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Reference Points for Eastern Georges Bank Atlantic Cod

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ABSTRACT

A VPA model (VPA.8) that incorporates recent increasing natural mortality (M) with age is currently used to provide stock assessment advice for Eastern Georges Bank cod. This model sets M at 0.2 for all ages except for ages 6+ beginning in 1994 for which M is 0.8. In the past, a loess smoothed stock recruitment relationship (SRR) in the Sissenwine-Shepherd production model yielded $F_{msy} = 0.125$, but $F_{90\%FMSY} = 0.11$ was chosen as a fishing mortality (F) reference point due to uncertainty around the SRR and the high M. We use the VPA output from the VPA.8 model to estimate several F reference points by applying yield per recruit, spawner per recruit and production models in a Sissenwine-Shepherd approach using a number of SRR fits, and use profile likelihoods to assess plausibility of F_{msy} reference points. There was considerable uncertainty in the maximum likelihood point estimates for the SRR and F reference points. A decision theoretic approach was used to estimate F reference points by maximising the expectation of catch by integrating across the likelihood surface of the SRR parameters. Attempts to model the stock-recruitment (SR) in ways that reflect apparent productivity changes did not improve the ability to estimate productivity, so the full time series of data is considered for defining F reference points. $F_{maxE(C)}$, or the F that maximises the expectation of catch, which is thought to be less variable and to lessen the risk of overexploitation relative to F_{msy} , was 0.097 (approximately 0.1), and is proposed as a F reference point for the Eastern Georges Bank cod VPA.8 model.

RÉSUMÉ

Un modèle d'analyse de population virtuelle (APV.8) qui intègre la récente augmentation de la mortalité naturelle (M) avec l'âge est actuellement utilisé pour formuler les avis sur l'évaluation du stock de morue de l'est du banc de Georges. Ce modèle établit la valeur de M à 0,2 pour tous les âges, sauf pour les âges de 6 ans et plus après 1994, pour lesquels la valeur de M est de 0,8. Par le passé, une relation stock-recrutement avec lissage loess dans le modèle de production de Sissenwine-Shepherd a donné lieu à une F_{RMS} de 0,125; toutefois, une valeur de $F_{90\%RMS}$, c'est-à-dire 0,11, a été choisie comme point de référence de la mortalité par pêche (F) en raison des incertitudes liées à la relation stock-recrutement et de la haute valeur de M. Nous utilisons les extrants du modèle APV.8 afin d'estimer plusieurs points de référence de F par l'application des modèles de rendement par recrue, de stock reproducteur par recrue et de production dans une approche de Sissenwine-Shepherd qui utilise plusieurs ajustements de la relation stock-recrutement et des fonctions de vraisemblance pour évaluer la vraisemblance des points de référence de F_{RMS} . Le niveau d'incertitude lié aux estimations du point maximal de vraisemblance pour la relation stock-recrutement et les points de référence de F était très élevé. Une approche théorique de décision a été utilisée pour estimer les points de référence de F en maximisant les attentes relatives aux prises au moyen de l'intégration des paramètres de la relation stock-recrutement dans l'ensemble de la plage de vraisemblance. Les tentatives visant à modéliser la relation stock-recrutement d'une manière qui reflète les changements de productivité apparents n'ont pas permis d'améliorer la capacité à estimer la productivité, de sorte que l'ensemble des séries chronologiques de données est pris en compte dans la définition des points de référence de F. $F_{maxA(P)}$ (la valeur de F qui maximise les attentes relatives aux prises), qui serait moins variable et moins à risque de surexploitation par rapport à F_{RMS} , était de 0,097 (~0,1) et est proposée comme un point de référence de F pour le modèle APV.8 de la morue de l'est du banc de Georges.

INTRODUCTION

Limit reference points (LPAs) consistent with the Precautionary Approach (PA) were developed for NAFO Division 5Zjm during a zonal science advisory process in 2010. A LRP based on a Beverton-Holt stock-recruitment (SR) model was calculated as $B_{lim} = 21,000$ t. At the time, spawning stock biomass (SSB) was estimated to have been below the limit reference point (LRP) since 1994 and was 9,260 t (Clark et al., 2011). Although recruitment had been consistently low since 1993, there was no evidence to suggest that recruitment could not return to higher levels with higher biomass and that there had been an irreversible change in productivity, so the full (1978-2009) time series of recruitment data was used.

Since that time, various assessment formulations have been used to provide stock assessment advice for Eastern Georges Bank (EGB) cod. At the 2013 benchmark meeting for this stock, it was agreed that high total mortality (Z) for ages 6+ relative to ages 4-5, coupled with declining relative exploitation (catch/survey), implied the natural mortality had increased since the mid-1990s and that natural mortality (M) was higher for ages 6+. This led to the development of the "M 0.8" VPA model (herein VPA.8), which sets $M = 0.2$ for all ages in all years except for ages 6+ beginning in 1994 which have $M = 0.8$ (Wang and O'Brien, 2013). At this time, a loess smoother was fitted to the data to describe the SR, as has been done for EGB haddock (Wang and Van Eeckhaute, 2012).

The estimation of a fishing mortality reference point (F_{rp}) in this situation of increasing M was identified as problematic. Broadly, under a yield-per-recruit (YPR) approach, F_{rp} will increase with higher M , to catch the cod before they are removed from the population through natural causes, while under a maximum sustainable yield (MSY) approach, F_{rp} would decrease to offset the increase in M (Legault and Palmer, 2013¹). The current F_{rp} for EGB cod, was determined to be 0.18 (an F_{msy} proxy $F_{40\%} = 0.18$) partly based on a VPA with $M=0.2$. This F_{rp} was suggested to be inconsistent with the VPA.8 model, and the Transboundary Resources Assessment Committee (TRAC) agreed a lower F reference point would be expected for the VPA.8 model (TRAC, 2013).

