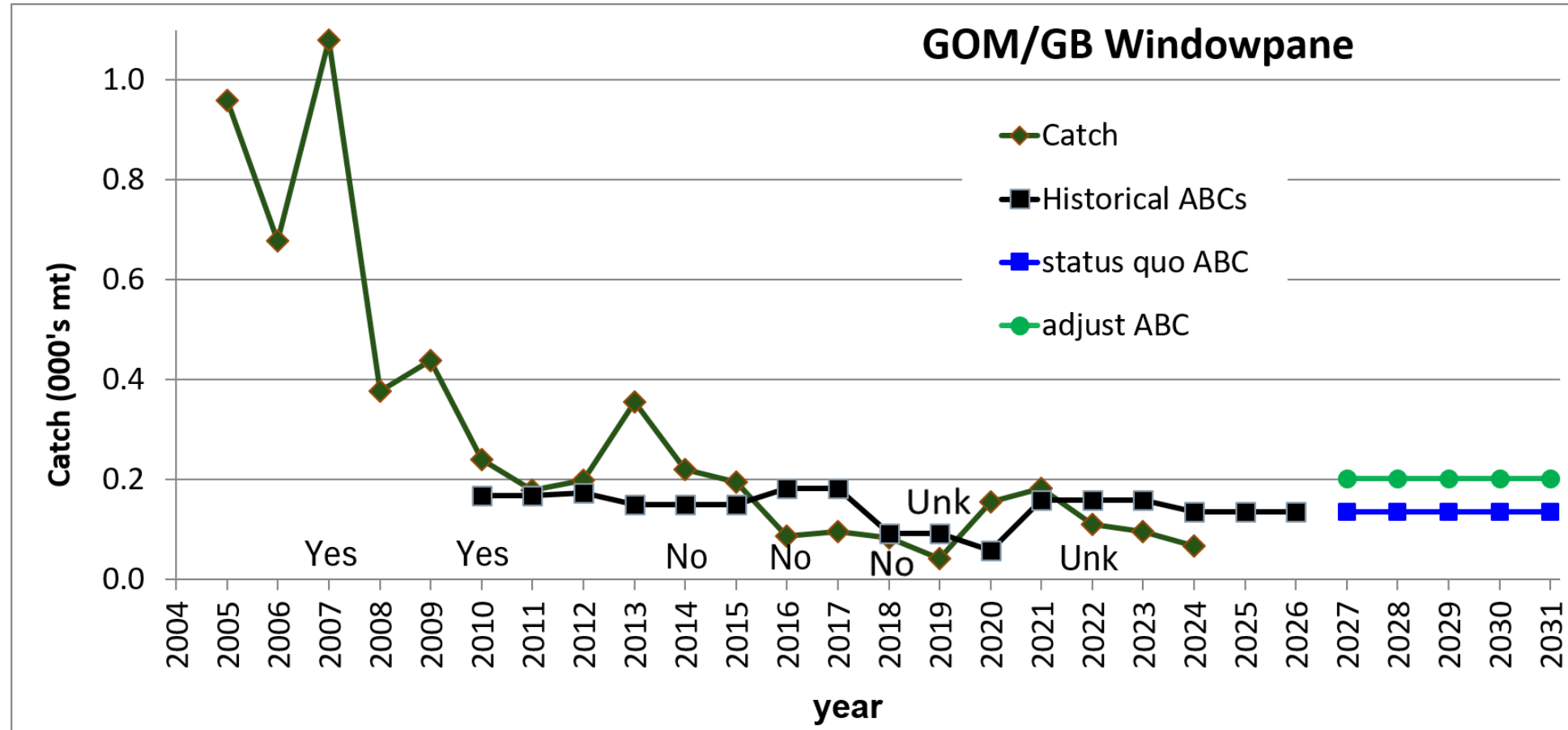
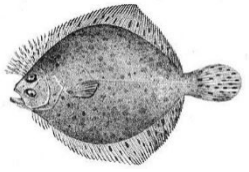
CATCH PERFORMANCE



Year	Catch	Historical	Historical	Option 1	Option 2
		OFLs	ABCs	Status Quo	ABC Adjustment
2010	241	225	169		
2011	179	225	169		
2012	199	230	173		
2013	356	202	151		
2014	221	202	151		
2015	195	202	151		
2016	88	243	182		
2017	96	243	182		
2018	83	122	92		
2019	43	122	92		
2020	156	84	59		
2021	182	Unk	160		
2022	111	Unk	160		
2023	96	Unk	160		
2024	68	Unk	136		
2025		Unk	136		
2026		Unk	136		
2027				136	202
2028				136	202
2029				136	202
2030				136	202
2031				136	202



CATCH PERFORMANCE

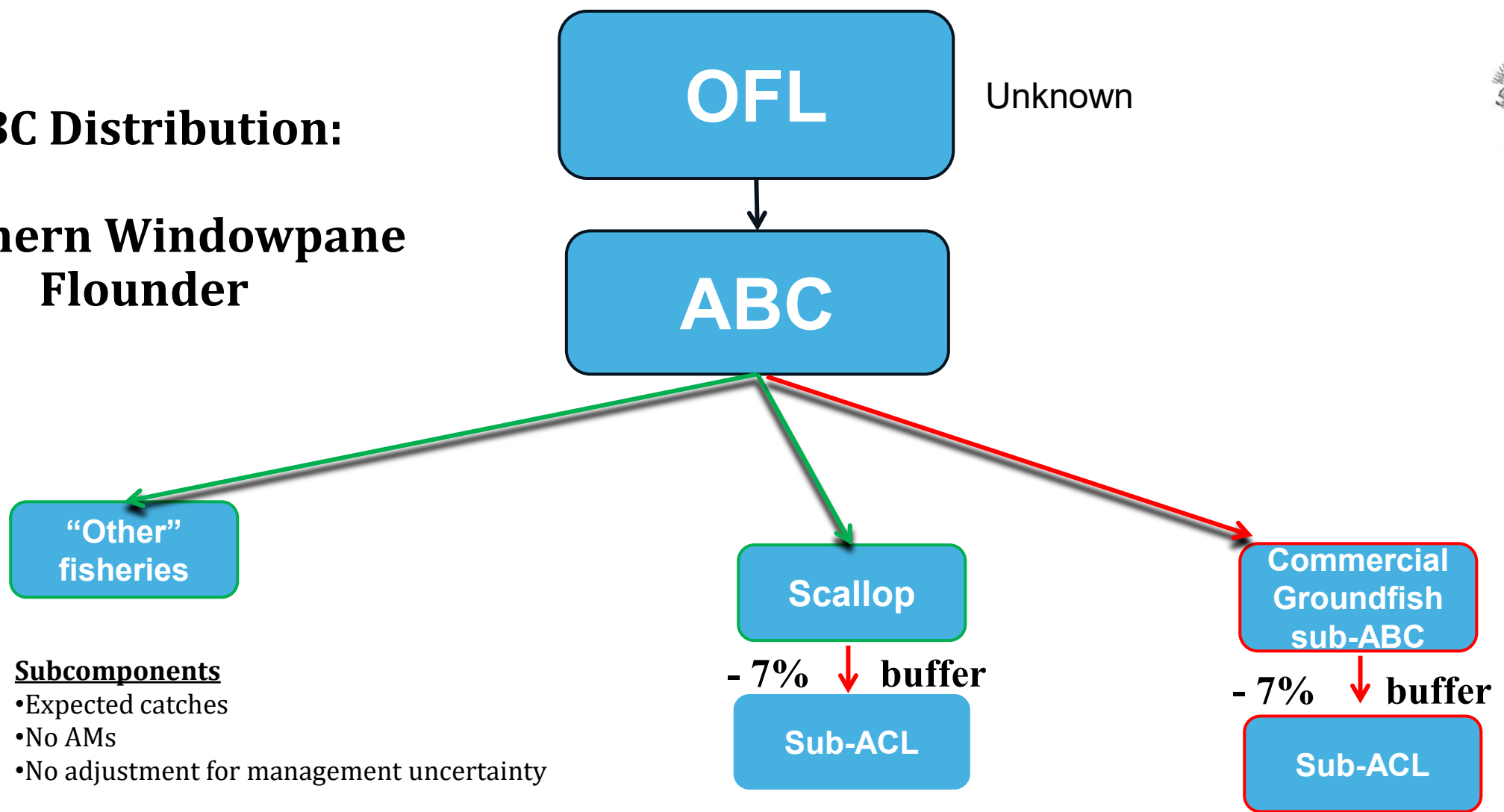
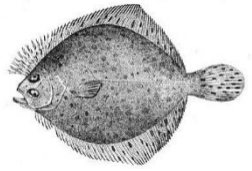


Overfishing status in the terminal year of the assessment indicated on the x-axis (“Yes” = overfishing; “No” = not overfishing; “Unk” = unknown).



ABC Distribution:

Northern Windowpane Flounder



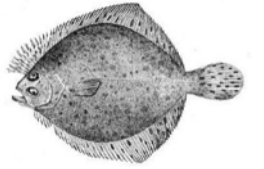
Subcomponents

- Expected catches
- No AMs
- No adjustment for management uncertainty

Sub-ACLs

- Subject to AMs
- Management uncertainty adjustment

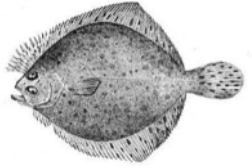
COMMERCIAL GROUNDFISH FISHERY CATCH & UTILIZATION



	<i>Commercial Groundfish Fishery – Northern Windowpane Flounder</i>		
	Sub-ACL (mt)	Total Catch (mt)	Utilization
FY2023	105.0	9.4	9.0%
FY2024	94.0	9.3	9.9%
FY2025 (preliminary)	93.6	10.8	11.5%



SCALLOP FISHERY SUB-ACL

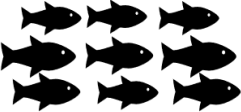


	<i>Scallop Fishery – Northern Windowpane Flounder</i>					
Groundfish Fishing Year	Total ACL (mt)	Total Catch (mt)	Percent Total ACL Caught	Scallop sub-ACL (mt)	Scallop Catch (mt)	Percent Scallop ACL Caught
2022	150	110	73.5%	31	101.1	326.1%
2023	150	94.3	63.0%	31	81.7	261.8%
2024	128	71.0	55.5%	27	53.3	197.4%

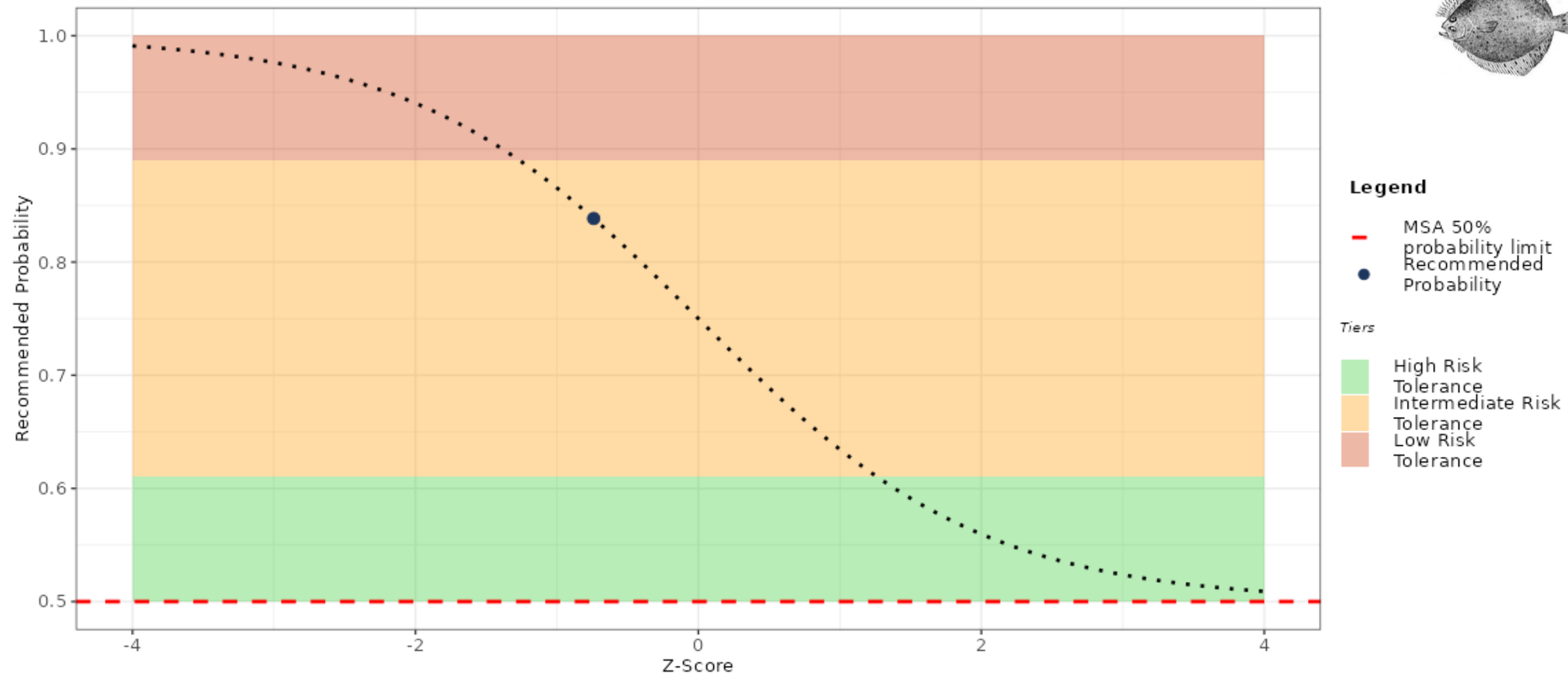
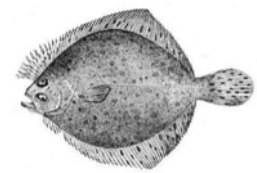
Allocated a fixed percentage sub-ACL of 21 percent of total ABC



N. WINDOWPANE: RISK POLICY FACTORS, SCORING, AND WEIGHTING

Factor	Weight	Score	Scoring Details
 SSB / Stock Status	0.30	-4	Empirical assessment without BRPs. From 2021-2025, five years are below 25 th percentile of fall survey biomass time series.
 Recruitment	0.26	0	No recruitment information is available.
 Climate Vulnerability	0.19	0	Low climate vulnerability with neutral directional effect (Hare et al. 2016)
 Commercial Fishery Characterization	0.25	2	Zero possession, unallocated stock. Commercial groundfish sub-ACL utilization <80%. Scallop fishery sub-ACL & significant catch. Gear-restricted area AMs for scallop fishery and commercial groundfish fishery. AP input score of '0'.
 Recreational Fishery Characterization	No sub-ACL	-	
			Total Z Score: -0.74

N. WINDOWPANE: RISK POLICY OUTPUT



Z-SCORE = -0.74 → INTERMEDIATE RISK TOLERANCE



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POSSIBLE OFL AND ABC OPTIONS – N. WINDOWPANE FLOUNDER

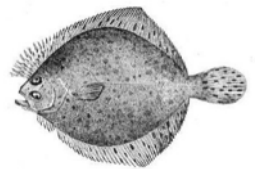
OFL is unknown

Constant ABC approach

Two options:

- A. Maintaining status quo - discussed updated survey biomass indices and fishery catch data to consider whether status quo catch advice remains appropriate
- B. Survey-adjusted ABC – used updated fall survey index to adjust ABC

The PDT discussed uncertainties associated with status quo catch advice and the adjusted ABC option.



