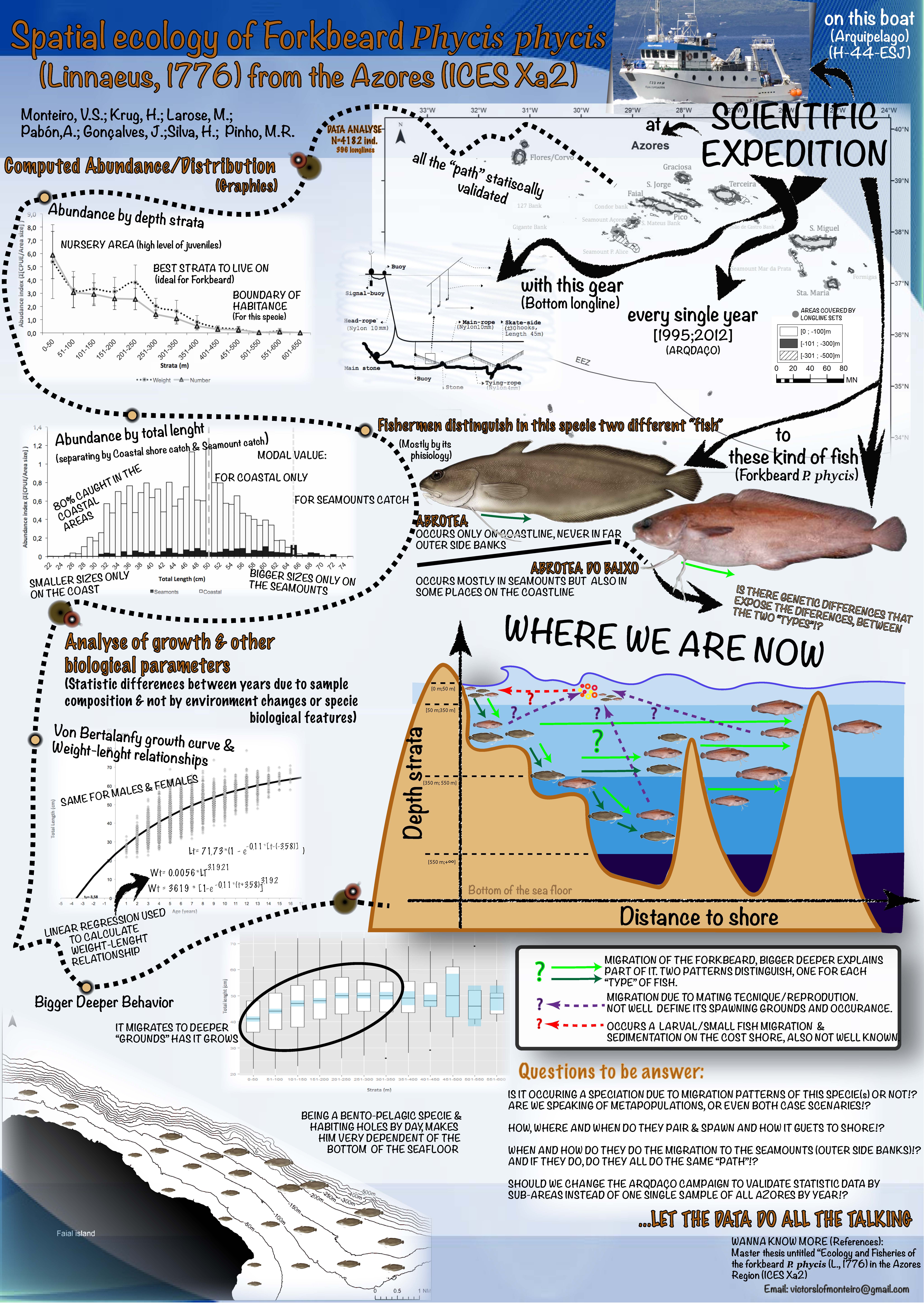
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**Spatial ecology of Forkbeard *Phycis phycis* (Linnaeus, 1776) from the Azores Region (ICES Xa2): Implications for exploitation and management.**

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**Abstract**

The Azores region is defined as an open ocean or a deep-sea ecosystem, where the predominant features are the Mid Atlantic Ridge, seamounts and islands. Constituted by small and fragmented habitat areas with great depth among them, that can act as geographical barriers, suggests the distribution by metapopulations for many species, particularly demersal with bottom dependence. For this study, Forkbeard (*Phycis phycis*) was selected, because it represents one of the most common discharge demersal species of artisanal fisheries and as a high bottom dependence. Survey data, complemented by fishery data, was used to map the species distribution with the objective to analyse and better understand some aspects of the spatial ecology of this demersal species. The results show that the species distribute up to 600m, however about 90% of the abundance occurs up to 350m. Its distribution presents the typical behaviour of bigger-deep (larger individuals inhabit greater depths). Juveniles (LF<31cm) are observed only in coastal areas and very larger individuals (megaspawners) (LF>65cm) are only observed in offshore areas, empathizing differences between metapopulations. The spawners (LF>35-38cm) are found throughout the distribution area. These results suggest that recruitment occurs only in the coastal areas of the islands. The study allows to define the spatial habitat for the Forkbeard and to develop a proposal for its life history in order to discuss the species connectivity aspects in the region of the Azores. Additional information on the characteristics of the fisheries is provided and aspects related to exploration and management are discussed.

**Keywords:** *Phycis phycis*, Azores, seamounts, spatial distribution, metapopulations, connectivity.

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