The VPA.8 model run for 2013 yielded $F_{0.1}$ and $F_{40\%}$ of 0.46 and 0.53, respectively. Applying the loess-smoothed SRR in the Sissenwine-Shepherd production model estimated F_{msy} at 0.125. Due to uncertainty in the SRR and the high M , $F_{90\%FMSY}$ was suggested ($F = 0.11$) as a reference point for the EGB cod VPA.8 model (Wang and O'Brien, 2013). Concerns with this approach included the arbitrary nature of the choice of $F_{90\%FMSY}$ (and therefore, $F = 0.11$), the variation around the calculation of $F = 0.1$ and the goodness of fit of the loess smoothed SRR.

Using the output from the VPA.8 model, we estimate several F reference points for the EGB cod. Specifically we apply yield per recruit (YPR), spawner per recruit (SPR) and production models in a Sissenwine-Shepherd type analysis. Several stock recruitment relationships were fit to data to determine the best fit model. Common F reference points were estimated using SPR and YPR methods. For the production modelling, profile likelihoods were used to assess the plausibility of values for F_{msy} reference points. There was considerable uncertainty in the maximum likelihood point estimates (MLEs) of the SRR parameters and hence the estimates of F reference points. Following Ianelli and Heiflitz (1995), as well as Gibson and Myers (2004), we applied a decision theoretic approach to estimating reference points which maximises the expectation of catch by integrating across the likelihood surface of the SRR parameters. One advantage of this approach is that it incorporates the uncertainty in stock recruitment parameters into the estimation of reference points.

¹ Legault, C.M., and M.C. Palmer. 2014. What Direction Should the Fishing Mortality Target Change when Natural Mortality Increases Within an Assessment? TRAC WP 2014/27.

METHODS

The merits of the VPA.8 model will not be considered here and results were produced using the accepted output from the model. As the model formulation and SRR data showed a two-phase paradigm (Figure 1), with an upper attractor in the pre-1993 period and a lower less productive attractor post 1993, we performed the analyses described below for each of the two time blocks separately (not including the transition year 1993 in either block), as well as the full time series of data (1978-2010).

STOCK RECRUITMENT RELATIONSHIPS

We explored several hypotheses on the relationship between SSB and R for this stock by fitting different models to the data. Parametric stock and recruitment relationships are often suggested to show compensatory mechanisms, such that recruitment rate (R/S) decreases monotonically as stock size increases through a range of processes including density dependence. A Beverton-Holt relationship (Eq. 1) follows this pattern with the largest increase in recruits per spawner at the origin (α), and compensatory decreases in slope to an asymptotic level of recruitment (R_a).

$$R_t = \frac{\alpha SSB_t}{1 + (\alpha SSB_t / R_a)} \quad \text{Eq. 1}$$

A Ricker model (Eq. 2) also follow this similar form, but also includes a decrease in recruitment with stock size through over-compensatory mechanisms such as increased natural mortality or competition.

$$R_t = \alpha SSB_t e^{-\beta SSB_t} \quad \text{Eq. 2}$$

Additionally, a density-independent, or zero intercept model was used to determine if any evidence of compensatory mechanisms could be determined. The α parameter in Eq. 3 is essentially a slope of the origin with no evidence of an asymptote in recruitment.

$$R_t = \alpha SSB_t \quad \text{Eq. 3}$$

We also evaluated nonparametric models (NPM; such as loess or cubic spline smoothers) as they do not force a functional form. The difficulty with NPMs are that they often result in multiple equilibria, biologically unreasonable functional forms, such as recruitment >0 as spawning stock biomass approaches 0, and the choice of smoothing level is subjective. Here the loess smoother was combined with a wild bootstrapping technique (Liu 1988) to show 95% confidence bounds around the relationship. Recent work by Cadigan (2013) has suggested the use of shape constrained additive models (SCAM) may provide a nonparametric method to overcome the difficulty fitting SRs to a functional shape. Briefly, SCAM models are a type of generalised additive models, which combine a series of B-spline basis functions centered between a series of knots or divisions across the data space. The shape constraint component of these additive models are the key to using SCAMs for SRs as during the fitting procedure a monotonic concave or convex shapes can be specified in order to maintain the biological realism of the fits. Moreover, constraints can be included to force the nonparametric relationship through the origin.

Parametric models were compared using a delta AIC approach, where AIC incorporated the finite sample size correction (often termed AICc).

LIKELIHOOD PROFILING OF BEVERTON-HOLT STOCK RECRUITMENT RELATIONSHIP (SRR)

Maximum likelihood estimates (MLE) of Beverton-Holt parameters were obtained using a lognormal error structure for recruitment (Myers et al., 1995) in which the log-likelihood is given by:

$$\ell(\alpha, R_a, \sigma) = -n \log \sigma \sqrt{2\pi} - \sum \log r_i - \frac{1}{2\sigma^2} \sum \log \left(\frac{R_i}{g(SSB_i)} \right)^2 \quad \text{Eq. 4}$$

Here, SSB_i and R_i are the spawner biomass and recruitment data in year i , $g(SSB_i)$ is the Beverton-Holt function, σ is the shape parameter and n is the number of paired SRR observations. The log profile likelihood for α (denoted $\ell_p(\alpha)$), is:

$$\ell_p(\alpha) = \max_{R_a, \sigma} \ell(\alpha, R_a, \sigma) \quad \text{Eq. 5}$$

The MLE for α occurs where $\ell_p(\alpha)$ is at its maximum value. The plausibility of individual parameter estimates, given the observed data, was done using profile likelihoods, specifically, by comparing their log likelihoods with the maximised log likelihood. A likelihood ratio based 95% confidence interval for α was calculated as:

$$\{\alpha : 2[\ell_p(\alpha^{\text{MLE}}) - \ell_p(\alpha)] \leq \chi_1^2(0.95)\} \quad \text{Eq. 6}$$

The profile likelihood and the associated 95% confidence interval for R_a were found similarly.

PER RECRUIT ANALYSIS

Yield per recruit (YPR) and spawner per recruit (SPR) analysis were performed following methods of Gabriel et al. (1989) across a range of fishing mortality values (F) incorporating the information outlined in Table 1. The same information was used for the full time series as well as the late period (1994-2010) whereas previously published information was used for the 1978-1992 time block (Working Group on Re-Evaluation of Biological Reference Points for New England Groundfish, 2002).