STATUS QUO APPROACH

OFL is unknown

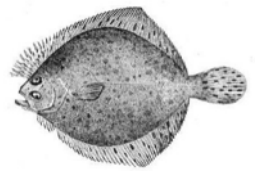
Constant ABC approach = 136 mt (no projections)

The current ABC was calculated as the average of the exploitation rates of the zero-possession years (2010-2022) x 3-year average of the fall survey index.

Year 1 = Average of 2019 and 2021 (2020 missing)

Year 2 = 2021

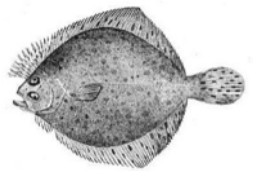
Year 3 = 2022



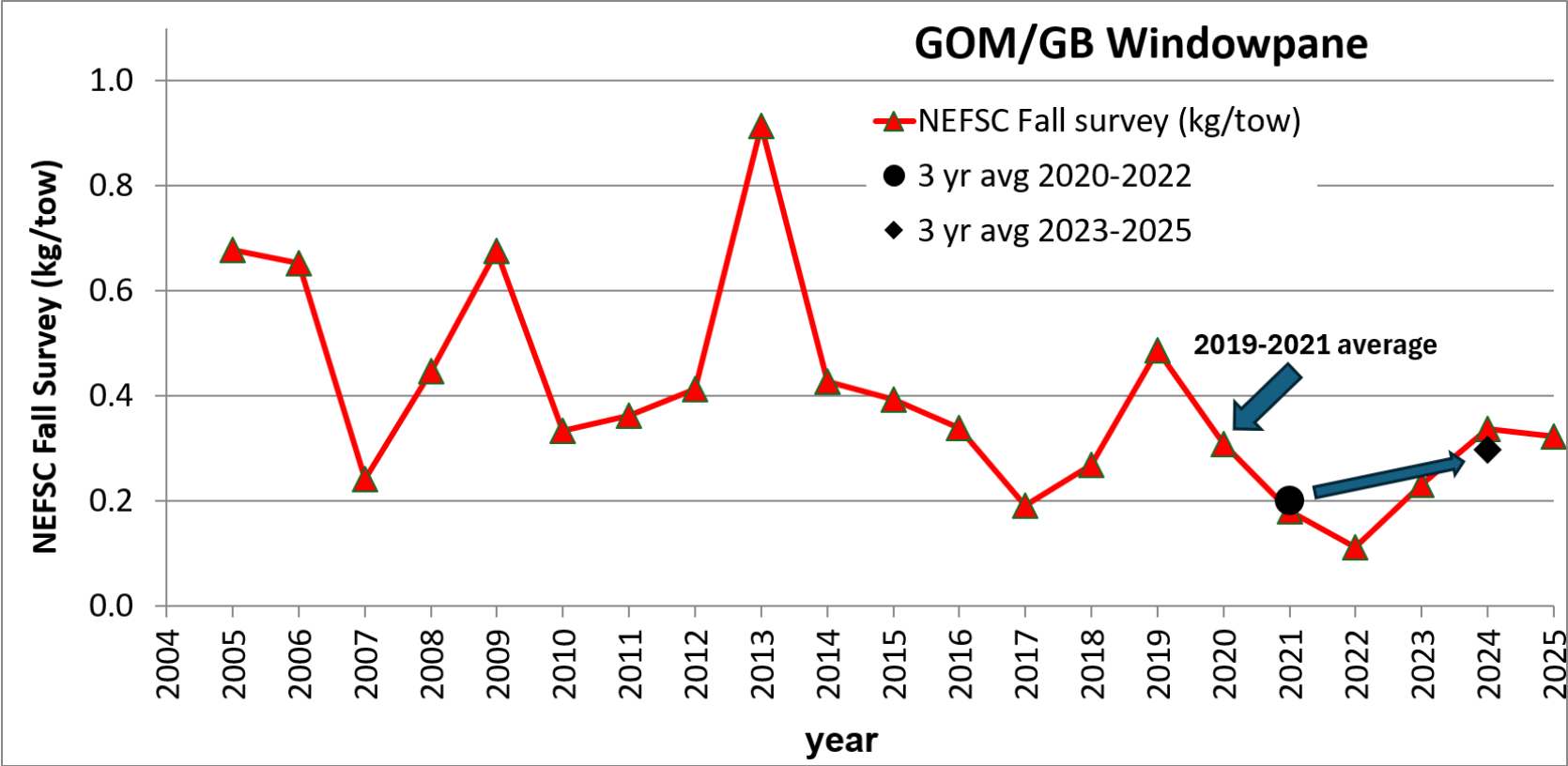
STATUS QUO

Uncertainties and Considerations –

- Status quo ABCs have been in place last 3 years (FYs 2024-26)
- No substantial change in catch in recent years
- Slight increase in the survey index
 - Though relative to the long-term time series, this does not show much increase in the indices overall.
- Overfished status
- Rebuilding plan



ALTERNATIVE SURVEY-ADJUSTED OPTION

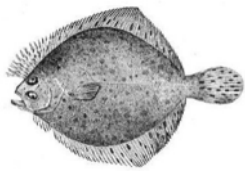


NEFSC Fall Survey index (kg/tow)

3 yr avg 2020-2022 0.200

3 yr avg 2023-2025 0.297

ABC adjustment = 49% increase

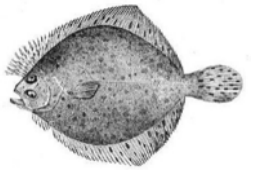


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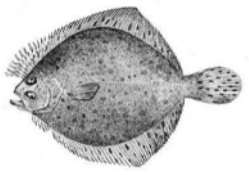
ALTERNATIVE SURVEY-ADJUSTED OPTION

Uncertainties and Considerations –

- Does not incorporate all components of the assessment methodology
 - Method does not include year-specific catchability
- Simple empirical assessment method appears to be the most reasonable application of the adjusted ABC approach
- Ecosystem Component Species designation potential
- Non-target, zero possession stock
 - Would not expect increased targeting with higher ABC



ABC OPTIONS - NORTHERN WINDOWPANE FLOUNDER



The PDT does not recommend one option over the other

- Compelling information to support either option
- Both approaches are defensible

Maintaining the status quo ABC –

- Supported by:
 - Overfished status and rebuilding plan
 - Substantial uncertainty in stock status and BRPs

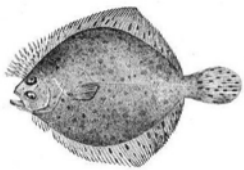
Updating the ABC based on the fall survey index –

- Supported by:
 - Incorporates the most recent abundance information available.
 - Not substantively different to what would be presented in an empirical stock assessment based on the fall survey index.



POTENTIAL OFLS AND ABCS – NORTHERN WINDOWPANE FLOUNDER

Status Quo



FY	OFL	ABC
2027	Unknown	136 mt
2028	Unknown	136 mt
2029	Unknown	136 mt
2030	Unknown	136 mt
2031	Unknown	136 mt

Alternative Survey-Adjusted Option

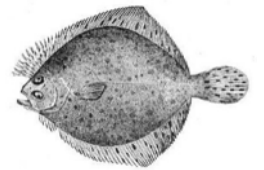
FY	OFL	ABC
2027	Unknown	202 mt
2028	Unknown	202 mt
2029	Unknown	202 mt
2030	Unknown	202 mt
2031	Unknown	202 mt



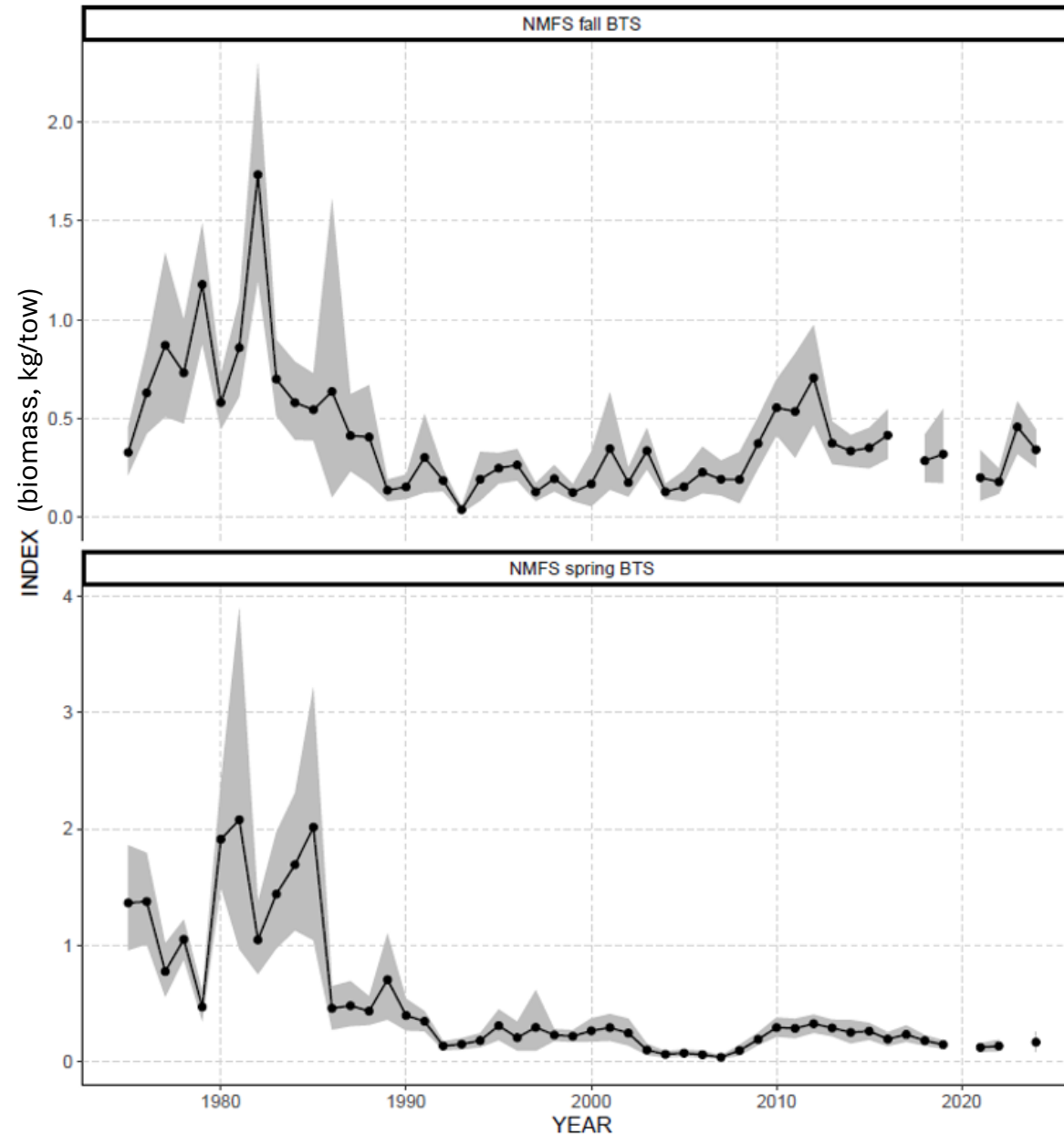
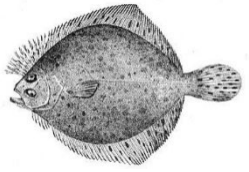
BACKGROUND: SOUTHERN WINDOWPANE 2023 MT ASSESSMENT

MODEL	Empirical AIM
STOCK STATUS	Not overfished, Overfishing is not occurring
REBUILDING	Rebuilt
UNCERTAINTIES	Data limited assessment. Uncertainty in catch input because the catch is almost entirely comprised of discards (zero possession).

- Catch projections from the AIM model are not possible.
- OFLs and ABCs for FYs 2024-2026 were calculated by applying the updated F_{MSY} proxy and $75\%F_{MSY}$ proxy to the 3-year average of the fall biomass index and applying a constant approach.

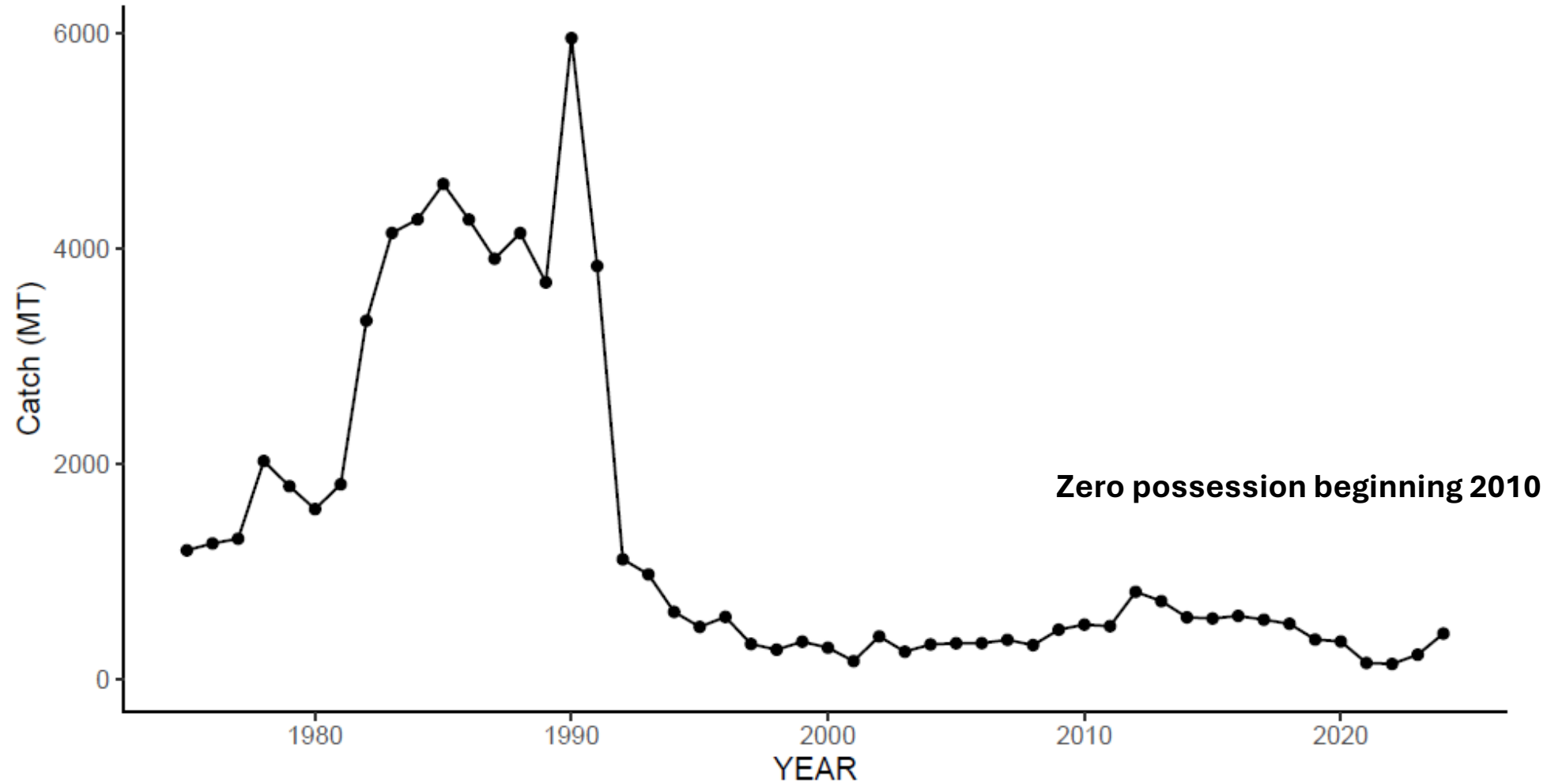
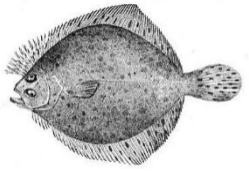


