

Analysis of the small-scale fleet's coverage under different biological sampling strategies: from the DCR stock-based sampling to the concurrent DCF métier-based sampling in the Northern Spanish coastal gillnets fleet.

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Summary

One of the major contributions of the current EU Data Collection Framework (DCF) was the shift from a stock-based approach towards a fishery-based approach. The aim of this change was serving the new demands of the fisheries management including the ecosystem approach considerations. Since 2009, the MS national fisheries sampling programs had to adopt the concurrent sampling strategy, which implies that length structure of all species landed must be obtained in the sampling operation. The Northern Spanish coastal small scale fleet represents a major challenge for sampling due to the multi-species and multi-gear character and the complexity of the fleets' dynamics. Particularly, the small-scale gillnets called "beta" (GNS_DEF_60-79_0_0) represents one the more complex Spanish métiers in terms of catches (1850 t in 2014), effort (23341 trips), geographical distribution (Division VIIIc and IXa) and the number of exploited species (more than 60 species). Comparison of data obtained in 2008, under a stock-based approach, versus the full concurrent sampling realized in 2014 resulted in the increase of the information obtained and provided to ICES without detected failures in data quality.

Introduction

Implementation of new data collection procedures in the market sampling following EU Data Collection Framework (DCF) provisions in 2009 led to significant changes in the sampling programmes. From a stock-based approach, sampling design moved to a métier-based scheme where species had to be sampled "concurrently", i.e., all species measured in every sampling event. Regulation grouped species in three groups at a regional level allowing to prioritize them. Concurrent sampling strategy was conceived to facilitate the existing data demands as well as serving the needs for future fishery based management and ecosystem approach. New benefits, as an increase in the information collected (mostly number of species) and the sampling coverage for those sampled, were expected from the new procedures. However, after some years of implementation, the concurrent sampling has proven to be not well-known by end-users (ICES 2015a, in prep.), generating some controversial points of view regarding the new information provided, including quality, utility and the associated costs.

Small-scale fisheries present a major challenge for sampling programmes due to the number of boats, the large number of fishing operations, the diversity and variability of gears and the number of species caught. Concurrent sampling could represent a source of information for small-scale fisheries which often target a set of coastal species some of them presently unassessed.

The approach adopted here is to compare, under statistical and logistical perspectives, the length data compiled for the Northern Spanish small-scale gillnet fleet before and after the concurrent sampling implementation. The current implementation of the concurrent strategy is also discussed to consider changes needed.

Materials and methods

Analysis are based on market sampling length information from the Northern Spanish small-scale gillnets ("betas") collected by IEO during 2008 and 2014. Dataset from 2008 includes information from two Galician ports (Finisterre and Muros) where a stock-based sampling was carried out for hake (*Merluccius merluccius*). The 2014 "betas" data derive from the full concurrent sampling carried out in

the same Galician ports, as well as Cantabrian ports (Aviles/Gijón). The sampling frame is stratified by quarter with a systematic monthly allocation of effort. Overall dataset contains sampling information from 195 trips (74 trips from 2008 and 121 from 2014).

Qualitative analysis was carried using the open-source software developed in R COST (Anon., 2008). This software allows the detection of outliers in length frequencies in the most disaggregated level through the *Delta* measure and the estimation of precision estimates (coefficient of variation: CV) for length structures according to the DCF.

Results and Discussion

Results showed a high increase in the number of species measured, from 1 species in 2008 to 48 species in 2014. However, the 2014 length data are concentrated in a set of 6 species surpassing 500 individuals measured and accounting for the 90% of the total individuals: hake, pouting (*Trisopterus luscus*), Atlantic horse mackerel (*Trachurus trachurus*), striped red mullet (*Mullus surmuletus*), axillary seabream (*Pagellus acarne*) and Atlantic mackerel (*Scomber scombrus*). Total number of lengths rose 176% due to an increase in the number of trips sampled and an overall increase in the number of lengths by trip. Considering hake, the number of lengths by trip decreased in 2014. Nevertheless, the statistical analysis of hake length frequencies provides similar *Delta* values. Same analysis on the rest of species in 2014 provides results equally robust. Precision estimates for hake length structures revealed better CV in 2014. CV of the rest of species show similar levels to hake.

As a conclusion, concurrent sampling on *betas* resulted in an important increase in the number of species and lengths measured, while the quality indicators improved slightly. The importance of the sample size for trips sampled in 2008 was overestimated. The number of trips (primary sampling unit) sampled and the direct estimation of CVs are seen as better quality indicators (ICES, 2014a). Besides not affecting the quality of the information collected, the concurrent sampling approach allows extending the provision of scientific fishery data to ICES for more stocks. Particularly related to the Northern Spanish coastal gillnet fleet, the respective length frequency distributions are currently provided to ICES for hake, striped red mullet, Atlantic horse mackerel and Atlantic mackerel (ICES, 2014b,c,d; ICES, 2015b). Other species with significant biometric data from Spanish “betas”, as axillary seabream or pouting, are not yet assessed by ICES.

Results suggest concurrent market sampling could be optimized through a prioritization of species by métier based on the analysis of data obtained from current implementation. This operational concurrent sampling strategy would ensure the collection of statistically robust information for key species –as required for assessment– without compromising other benefits and uses of concurrent data.

References

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