PRODUCTION MODEL

The SPR , YPR and SRR were combined to generate a production model. Specifically, for a given value of F , the spawning biomass produced by the number of recruits in year t is $SSB = SPR_F R_t$. Equilibrium spawning biomasses (SSB^*) and recruitment levels (R^*) were found by solving R_t , and substituting into the Be (Quinn and Deriso 1999) as:

$$\frac{SSB^*}{SPR_F} = \frac{\alpha SSB^*}{1 + \frac{\alpha SSB^*}{R_a}} \quad \text{Eq. 7}$$

Rearranging, the equilibrium spawning biomass (SSB^*) becomes:

$$SSB^* = \frac{(\alpha SPR_F - 1)R_a}{\alpha} \quad \text{Eq. 8}$$

which can be substituted back into the Beverton-Holt model to determine equilibrium recruitment (R^*):

$$R^* = \frac{\alpha SSB^*}{1 + \frac{\alpha SSB^*}{R_0}} \quad \text{Eq. 9}$$

The equilibrium catch (C^*) is simply the product of R^* and YPR_F :

$$C^* = R^* \cdot YPR_F \quad \text{Eq. 10}$$

We estimated F_{msy} by calculating C^* for each value of F , and selecting the value where C^* was maximised.

REFERENCE POINTS

Reference points from the SPR and YPR analyses were found using a grid search across the set of F (Table 1). Reference points estimated from the YPR were F_{max} , which is the fishing mortality resulting in the maximum YPR , and $F_{0.1}$, which is the fishing mortality where the slope of the YPR curve is 10% that of the slope at the origin. From the SPR an estimate of F_{spr40} , representing the fishing mortality at which the SPR is reduced to 40% of the SPR estimated for unfished ($F=0$) population, was derived.

Using the production model, F_{msy} and F_{col} (F that could cause stock collapse) were estimated through a grid search to find the fishing mortality rate that produces maximum sustainable yield (F_{msy}) and the fishing mortality rate that drives the population to extinction, respectively. Specifically, F_{col} was estimated by finding the value of F where the parameter α , the slope at the origin, equals $1/SPR_F$. The profile likelihood for F_{msy} was found by mapping the profile likelihood for α to F_{msy} using the production model.

An alternative reference point that has been used when SRRs are not well defined was suggested by Sissenwine and Shepherd (1987; but see Legault and Brooks, 2013). This reference point finds the F that produces a replacement line with a slope that equals the average survival ratio. They suggested it could be estimated from the median survival ratio in which case it is often referred to as F_{med} (Quinn and Deriso, 1999) and is the level of fishing mortality where recruitment has been more than sufficient to balance losses to fishing mortality in 50% of the observed years. We found F_{med} , using an objective function to 1) minimize the absolute difference in the number of observations above and below the replacement line, and 2) minimize the sum of squared differences.

DECISION THEORETIC APPROACHES TO REFERENCE POINTS

The profile likelihoods and likelihood surfaces for the Beverton-Holt, for any of the time periods, suggested that although MLE parameter estimates for α and R_a could be obtained, the parameters were not always well defined and were too imprecise to be of use (see Results). Previous work by Clark (1991) suggested that if reasonable ranges of α are known a production-based reference F can be estimated without any knowledge of the true SR through

maximising the minimum yield across the set of α 's. A meta-analysis of Atlantic Cod populations provided distributions of α and $\alpha K (\equiv R_a)$; Myers et al., 2001) which could be used to inform such an analysis. However, the levels of estimated production for this population of cod preclude this as a viable option as even during the highest biomass and recruitment period (1978-1992) the production is well below the meta-analytic distributions (see Results).

The profile likelihoods for the full time series of SR show that R_a is not precisely estimated (see Results). Consequently, the data do not preclude the possibility that the population could be larger than the MLE. Larger population sizes would lead to larger yields from the fishery, and given the uncertainty in the parameter estimates, a reference point based on the maximum likelihood estimates for the parameters may not be appropriate if it reduced the probability of obtaining larger catches. Similarly, for the two shortened time series α was not well defined (see Results), suggesting that the population's ability to rebound at low population sizes was not well defined under truncated data series.

To address these issues, a set of plausible SR parameters can be viewed as alternative hypotheses about the productivity of the population, and an *F reference point* can be defined as the fishing mortality rate that maximises the expectation of the equilibrium catch over this set of alternative hypotheses (Ianelli and Heifetz, 1995), this reference point is denoted $F_{max.E(C)}$.

Estimating $F_{max.E(C)}$ requires the determination of a parameter space, Ω , for the two dimensions

$$\alpha = \frac{1}{SPR_{F=0}}$$

representing α and R_a . We used $\frac{1}{SPR_{F=0}}$ as the lower limit for α in each time period. This lower limit was chosen as α levels below this limit would not maintain a viable population since reproduction would not offset natural mortality. Although, the productivity of Eastern Georges Bank cod is suggested to be lower than that provided by the meta-analysis of Myers et al. (2001) (see Results), we did not want to preclude the potential for higher growth, as such, we set the upper bound for α at the upper 99% percentile of the random effects distribution. Similarly we used the 1st and 99th percentiles of the random effects distribution of R_a for the bounds. Sensitivity analysis suggests that the choice of range for both α and R_a had very minimal impact on $F_{maxE(C)}$ (results not shown). Using the maturity schedules and natural mortality defined in Table 1, the expectation of the equilibrium catch can be estimated as:

$$E(C^*(F)) = \iint C^*(F, \alpha, R_a) p(\alpha, R_a) dR_a d\alpha \quad \text{Eq. 11}$$

where $C^*(F, \alpha, R_a)$ is the equilibrium catch as a function of the fishing mortality rate, the maximum reproductive rate and the asymptotic recruitment level, and $p(\alpha, R_a)$ is the probability density evaluated at α and R_a . We calculated $p(\alpha, R_a)$ using the likelihood surface for each time block as:

$$p(\alpha, R_a) = \left\{ \begin{array}{ll} \frac{L(\mathbf{R} | \mathbf{S}, \alpha, R_a)}{\iint_{\Omega} L(\mathbf{R} | \mathbf{S}, \alpha, R_0) d\alpha dR_a}, & \alpha, R_a \in \Omega \\ 0 & \text{otherwise} \end{array} \right\} \quad \text{Eq. 12}$$

$F_{maxE(C)}$ is then the F that maximises the expectation of the catch:

$$F_{max.E(C)} = \underset{F}{\operatorname{argmax}} E(C * (F))$$

Using $F_{maxE(C)}$, an estimate of the percent SPR_{F0} was made to display the equivalent $F_{spr\%}$ given the proposed F_{rp} .