2025 DATA UPDATE – SURVEY BIOMASS INDICES

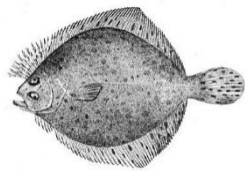


Only fall index used
in the assessment

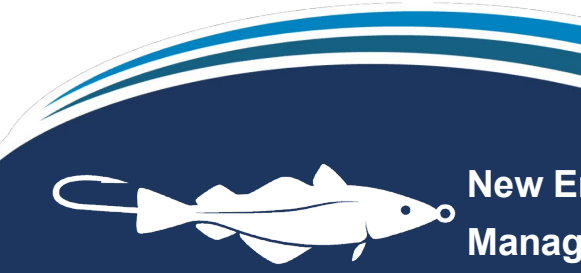
2025 DATA UPDATE – TOTAL CATCH



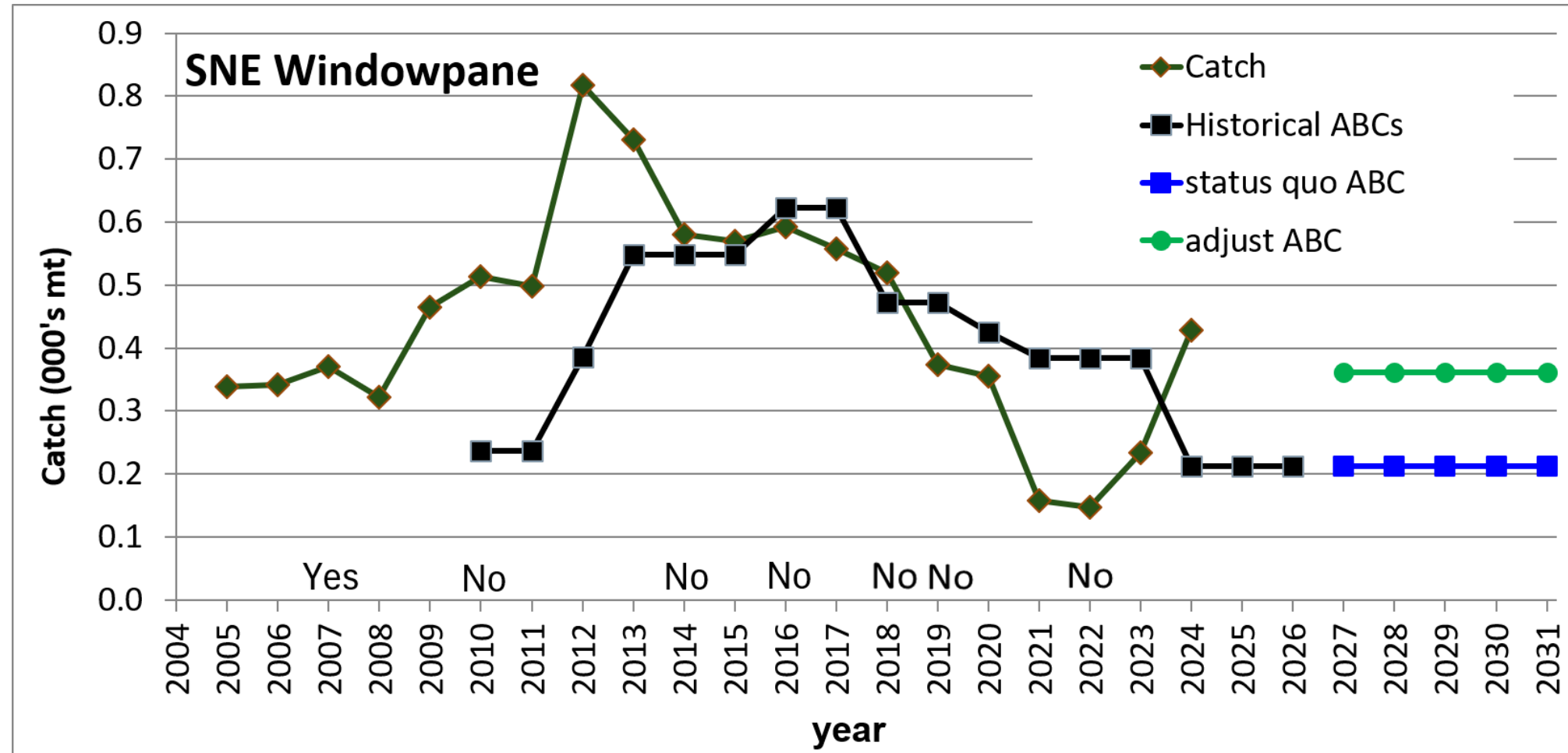
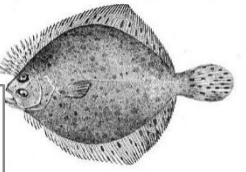
CATCH PERFORMANCE



Year	Catch	Historical OFLs	Historical ABCs	Option 1 Status Quo	Option 2 ABC Adjustment
2010	513	317	237		
2011	498	317	237		
2012	817	515	386		
2013	731	730	548		
2014	580	730	548		
2015	569	730	548		
2016	593	833	623		
2017	558	833	623		
2018	520	631	473		
2019	374	631	473		
2020	356	568	426		
2021	157	513	384		
2022	147	513	384		
2023	234	513	384		
2024	429	284	213		
2025		284	213		
2026		284	213		
2027				213	361
2028				213	361
2029				213	361
2030				213	361
2031				213	361

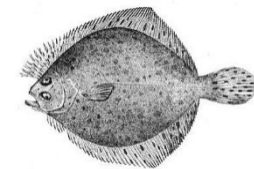


CATCH PERFORMANCE

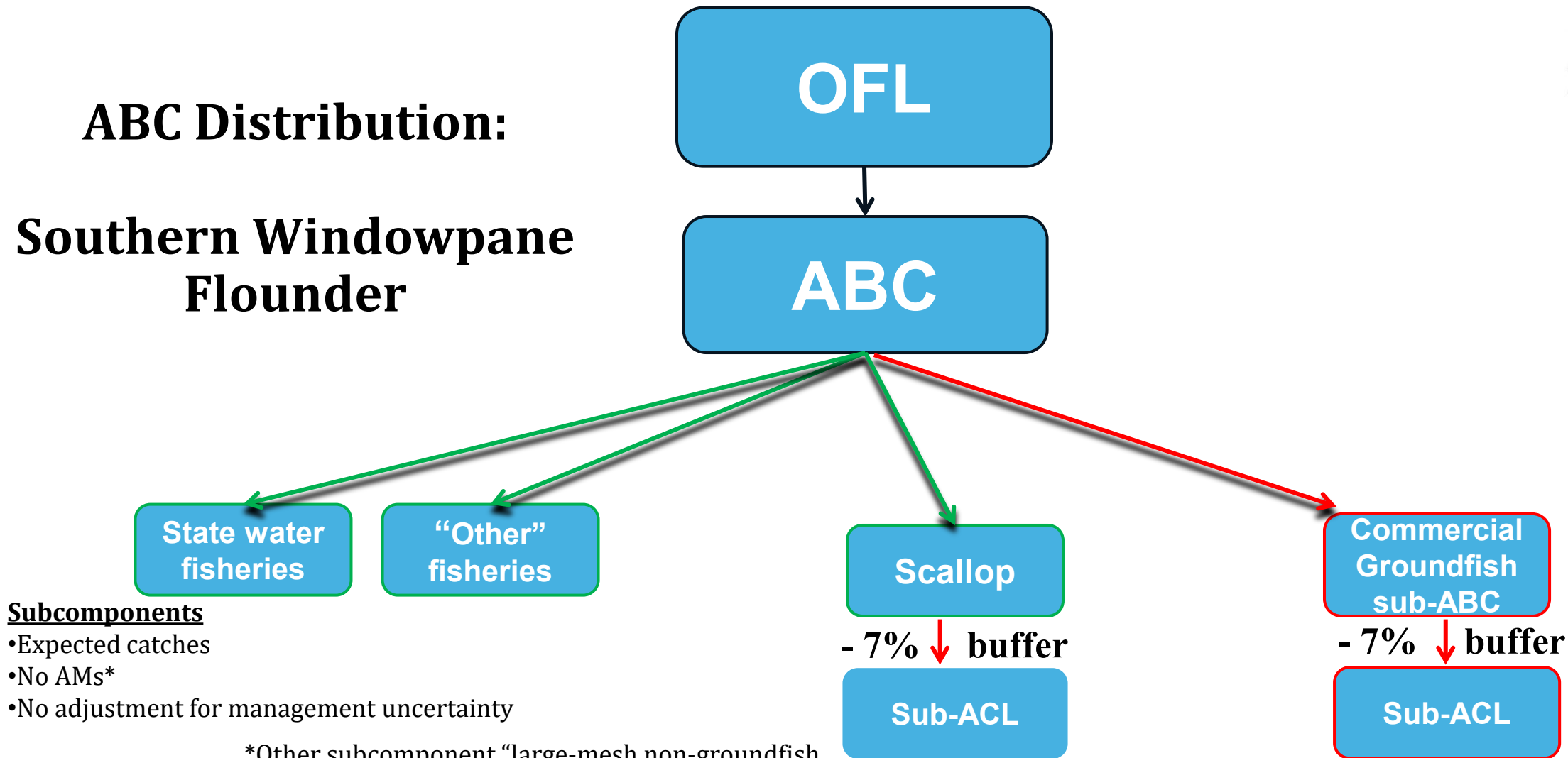


Overfishing status in the terminal year of the assessment indicated on the x-axis (“Yes” = overfishing; “No” = not overfishing).





ABC Distribution: Southern Windowpane Flounder



Subcomponents

- Expected catches
- No AMs*
- No adjustment for management uncertainty

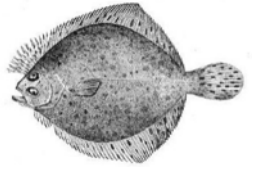
*Other subcomponent "large-mesh non-groundfish trawl fisheries" can be subject to AMs

Sub-ACLs

- Subject to AMs
- Management uncertainty adjustment

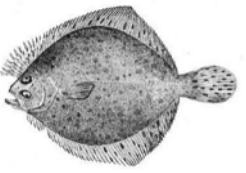


COMMERCIAL GROUNDFISH FISHERY CATCH & UTILIZATION



	<i>Commercial Groundfish Fishery – Southern Windowpane Flounder</i>		
	Sub-ACL (mt)	Total Catch (mt)	Utilization
FY2023	45.0	12.4	27.6%
FY2024	30.0	35.3	117.7%
FY2025 (preliminary)	29.7	24.4	82.2%





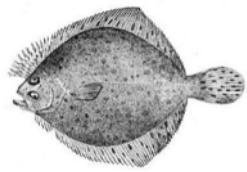
SCALLOP FISHERY SUB-ACL

	<i>Scallop Fishery – Southern Windowpane Flounder</i>					
Groundfish Fishing Year	Total ACL (mt)	Total Catch (mt)	Percent Total ACL Caught	Scallop sub-ACL (mt)	Scallop Catch (mt)	Percent Scallop ACL Caught
2022	371	119.5	32.2%	129	10.5	8.1%
2023	371	272.2	73.4%	129	5.6	4.4%
2024	205	425.4	207.5%	71	3.9	5.5%

Allocated a fixed percentage sub-ACL of 36 percent of total ABC



OTHER FISHERIES SUB-COMPONENT



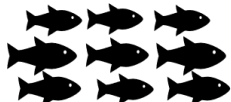
“Large-mesh non-groundfish trawl fisheries” – mainly summer flounder, scup, and skate

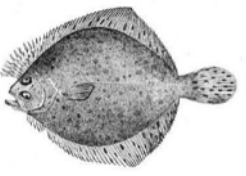
	<i>Other Sub-components – Southern Windowpane Flounder</i>					
Groundfish Fishing Year	Total ACL (mt)	Total Catch (mt)	Percent Total ACL Caught	“Other” sub-ACL (mt)	“Other” catch (mt)	Percent sub-ACL Caught
2022	371	119.5	32.2%	177	93.5	53%
2023	371	272.2	73.4%	184	240.5	130.5%
2024	205	425.4	207.5%	98	363.3	370.7%