RESULTS

Following the previous work in Wang and O'Brien (2013) we performed *SPR* and *YPR* analyses to estimate several F reference points for the early (1978-1992), late (1994-2010), and full time series of data. The early time block represented a period with assumed lower natural mortality on the older ages, older age at maturity and the population had a larger weight at age than in the late or full time series (Table 1). The same population and fishery information was used for the late and full time series and will, therefore, be considered together. Each of the $F_{0.1}$, F_{max} , and F_{spr40} reference points increased between 175 and 210% from the early to the late period largely as a result of the increasing natural mortality (Table 2; Figures 2 and 3). F_{med} did not follow this pattern as the reference point was higher for the early period at 0.427, compared to the late time period of 0.05 or the full time period of 0.11 (Table 2).

The density independent, Beverton-Holt and Ricker parametric stock recruitment relationships for Eastern Georges Bank cod were comparable with delta AICc's <3 and all showed a characteristic linear increase across the range of data (Figure 4). Neither the Ricker nor the Beverton-Holt model displayed compensatory recruitment decreases over the observed range of data. Compensatory decreases in recruitment rates with increasing spawner abundance were achieved with the non-parametric models (Figure 5). The use of a loess smoother (span = 0.52) followed the data trajectory but did suggest the potential for multiple equilibria, and the upper confidence bounds from wild bootstrap did not follow the same asymptotic relationship and was therefore not explored further (Figure 5). The shape constrained additive model (SCAM) did force compensation and asymptotic recruitment; however, this led to significant patterning in the recruitment residuals, such that spawning stock biomasses above 30 kt all had positive residuals (Figure 5). For the remainder of the analyses, the Beverton-Holt stock recruitment relationship was used as it was not rejected as a suitable model for describing the SR and it was considered the best fit SR model for many previously examined cod stocks (Myers et al., 2001).

Comparing the Beverton-Holt parameters with those obtained from meta-analysis (Myers et al., 2001) suggested that Eastern Georges Bank cod are maintained at a lower carrying capacity, and have a lower maximum reproductive rate than the combined information across populations (Figure 6). Moreover, SRR data suggests that the biomass of spawners produced per spawner have only rarely been observed to be above the meta-analytic Beverton-Holt relationship (Figure 6).

The likelihood profiles for the Beverton-Holt parameters across the full time series suggested that α could be defined, as there was evidence of both upper and lower limits of the likelihood ratio based confidence bounds (Figure 7). The asymptotic recruitment (R_a) was ramped with evidence of a lower bound but not a reasonable estimate of the upper bounds. Mapping the profile likelihood for α to F_{msy} through the production model suggested that the MLE for F_{msy} was 0.079 with likelihood ratio 95% confidence bounds of (0 and 0.17 - Figure 7, Table 2). In contrast, both the early and late time series blocks were ramped for α , and the late time period was also ramped for R_a (Figures 8 and 9). The likelihood ratio 95% confidence lower bounds were 0.16 for the early time block and 0.12 for the late time block, suggesting that the confidence bounds for α were not significantly different than that for the full time series (Figures 7-9). From these two time blocks, MLE estimates of F_{msy} were estimated to be 0.33

and 0.42 respectively (Table 2); however, the likelihood profiles suggest that the upper limits for these estimates are not defined and do not preclude the possibility that α and F_{msy} could be larger than the MLE (Figures 8 and 9).

F_{col} was estimated for the full time series to be 0.172, which is below the current F_{msy} proxy at 0.18 (Table 2). The estimates of F_{col} for the early and late time series were high at levels >1.6 for both (Table 2). There would also be considerable uncertainty in the shortened time series for F_{col} as the α parameter is not well defined for either time period.

Exploring the set of parameter space of α and R_a under a decision theoretic framework yielded estimates of $F_{maxE(C)}$ of 0.281, 0.097, and 0.097 for the early, late, and full time series of data respectively (Figures 10 and 11). For both the early and late time series, the estimate of F_{msy} was larger than the estimate of $F_{maxE(C)}$, which was likely due to the greater uncertainty in the α Beverton-Holt parameter for these time periods. Conversely, α was better defined for the full time series, which yielded a marginally higher estimate of $F_{maxE(C)}$. Converting the full time series $F_{maxE(C)}$ to the equivalent currently used F_{msy} proxy would result in $F_{spr80\%}$.

DISCUSSION

Although the biomass and recruitment data suggests that Eastern Georges Bank cod have undergone productivity changes, attempting to model the SRR data as two separate time periods did not improve the ability to estimate production. As such, the full time series of data should be considered for defining F reference points. Moreover, when defining precautionary reference points it is often suggested to use the full time series of data to ensure the full breadth of observed productivity is included (DFO, 2013).

Applying a decision theoretic approach to defining the F reference point, $F_{maxE(C)}$, allowed for the incorporation of uncertainty in stock recruitment relationship through the integration of the likelihood surface and production models. Previous simulation studies have suggested that $F_{maxE(C)}$ exhibited less variability and substantially reduced the risk of overexploiting populations when compared to fishing near F_{msy} (Gibson and Myers, 2004). A reference point based on the estimate of $F_{maxE(C)}$ of 0.097 (~ 0.1) is therefore proposed as the fishing mortality reference point for the Eastern Georges Bank cod VPA.8 model.

The estimate of F_{med} of 0.11 for the full time series of data was very similar to the $F_{maxE(C)}$. Recent work by Legault and Brooks (2013) has shown that F_{med} may not be a useful proxy for F_{msy} or $F_{spr\%}$ as it does not necessarily describe any biological or productivity feature of the stock. In instances, such as this example for the Eastern Georges Bank cod, when there is a fairly long time series of spawning stock biomass estimates, and the hypothesis of a density independent SR cannot be rejected, the median replacement line or F_{med} may be considered a robust slope of the origin model and may be meaningful as a fishing mortality reference point. However, a full simulation analysis of this suggestion is warranted.

The increase in natural mortality between early and late periods resulted in an increase in YPR and SPR F reference points. This pattern has been shown elsewhere and is due to the decrease in overall YPR and SPR as individuals are removed from the fishable or spawning population at a much faster rate (Legault and Palmer, 2013). The higher F reference points from this type of analysis do not lend themselves to a precautionary fishery strategy, unless the population has entered a new equilibrium state and there is no expectation of the fish returning to their natural productivity levels. There is no evidence to suggest EGB cod cannot increase their productivity levels in the future.

Under the Beverton-Holt stock recruitment relationship and the recently updated SPR analysis, the fishing mortality rate that would cause stock collapse (F_{col}) was estimated to be 0.17, which is below the current F_{msy} proxy at 0.18. Although, there remains variability around this estimate

of F_{col} , the spawning stock biomass of EGB cod stock appears to be variable and declining from 2009-2012 even as estimated fishing mortalities were at or below 0.18 (Wang and O'Brien, 2013). This supports the suggestion that a lower F reference point for the VPA.8 model was warranted, relative to the current $F_{rp} = 0.18$.

Based on the time series of data available, the EGB cod population is not as productive as many of the North Atlantic cod stocks. Specifically, during periods when the spawning stock biomass levels are similar to those of other stocks, the resultant recruitment appears to be lower, which was the situation even during periods of highest spawner biomass (Myers et al., 2001). This may be partially due to the high level of connectivity between EGB cod stock and the broader Georges Bank cod. Other explanations for this pattern may include higher mortality on the pre-recruiting animals, higher interspecific competition (e.g. Collie et al., 2009) or perhaps lower reproductive capacity. The discussion on this topic is beyond the realm of the current working paper.

In summary, because attempts to model the SR in ways that reflect apparent productivity changes did not improve the ability to estimate productivity, the full time series of data should be considered for defining fishing mortality reference points. We propose $F_{maxE(C)}$, which was 0.097 (approximately 0.1), as a suitable reference point for the Eastern Georges Bank cod VPA.8 model that better reflects M changes, and minimises the risk of overexploitation relative to F_{msy} .

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TABLES

Table 1. Age specific information used for yield and spawner per recruit analysis.

Measure		Full Time Series / Late Time Series- 1994-2010	Early Time Series – 1978-1992
Age		1 : 10+	1: 10+
Weight at Age	Fishery	0.37, 1.16, 1.93, 2.81, 3.80, 4.88, 6.10, 7.41, 8.85, 11.65	0.68, 1.15, 1.89, 2.93, 4.2, 5.72, 7.39, 8.96, 10.49, 15.23
	Population	0.07, 0.63, 1.37, 2.19, 3.14, 4.39, 5.39, 7.40, 8.74, 11.65	0.88, 1.51, 2.36, 3.63, 5.02, 6.59, 8.33, 9.74, 11.37, 14.74
Maturity at age		0,0,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1	0.13, 0.57, 0.92, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1
Partial Recruitment		0.01, 0.1, 0.6, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1	0.0001, 0.19, 0.66, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1
Mortality at Age		0.2, 0.2, 0.2, 0.2, 0.2, 0.8, 0.8, 0.8, 0.8, 0.8,	0.2, 0.2, 0.2, 0.2, 0.2, 0.2, 0.2, 0.2, 0.2, 0.2,
Fishing Mortality		0.001,0.002,....1.999, 2	0.001,0.002,....1.999, 2

Table 2. Maximum likelihood parameter estimates (MLE) for the Beverton-Holt stock recruitment relationship with α representing the slope at the origin and R_a the asymptotic recruitment level. Fishing mortality reference points estimated under several methods are shown for three different time blocks.

Theoretical Basis	MLE Parameter Estimate / Reference Point	Full Time Series (1978-2010)	Early Time Series (1978-1992)	Late Time Series (1994-2010)
Beverton-Holt	A	0.203	2.9E7	0.78
	R_a	5.9E8	8.43	2.97
Yield per Recruit	$F_{0.1}$	0.461*	0.168	0.461*
	F_{max}	0.916*	0.33	0.916*
Spawner per Recruit	$F_{40\%}$	0.518*	0.167	0.518*
	SPR_{F0}	7.20	26.2	7.2
	F_{med}	0.11	0.427	0.05
Production Model	F_{col}	0.173	>2	1.61
	F_{msy}	0.079	0.33	0.424
Decision Theoretic	$F_{max,E(C)}$	0.097	0.281	0.097

*Reference points are based on the same life history parameters in both periods and are therefore the same.