Percentage of the total ABC based on recent catch estimates

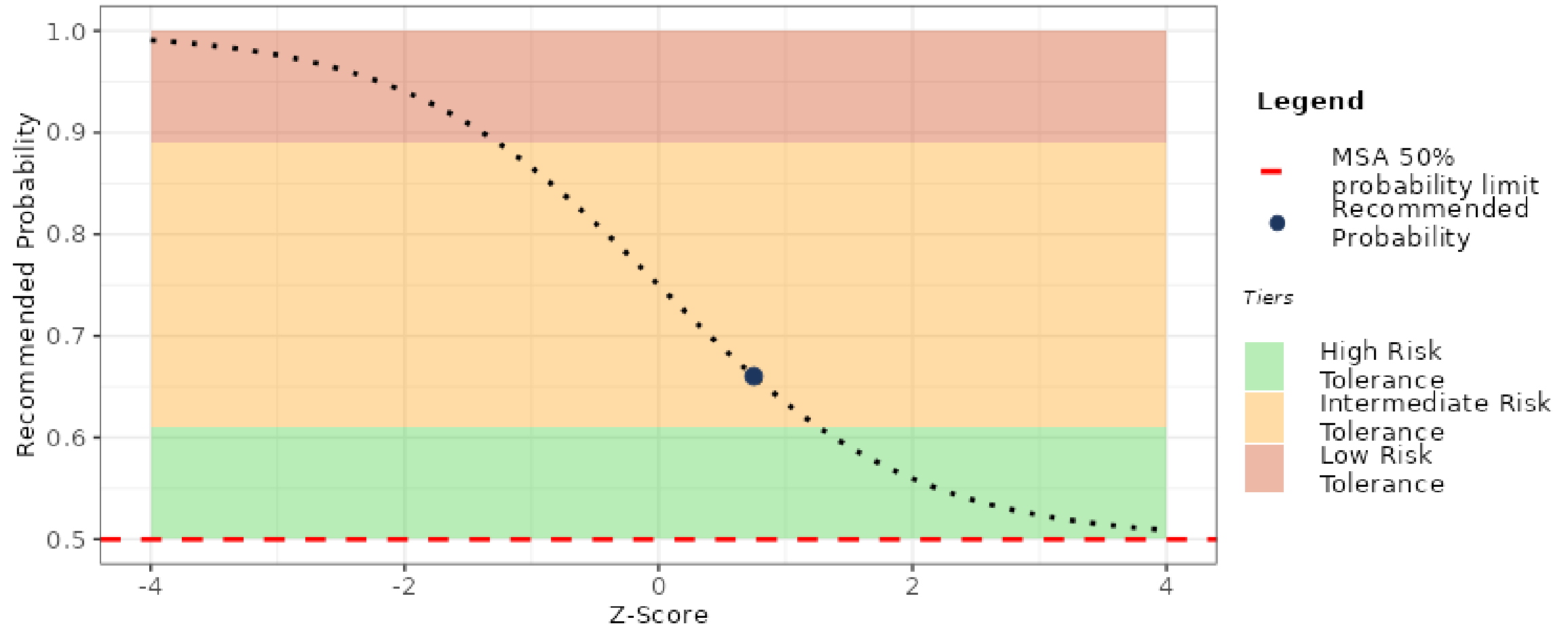


S. WINDOWPANE: RISK POLICY FACTORS, SCORING, AND WEIGHTING

Factor	Weight	Score	Scoring Details
 SSB / Stock Status	0.30	0	Terminal year (2022) biomass index is 0.213 kg/tow. 85% of B _{MSY} proxy (0.250 kg/tow).
 Recruitment	0.26	0	No recruitment information is available.
 Climate Vulnerability	0.19	0	Low climate vulnerability with neutral directional effect (Hare et al. 2016)
 Commercial Fishery Characterization	0.25	3	Zero possession, unallocated stock. Commercial groundfish sub-ACL utilization >80% two of last three years. Scallop fishery sub-ACL & minor catch. Other fisheries catch significant. Gear-restricted area AMs for groundfish fishery, scallop fishery, and 'large-mesh non-groundfish trawl fisheries' other sub-component. AP input score of '0'.
 Recreational Fishery Characterization	No sub-ACL	-	
			Total Z Score: +0.75



S. WINDOWPANE: RISK POLICY OUTPUT



Z-SCORE = +0.75 → INTERMEDIATE RISK TOLERANCE

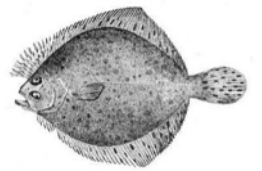
POSSIBLE OFL AND ABC OPTIONS – S. WINDOWPANE FLOUNDER

Constant OFL and ABC approach

Two options:

- A. Maintaining status quo - discussed updated survey biomass indices and fishery catch data to consider whether status quo catch advice remains appropriate
- B. Survey-adjusted OFL and ABC – used updated fall survey index to adjust OFL and ABC

The PDT discussed uncertainties associated with status quo catch advice and the adjusted ABC option.

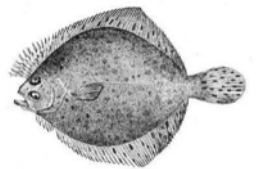


STATUS QUO APPROACH

Current OFL = 284 mt

Constant ABC approach = 213 mt (no projections)

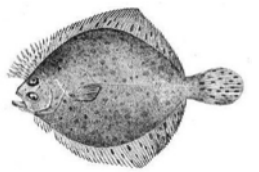
The current OFL and ABC were calculated by applying the 2023 F_{MSY} proxy (1.333) and $75\%F_{MSY}$ proxy to the 3-year average of the fall biomass index at the end of the time series (0.213) and applying a constant approach.



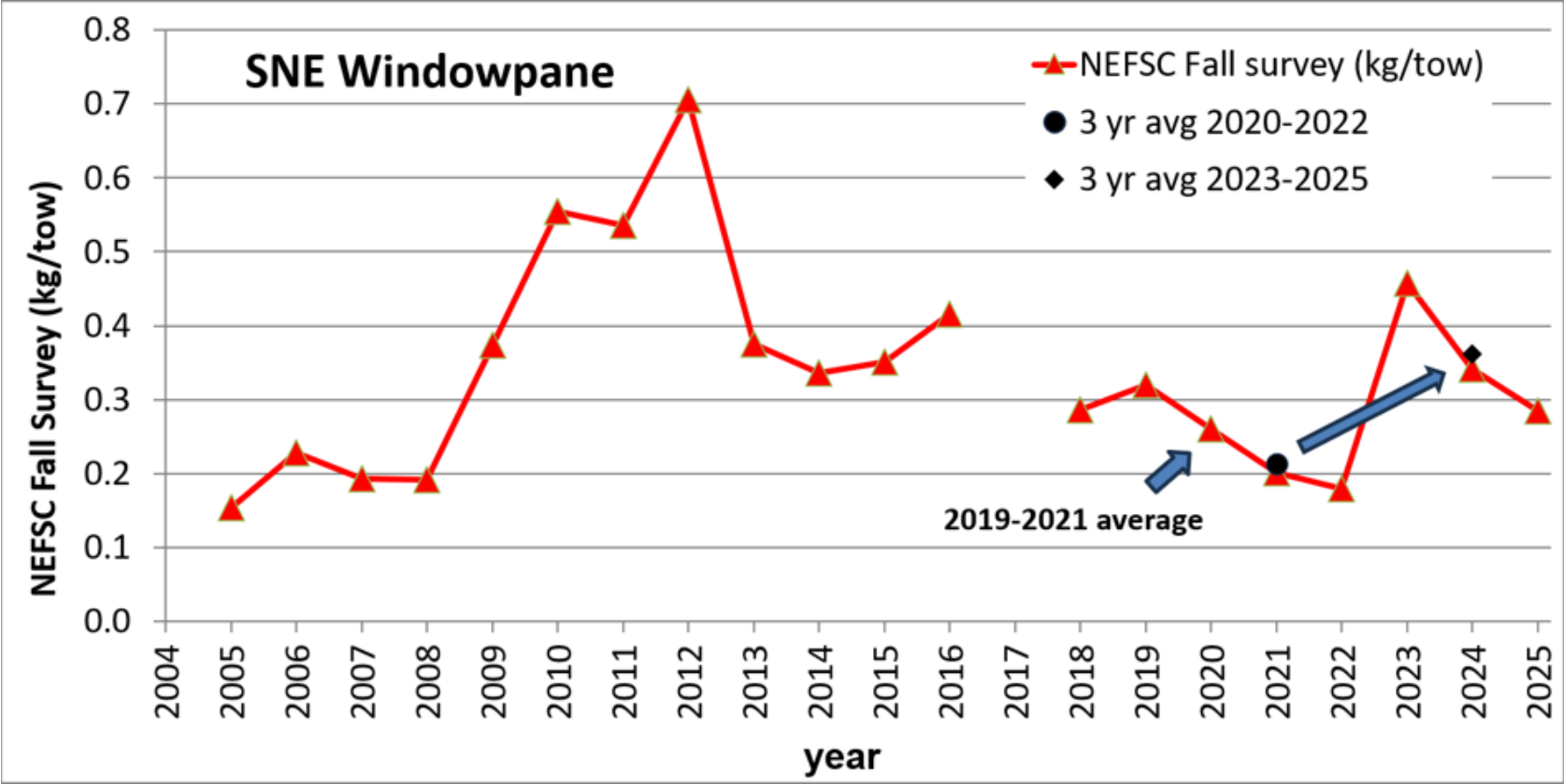
STATUS QUO

Uncertainties and Considerations –

- Status quo ABCs have been in place last 3 years (FYs 2024-26)
- Increases in catch and in the survey indices in recent years
 - High catches in FYs 2024-25 were the subject of multiple public comments at the April 2026 Council meeting.
 - Concerns about fishery interactions with this non-target stock and impacts of the AMs
- Stock status is not overfished, rebuilt, and not subject to overfishing
- Status quo could be overly constraining fisheries without addressing a biological concern



ALTERNATIVE SURVEY-ADJUSTED OPTION

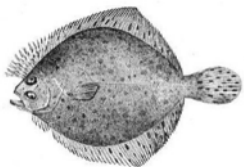


NEFSC Fall Survey index (kg/tow)

3 yr avg 2020-2022 0.213

3 yr avg 2023-2025 0.361

ABC adjustment = 69% increase

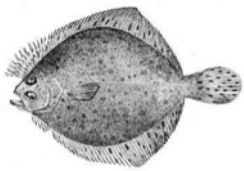


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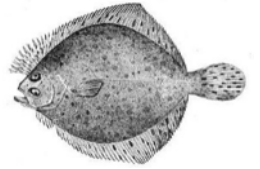
ALTERNATIVE SURVEY-ADJUSTED OPTION

Uncertainties and Considerations –

- AIM model is an empirical assessment, largely based on the survey
 - AIM model adjusts relationship between survey index and catch input
 - More difficult to predict assessment output, harder to interpret
- Increase in both catch and survey index indicates AIM model would provide higher catch advice if updated
 - AIM model would also re-estimate F_{MSY} proxy
 - Alternative method assumes no change in F_{MSY} proxy
- Ecosystem Component Species designation potential
 - Positive stock status and lack of directed fishery
- Non-target, zero possession stock
 - Would not expect increased targeting with higher ABC



ABC OPTIONS – SOUTHERN WINDOWPANE FLOUNDER



The PDT recommends the option for setting a survey-adjusted OFL and ABC.

Updating the OFL and ABC based on the fall survey index –

- AIM model is an empirical assessment, largely based on the survey
- Increase in both catch and survey index indicates AIM would increase catch advice
- Alternative method assumes no change in FMSY proxy
- Ecosystem Component Species designation potential
- Positive stock status
- Non-target, zero possession stock

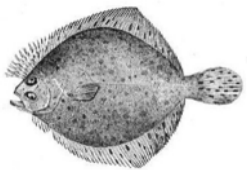
Maintaining the status quo ABC –

- Recent increases in catch and survey indices raise concerns of fishery interactions & AMs
- Status quo could be overly constraining fisheries without addressing a biological concern



POTENTIAL OFLS AND ABCS – SOUTHERN WINDOWPANE FLOUNDER

Status Quo



FY	OFL	ABC
2027	284 mt	213 mt
2028	284 mt	213 mt
2029	284 mt	213 mt
2030	284 mt	213 mt
2031	284 mt	213 mt

Alternative Survey-Adjusted Option - *PDT recommends*

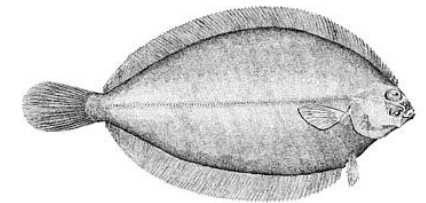
FY	OFL	ABC
2027	481 mt	361 mt
2028	481 mt	361 mt
2029	481 mt	361 mt
2030	481 mt	361 mt
2031	481 mt	361 mt



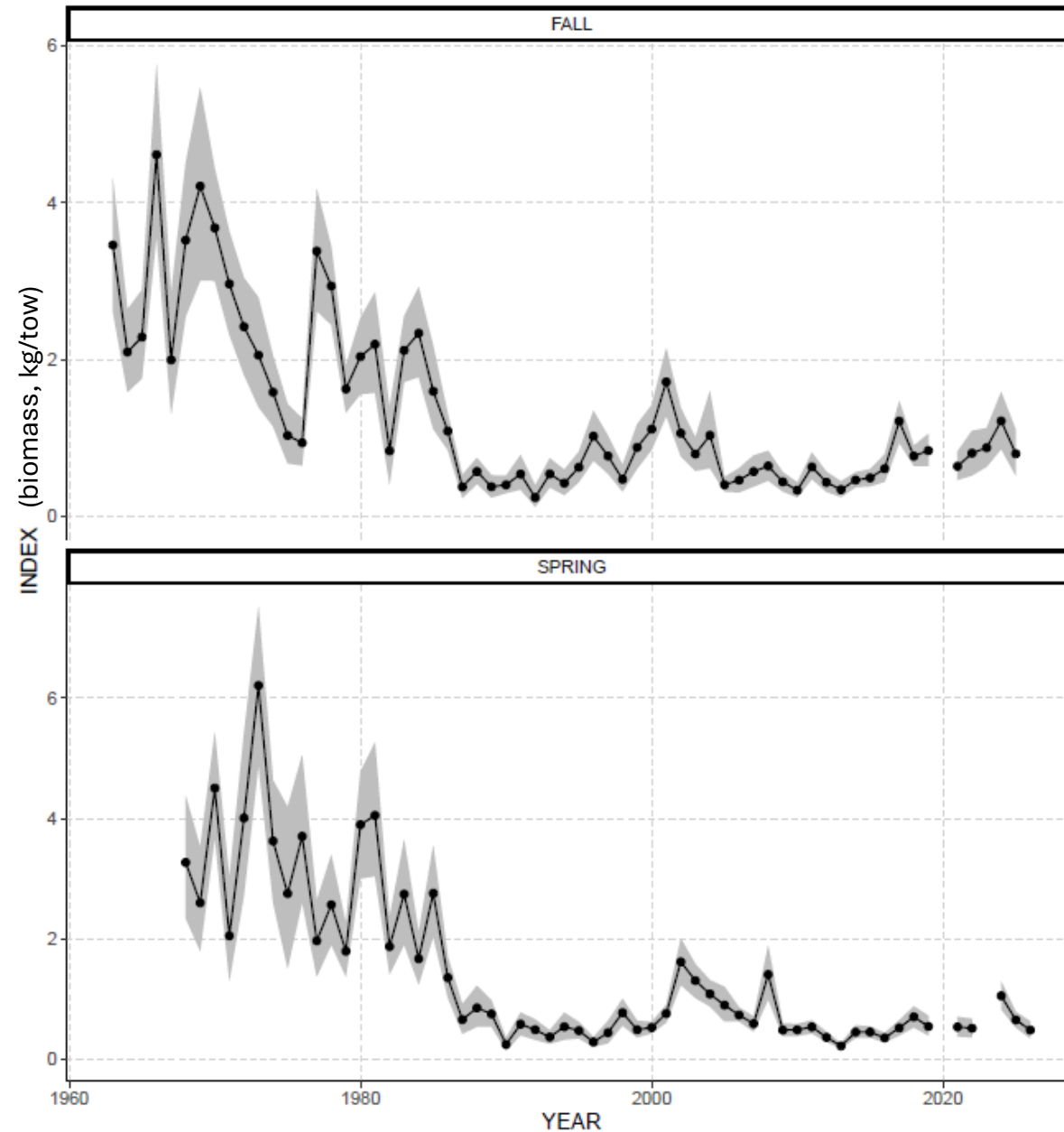
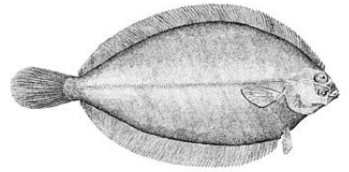
BACKGROUND: WITCH FLOUNDER 2024 MT ASSESSMENT

MODEL	Empirical area swept
STOCK STATUS	Overfished, Overfishing is unknown
REBUILDING	2043 (Frebuild based on the 2007-2015 exploitation rate), no projection)
UNCERTAINTIES	Uncertainty in catch data due to criminal misreporting case; inability to incorporate age structure data into the current empirical assessment.