FIGURES

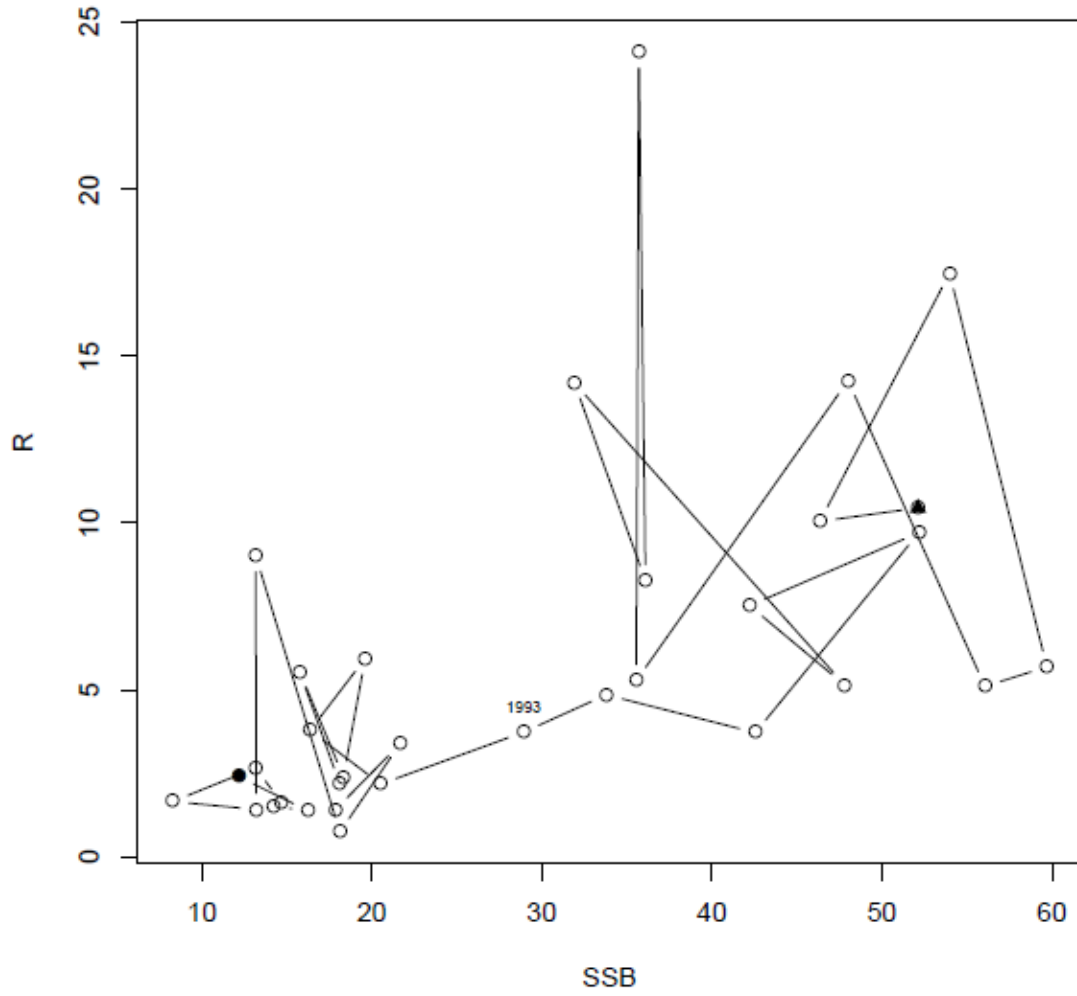


Figure 1. Trajectory of spawner biomass (kt) and recruit (millions of fish) data. Time series begins in 1978 (denoted by a filled triangle) and continues to 2010 (denoted by a filled circle).

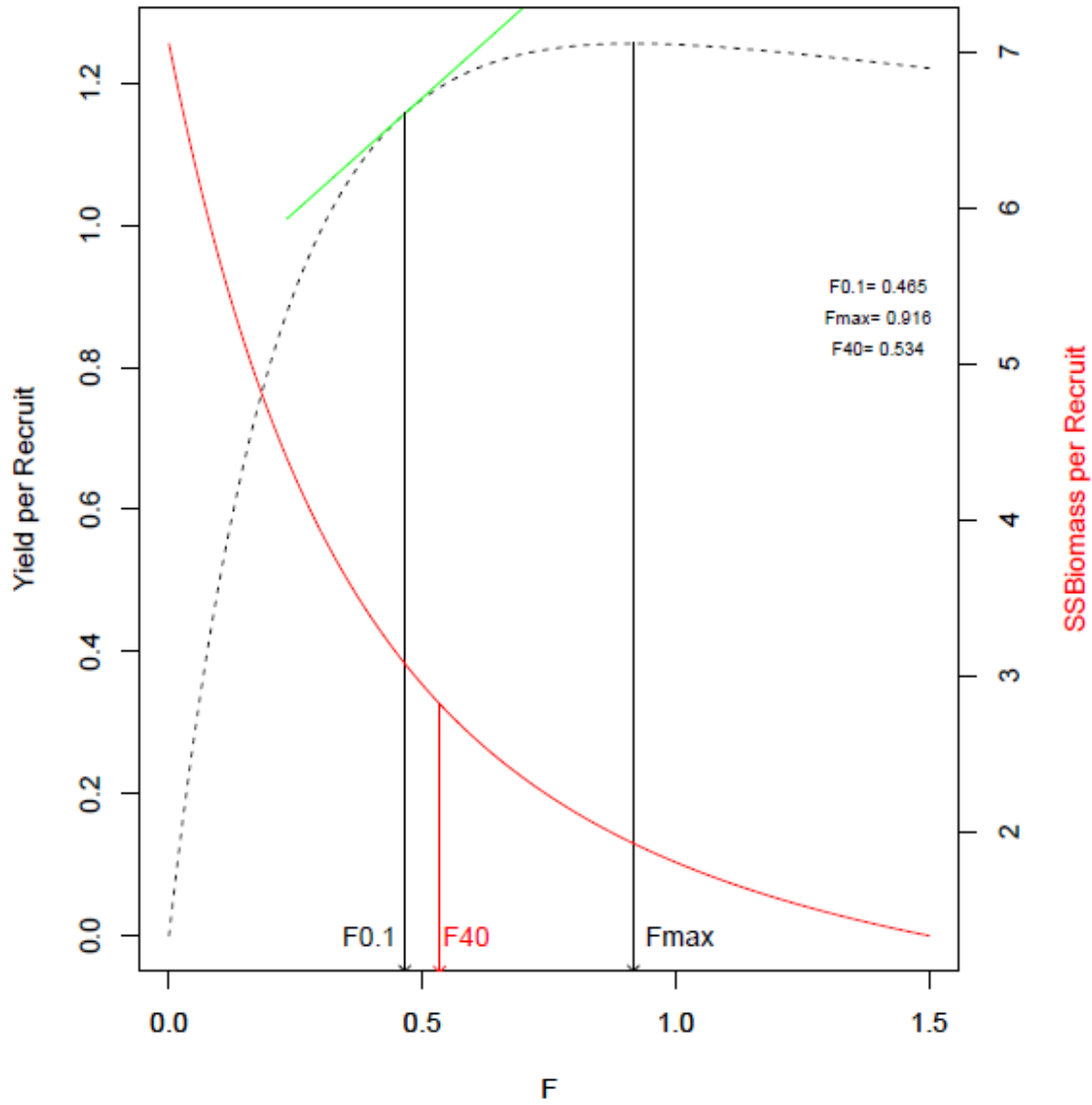


Figure 2. Yield (black line) and spawning stock biomass (red line) per recruit curves for Eastern Georges Bank cod. Fishing mortality reference based on these two equilibrium models are shown. Results are for the full time series of data.