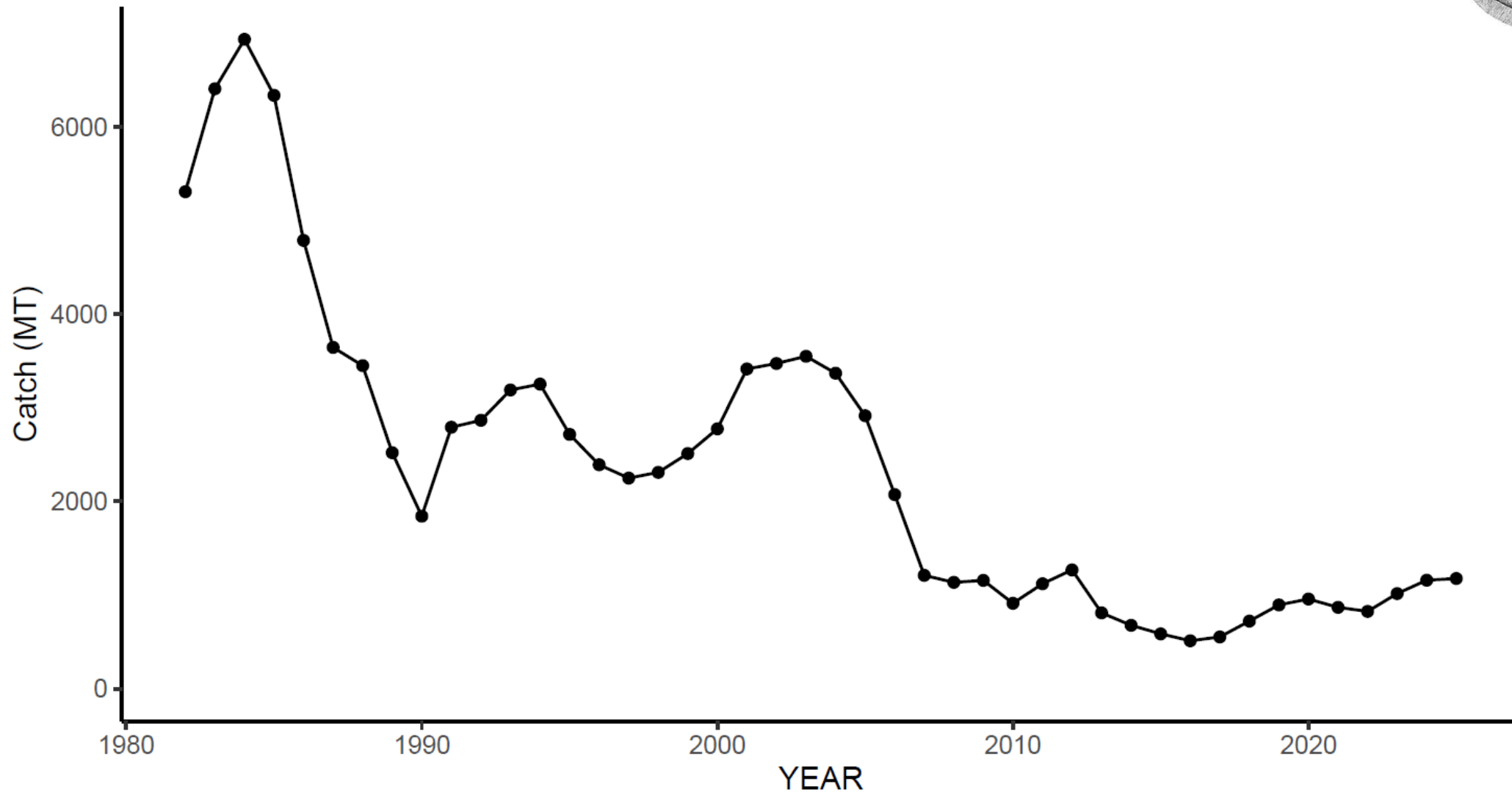
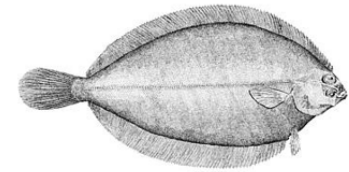
- OFL unknown
- ABC for FYs 2025-2027 was calculated as the mean exploitation rate (2007-2015) x 3-year average of exploitable biomass (2022-2024).
 - Year 1 = Average of Fall 2021 and Spring 2022
 - Year 2 = Fall 2022
 - Year 3 = Average of Fall 2023 and Spring 2024



2026 DATA UPDATE – SURVEY BIOMASS INDICES

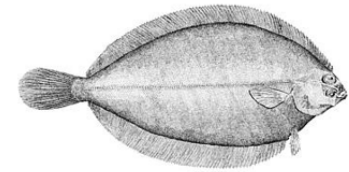


2026 DATA UPDATE – TOTAL CATCH



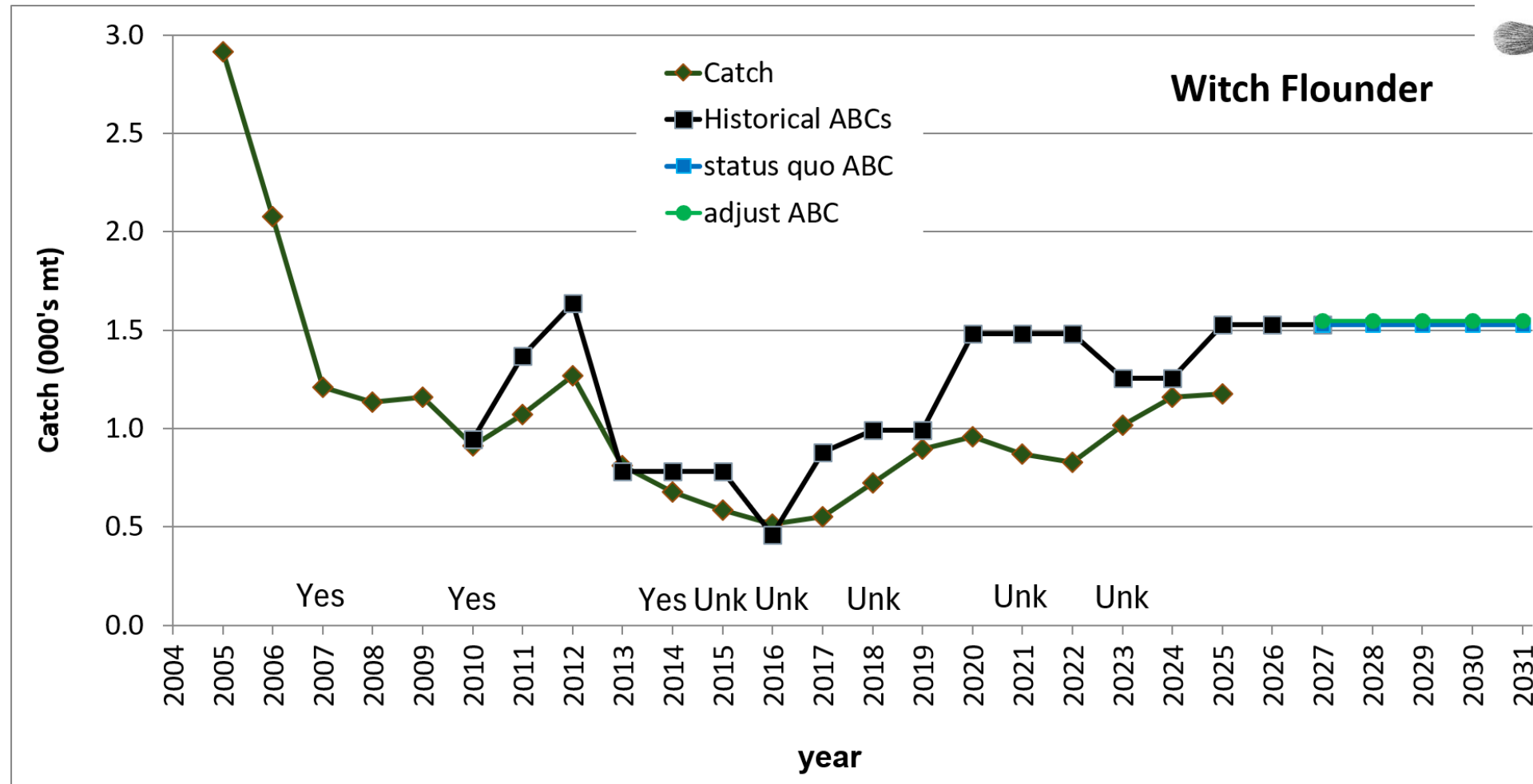
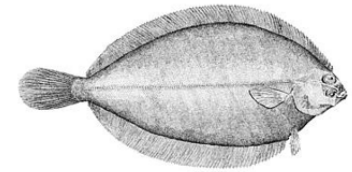
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CATCH PERFORMANCE



Year	Catch	Historical OFLs	Historical ABCs	<u>Option 1</u> Status Quo	<u>Option 2</u> ABC Adjustment
2010	913	1,239	944		
2011	1,072	1,792	1,369		
2012	1,269	2,141	1,639		
2013	811	1,196	783		
2014	677	1,512	783		
2015	586	1,846	783		
2016	512	521	460		
2017	553	Undefined	878		
2018	722	Undefined	993		
2019	895	Undefined	993		
2020	958	Undefined	1,483		
2021	869	Undefined	1,483		
2022	826	Undefined	1,483		
2023	1,016	Undefined	1,256		
2024	1,159	Undefined	1,256		
2025	1,177	Undefined	1,526		
2026		Undefined	1,526		
2027		Undefined	1,526	1,526	1,547
2028				1,526	1,547
2029				1,526	1,547
2030				1,526	1,547
2031				1,526	1,547

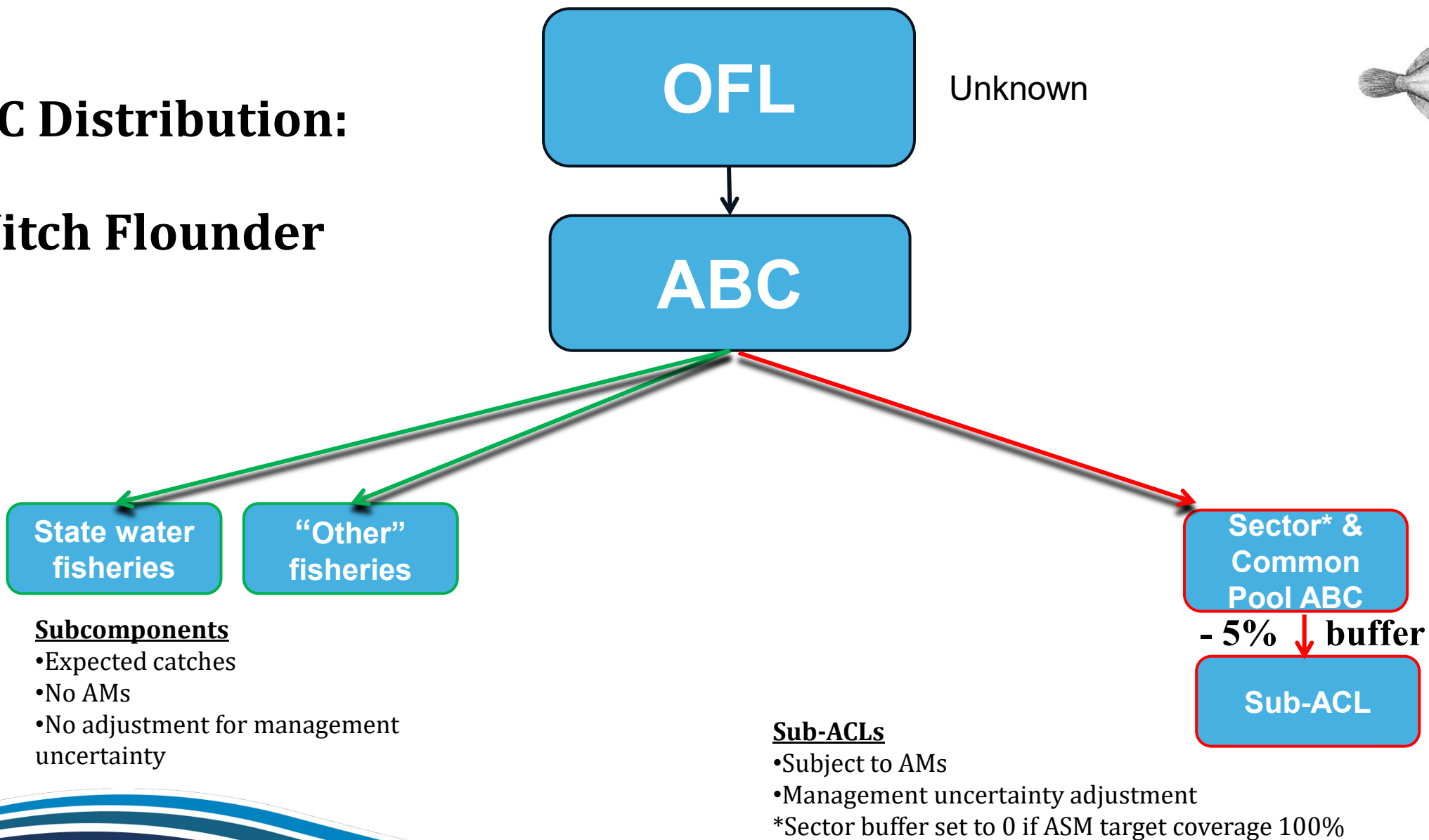
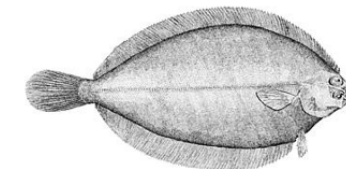
CATCH PERFORMANCE



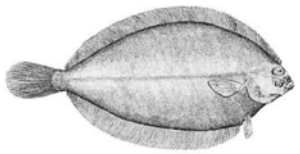
Overfishing status in the terminal year of the assessment indicated on the x-axis
 ("Yes" = overfishing; "Unk" = unknown).



ABC Distribution: Witch Flounder



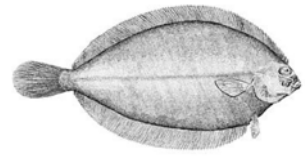
COMMERCIAL GROUNDFISH FISHERY CATCH & UTILIZATION



	<i>Commercial Groundfish Fishery – Witch Flounder</i>		
	Sub-ACL (mt)	Total Catch (mt)	Utilization
FY2023	1,146.0	1,114.7	97.3%
FY2024	1,203.0	1,124.6	93.5%
FY2025 (preliminary)	1,475.9	944.0	64.0%



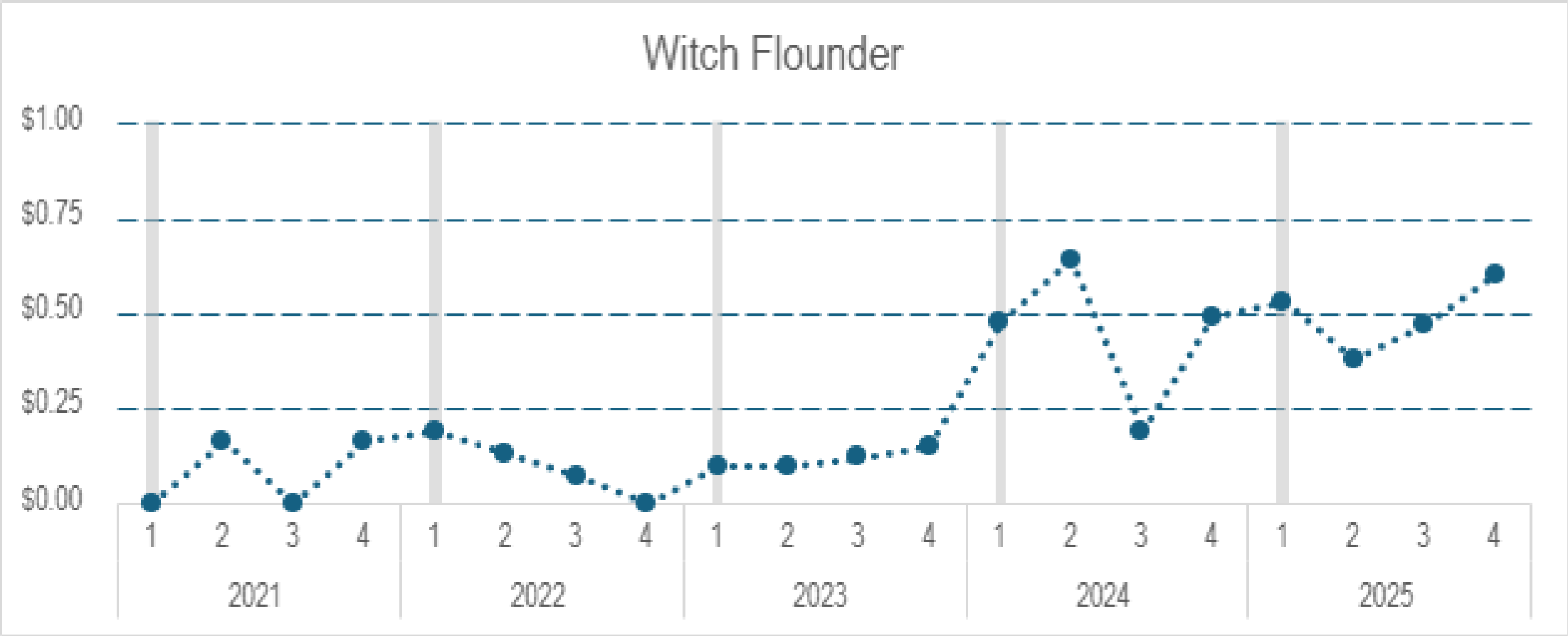
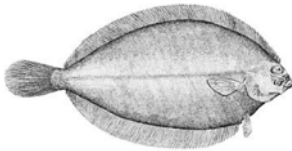
QUOTA CHANGE MODEL RESULTS - SECTORS



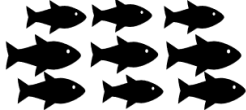
FY	Sector sub-ACL	Catch (mt)		Utilization (%)		Gross Rev (\$mil, 2025)	
		Realized	Predicted	Realized	Predicted	Realized	Predicted
2012	1,426	981	573	0.69	0.29	5.5	4.0
2013	599	639	694	1.07	0.93	4.4	3.7
2014	598	514	591	0.86	0.98	3.7	3.3
2015	596	523	526	0.88	0.88	3.6	3.6
Witch Flounder 2016	362	351	310	0.97	0.86	2.6	2.1
2017	718	487	449	0.68	0.63	2.7	3.4
2018	812	794	481	0.98	0.58	3.5	3.4
2019	831	761	651	0.92	0.78	3.5	3.6
2020	1,275	893	872	0.7	0.68	3.7	3.5
2021	1,273	843	716	0.66	0.56	3.5	3.2
2022	1,278	792	919	0.62	0.72	2.8	3.7
2023	1,104	1,095	824	0.99	0.74	3.3	3.3
2024	1,162	1,115	939	0.96	0.85	3.4	2.8
2025	1,422	931	978	0.66	0.69	3.2	2.8



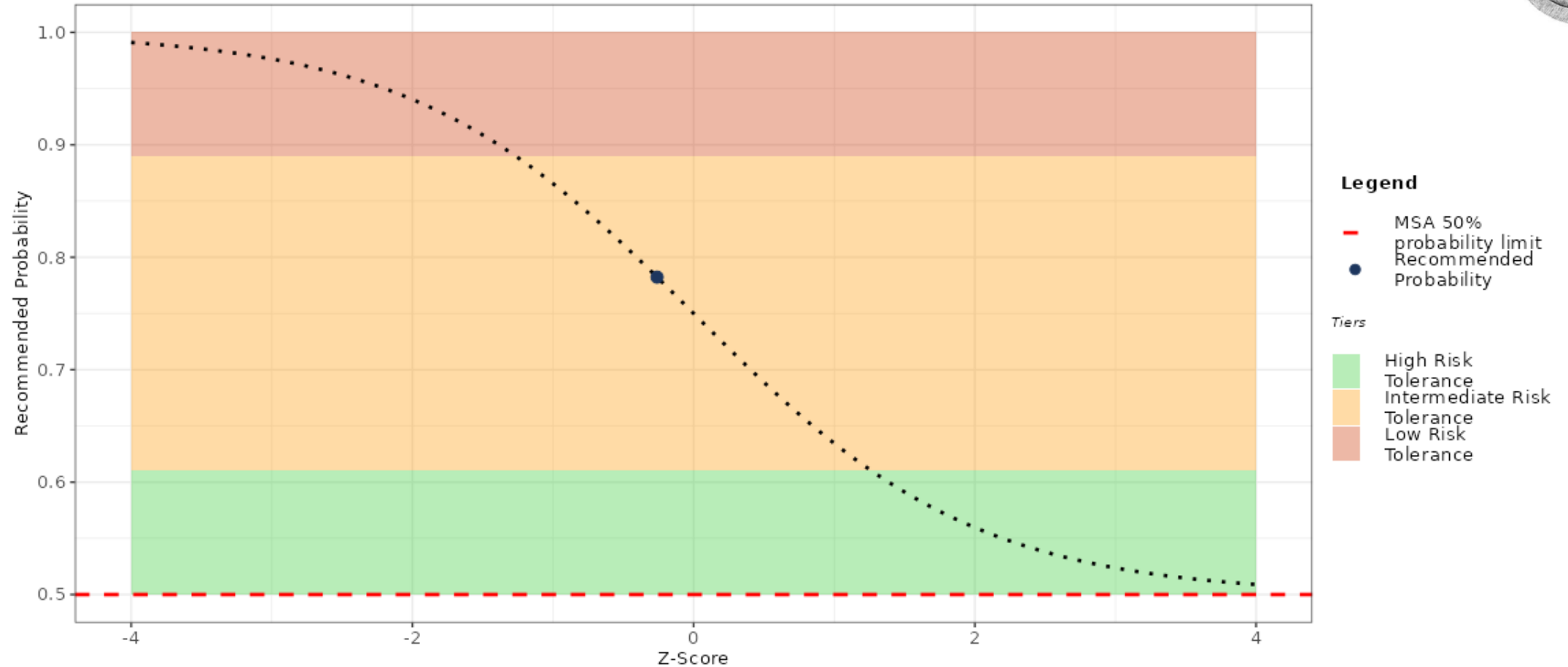
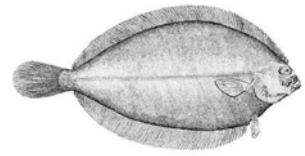
INTER-SECTOR ACE LEASE PRICES - SECTORS



WITCH FLOUNDER: RISK POLICY FACTORS, SCORING, AND WEIGHTING

Factor	Weight	Score	Scoring Details
 SSB / Stock Status	 0.30	 0	Empirical assessment without BRPs. From 2021-2025, five years are between 25 th and 75 th percentile of fall survey biomass time series.
 Recruitment	0.26	0	No recruitment information is available.
 Climate Vulnerability	0.19	-4	High climate vulnerability with negative directional effect (Hare et al. 2016)
 Commercial Fishery Characterization	0.25	2	Commercial groundfish utilization >80% two of last three years. Revenue contributes <10% of overall groundfish fishery revenue. Constraining stock for the groundfish sector fishery. AP input score ‘+1’, lower utilization/constraint in 2026.
 Recreational Fishery Characterization	No sub-ACL	-	
			Total Z Score: -0.26

WITCH FLOUNDER: RISK POLICY OUTPUT



Z-SCORE = -0.26 → INTERMEDIATE RISK TOLERANCE



POSSIBLE OFL AND ABC OPTIONS – WITCH FLOUNDER

OFL is unknown

Constant ABC approach

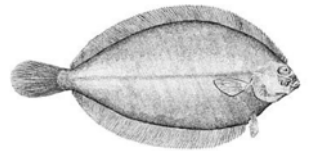
Two options:

- A. Maintaining status quo - discussed updated survey biomass indices and fishery catch data to consider whether status quo catch advice remains appropriate
- B. Survey-adjusted ABC – used updated fall and spring survey indices to adjust ABC

The PDT discussed uncertainties associated with status quo catch advice and the adjusted ABC option.



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STATUS QUO APPROACH

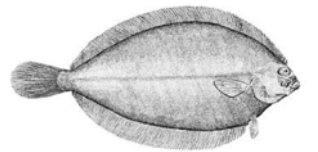
Current OFL = unknown

Constant ABC approach = 1,526 mt (no projections)

The current ABC was calculated by applying the mean exploitation rate of 5.4% (based on nine years, 2007-2015) to the 3-year (2022-2024) moving average of exploitable biomass (28,252 mt).



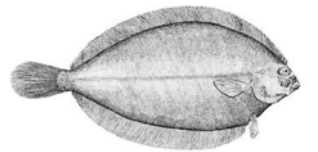
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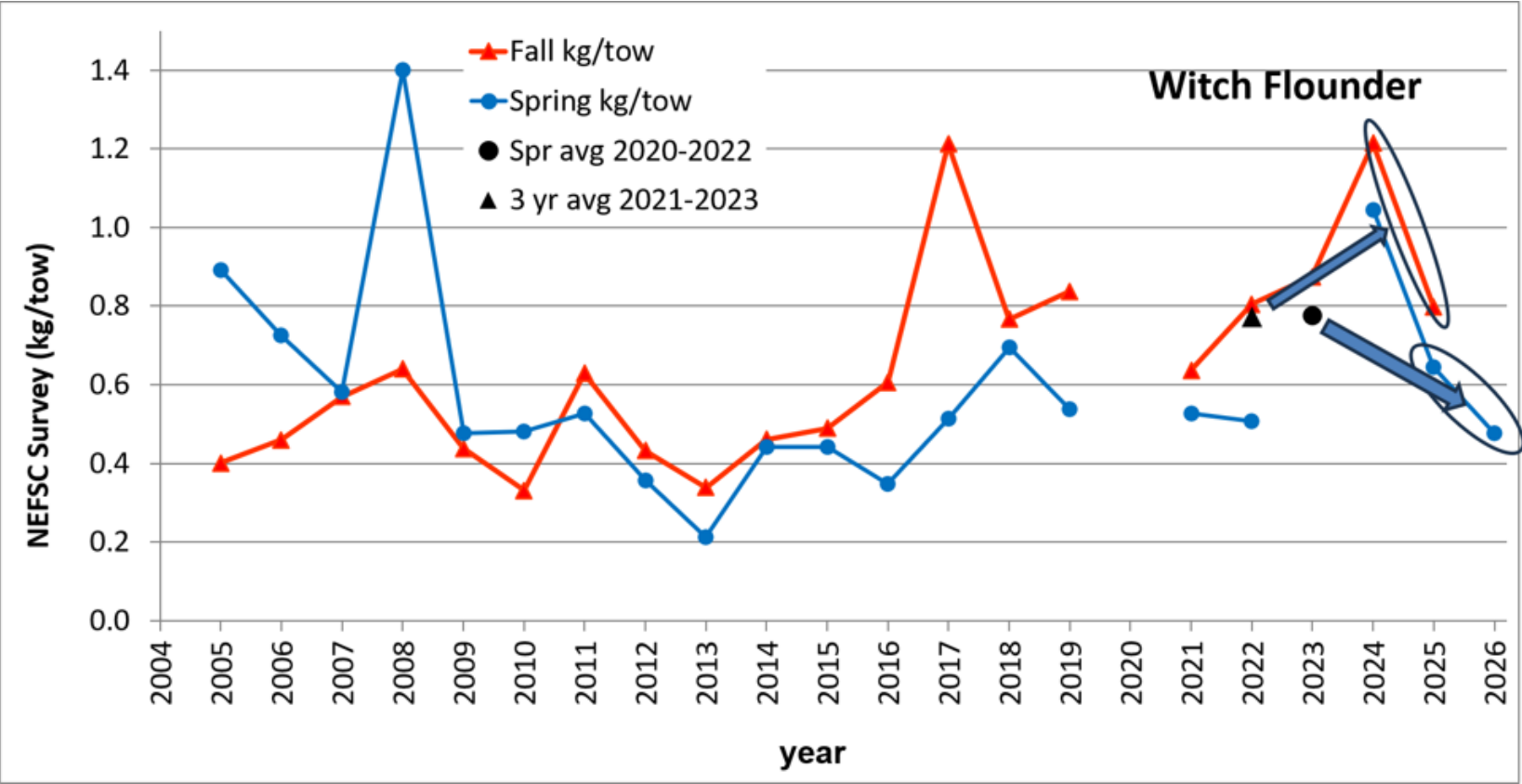
STATUS QUO

Uncertainties and Considerations –

- Status quo ABCs have been in place last 2 years (FYs 2025-26)
- Slight increase in catch recent years follows the increase in ACLs
- No clear indication of a change in stock abundance.
 - Spring survey index declined 2024 – 2026; , fall survey increased substantially in 2024 before declining in 2025 to past levels.
- Stock status is overfished, in a rebuilding plan, and overfishing is unknown.
- OFL and BRPs unknown; projections are not possible.