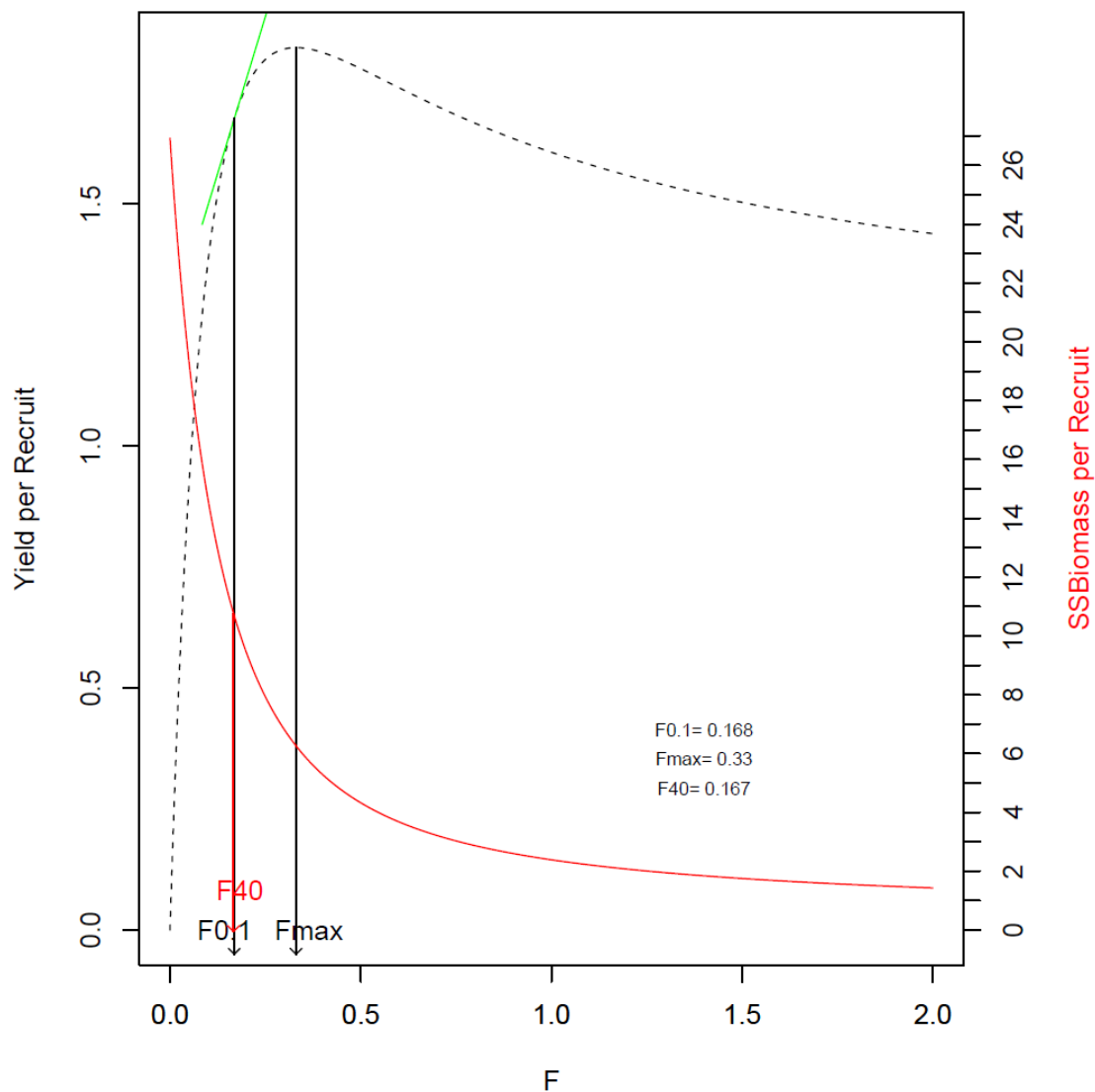


Figure 3. Yield (black line) and spawning stock biomass (red line) per recruit curves for Eastern Georges Bank cod during 1978-1992. Fishing mortality reference based on these two equilibrium models are shown.