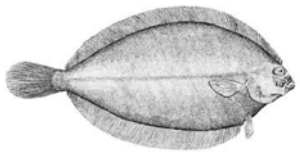
ALTERNATIVE SURVEY-ADJUSTED OPTION



NEFSC Fall Survey	index (kg/tow)
avg 2021-2023	0.772
avg 2024-2025	1.006

NEFSC Spr Survey	index (kg/tow)
avg 2022 & 2024	0.776
avg 2025-2026	0.561

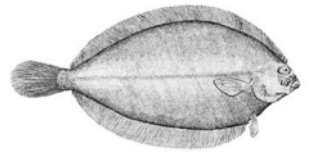
ABC adjustment = 1% increase
= Spring 28% decrease
+ Fall 30% increase



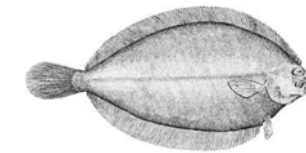
ALTERNATIVE SURVEY-ADJUSTED OPTION

Uncertainties and Considerations –

- Empirical swept assessment, based directly on the surveys
 - Changes in survey indexes inform changes in abundance
 - Inclusion of two surveys adds complication
 - Surveys don't provide clear indication of an increase – two surveys change in opposite directions and cancel each other out
- Only 2 years of updated survey information while assessment based on 3 years
- 1% adjustment to ABC is within survey error, likely no biological difference
- Important target stock and a constraining unit stock
 - 2025 decrease in catch likely related to external factors
- Consider socioeconomic effects consistent with NS 8
- Management track assessment expected in 2027



ABC OPTIONS – WITCH FLOUNDER



The PDT does not recommend one option over the other.

- No clear indication of a change in biomass
- Small change in biomass is within the error of the surveys

Maintaining the status quo ABC –

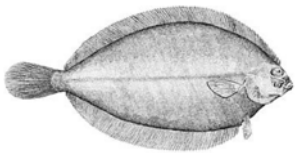
- Supported by:
 - Overfished status and rebuilding plan
 - OFL and BRPs unknown; projections are not possible.

Updating the ABC based on the survey indices –

- Supported by:
 - 1% adjustment to ABC is within survey error, likely no biological difference
 - Important target stock and a constraining unit stock
 - Consider socioeconomic effects consistent with NS 8



POTENTIAL OFLS AND ABCS – WITCH FLOUNDER



Status Quo

FY	OFL	ABC
2027	Unknown	1,526 mt
2028	Unknown	1,526 mt
2029	Unknown	1,526 mt
2030	Unknown	1,526 mt
2031	Unknown	1,526 mt

Alternative Survey-Adjusted Option

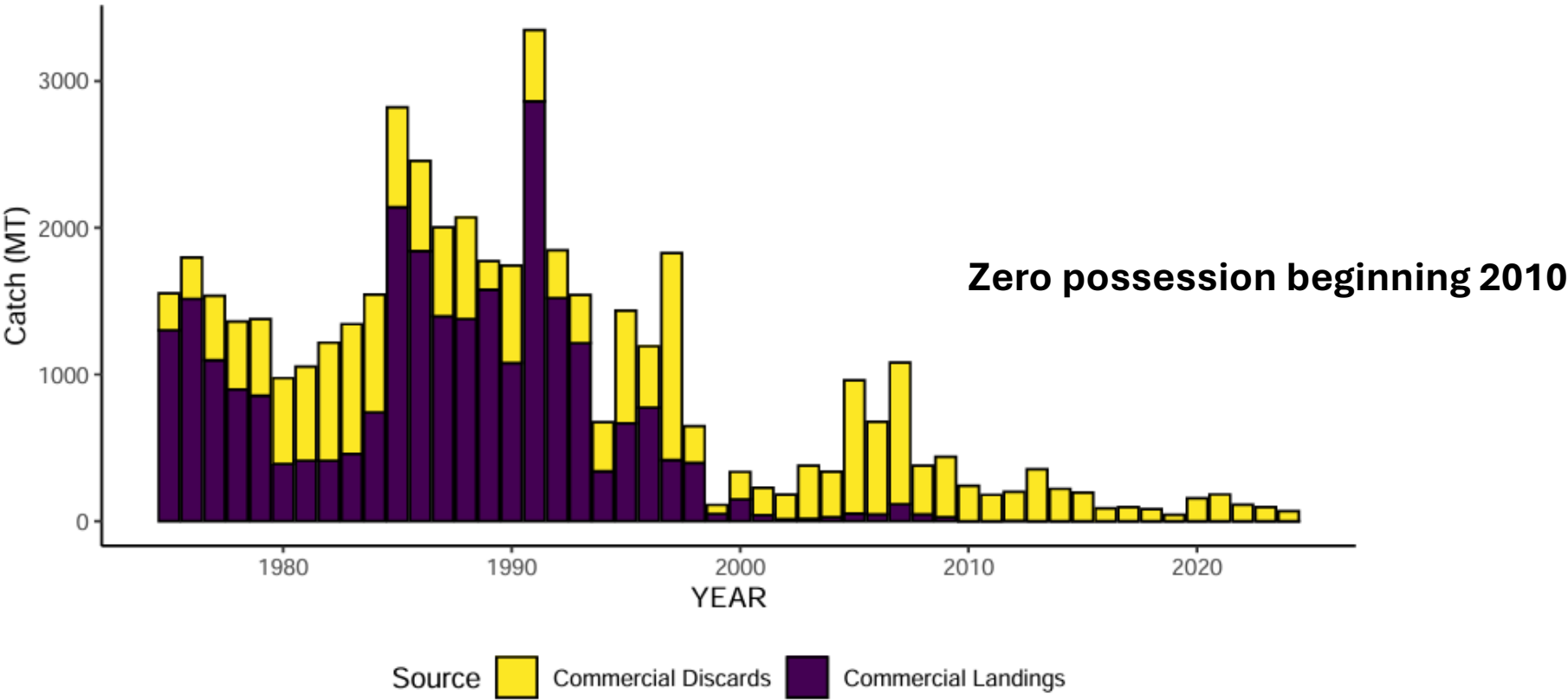
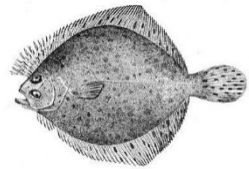
FY	OFL	ABC
2027	Unknown	1,547 mt
2028	Unknown	1,547 mt
2029	Unknown	1,547 mt
2030	Unknown	1,547 mt
2031	Unknown	1,547 mt



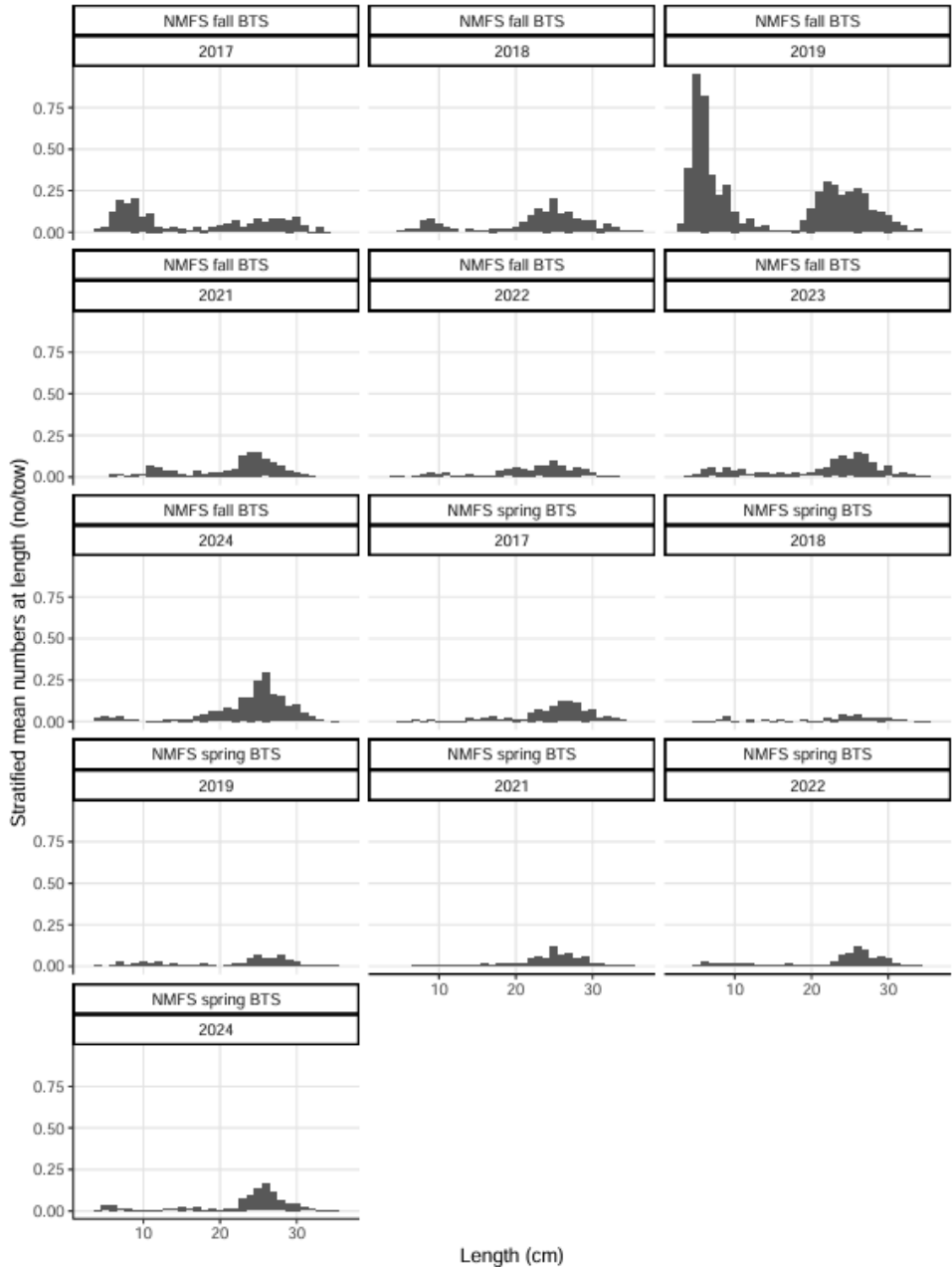
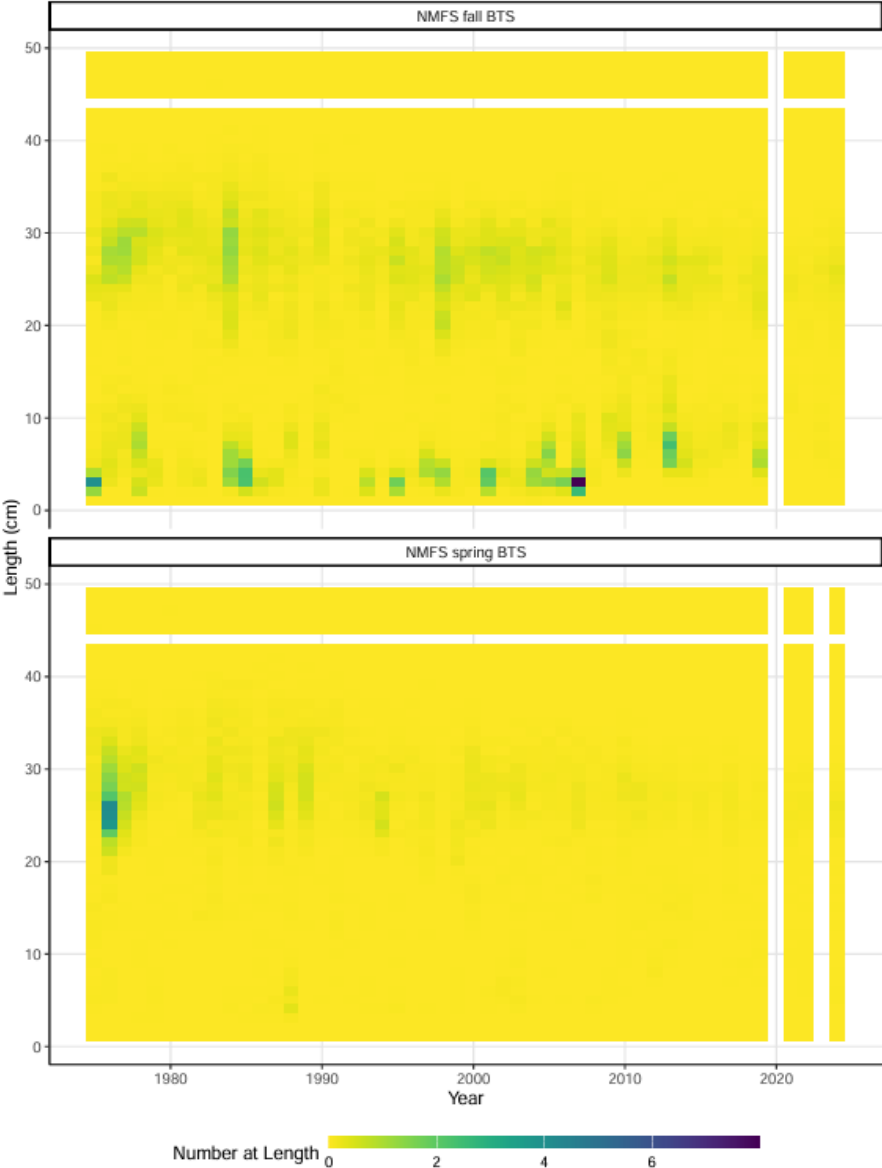
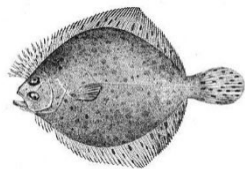
Extra Slides



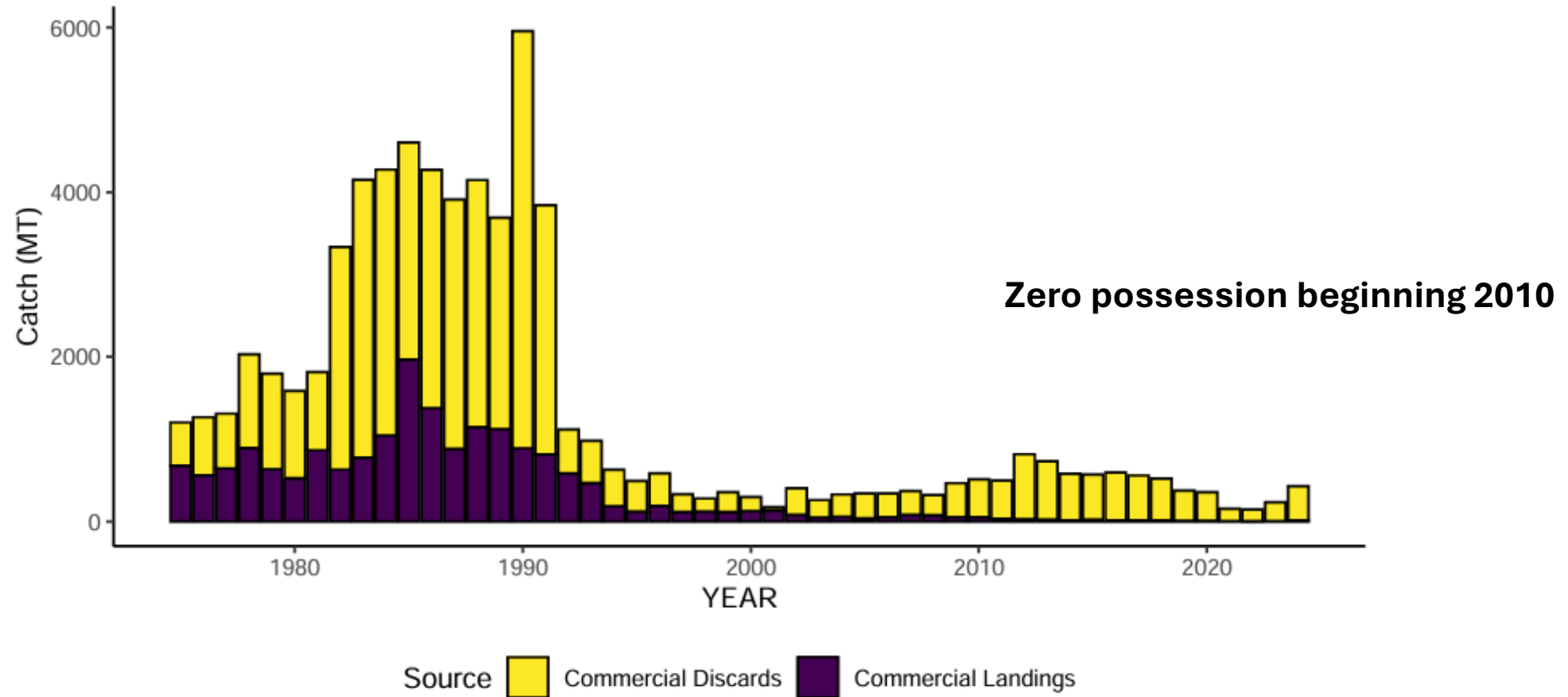
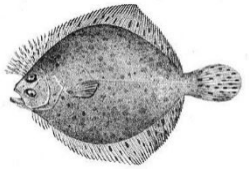
2025 DATA UPDATE – TOTAL CATCH – N. WINDOWPANE



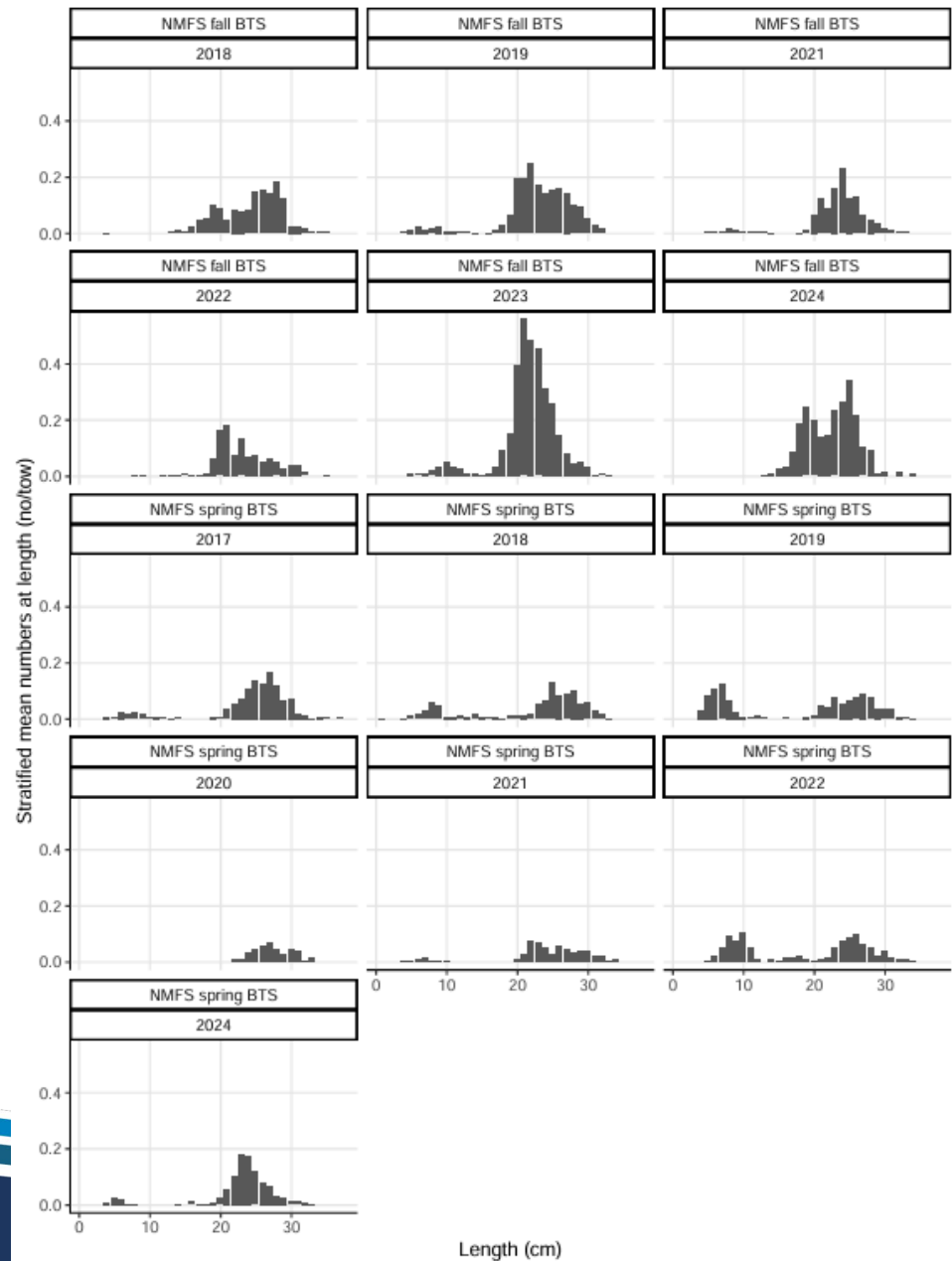
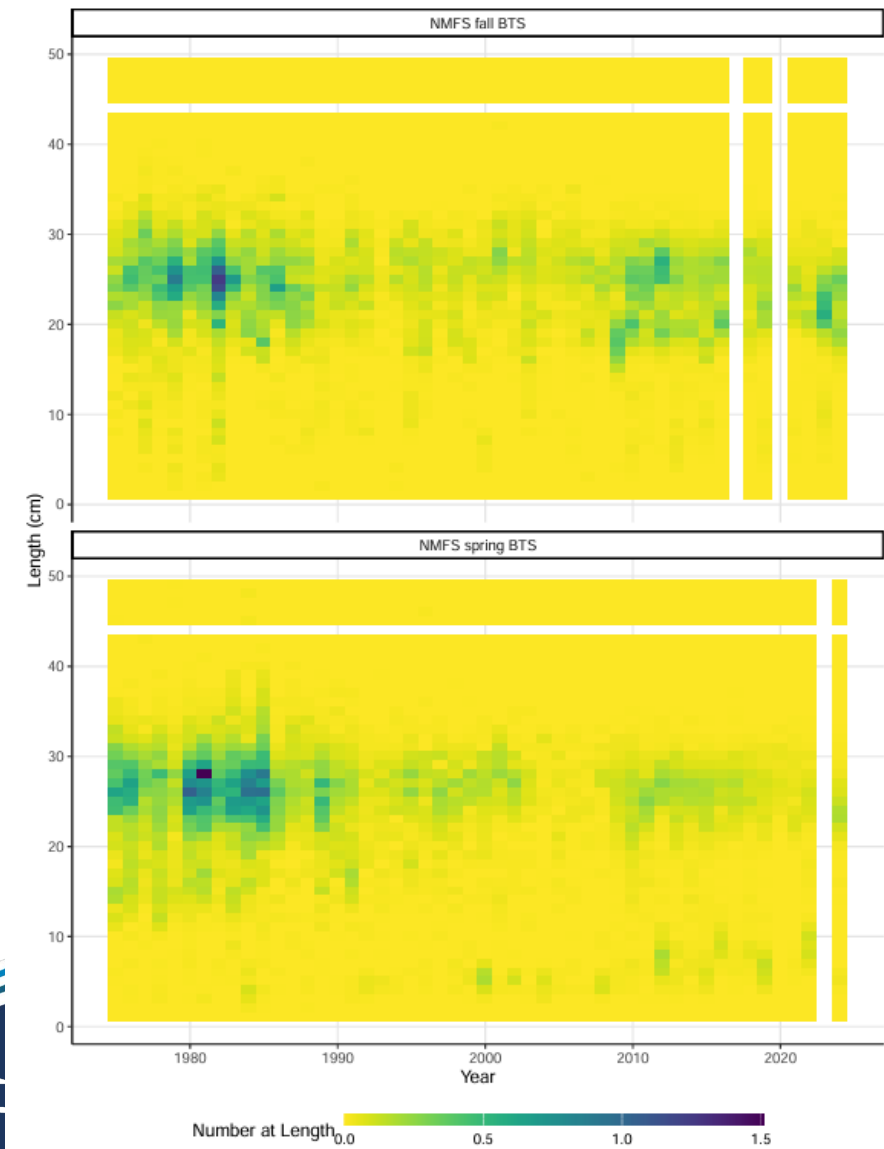
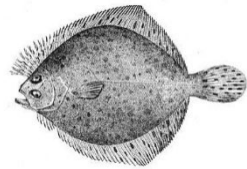
2025 DATA UPDATE – SURVEY STRATIFIED MEAN INDICES AT LENGTH – N. WINDOWPANE



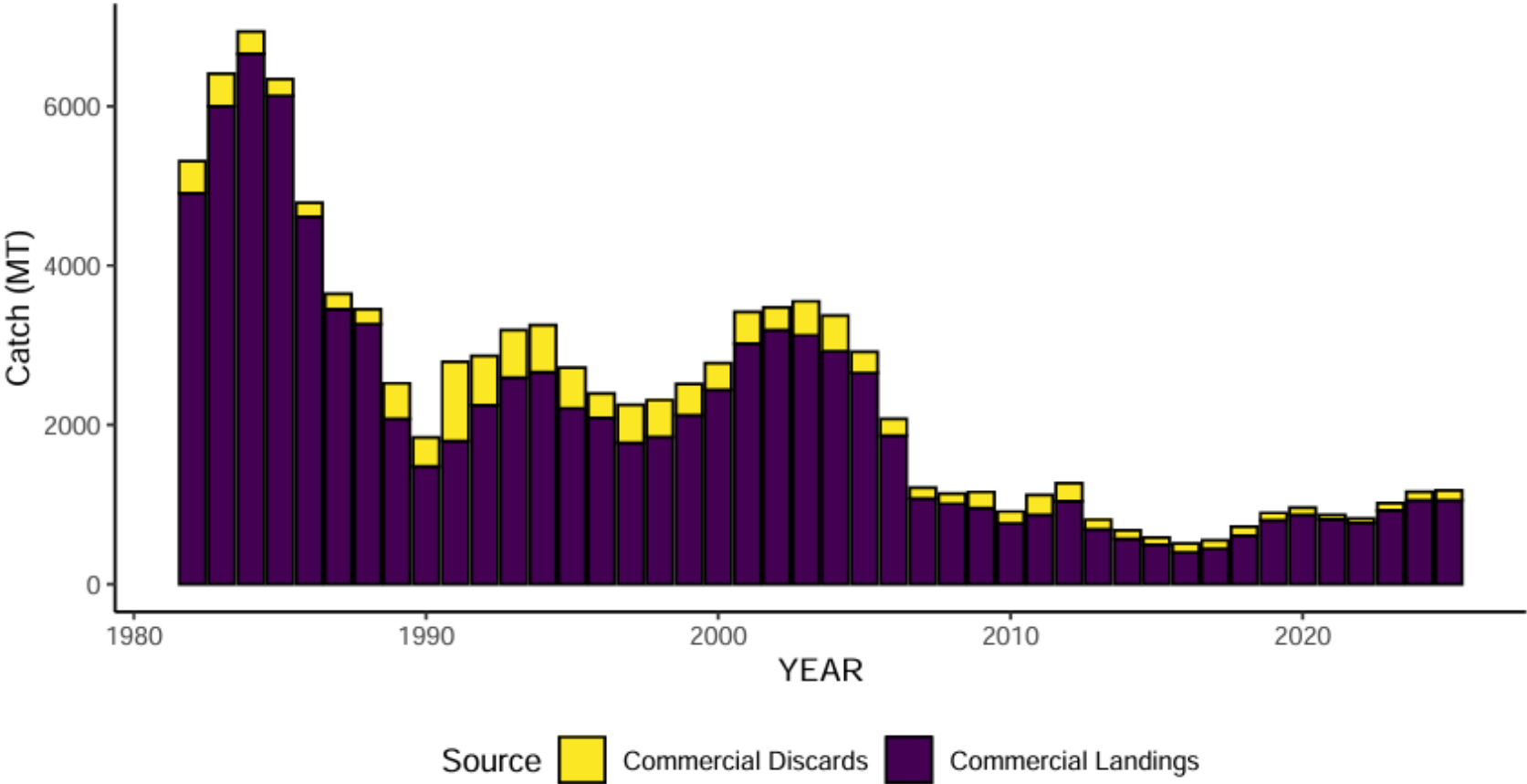
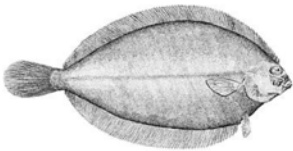
2025 DATA UPDATE – TOTAL CATCH – S. WINDOWPANE



2025 DATA UPDATE – SURVEY STRATIFIED MEAN INDICES AT LENGTH- S. WINDOWPANE



2026 DATA UPDATE – TOTAL CATCH



2026 DATA UPDATE – SURVEY STRATIFIED MEAN INDICES AT LENGTH