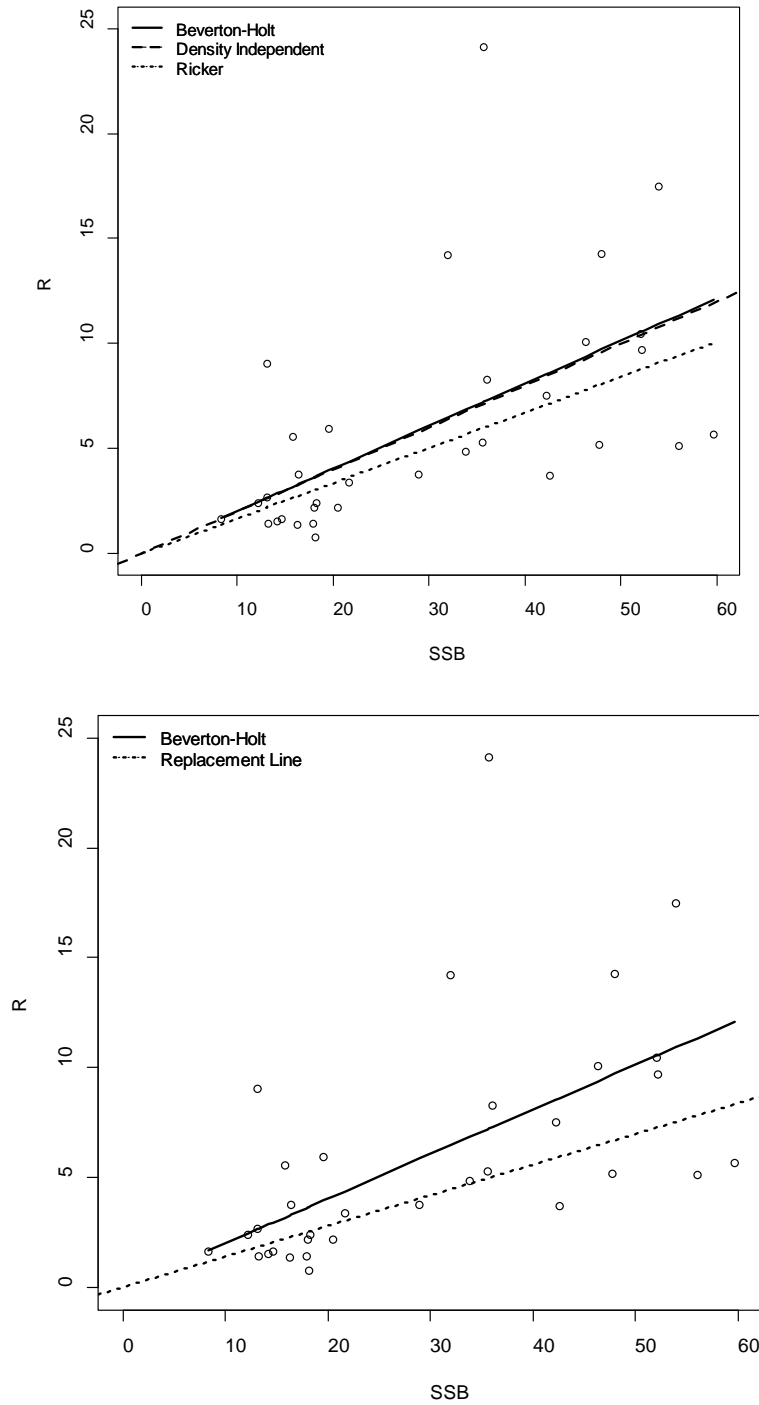


Figure 4. Stock recruitment relationships for Eastern Georges Bank cod. (Upper) Beverton-Holt (solid), Ricker (dotted) and density independent (dashed) relationships. (Lower) Beverton-Holt SR (solid) with replacement line F_{rep} (dotted) at $1/SPR_{F_0}$.

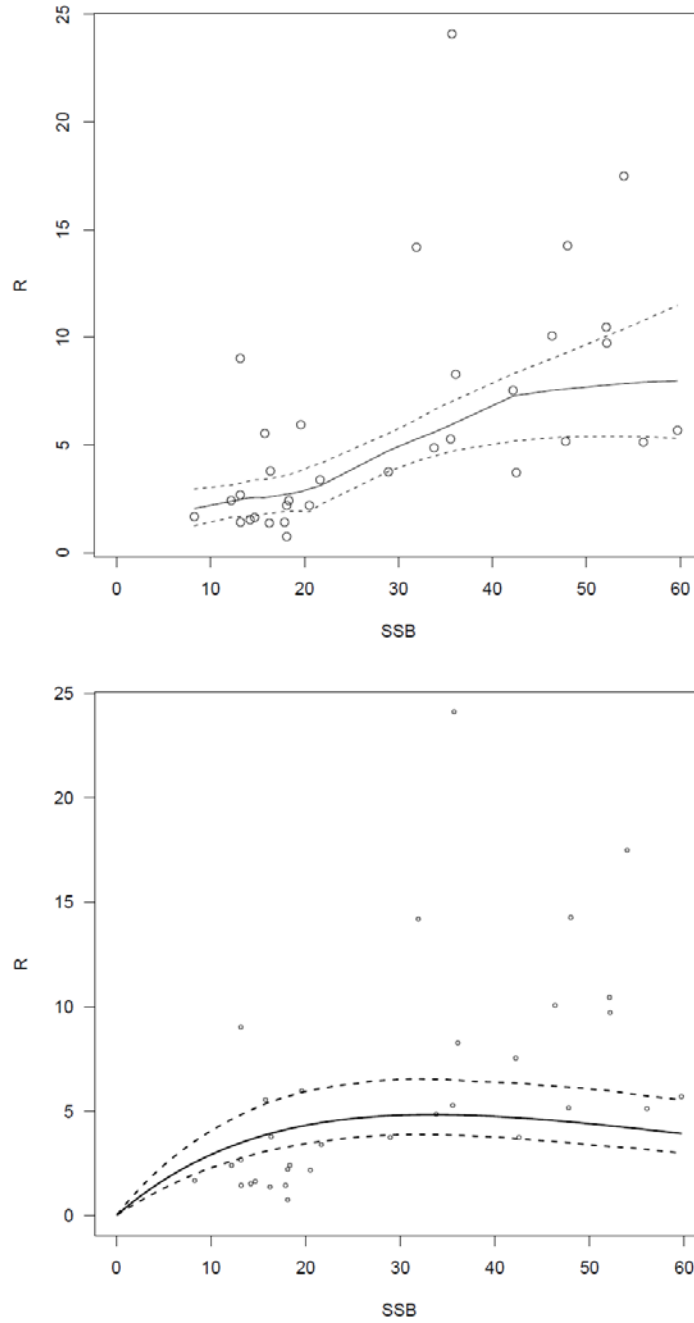


Figure 5. Stock recruitment relationships for Eastern Georges Bank cod. (Upper) Loess SRR with a span of 0.52 and wild bootstrapped confidence intervals. (Lower) Shape constrained additive model (SCAM) with 95% confidence intervals.

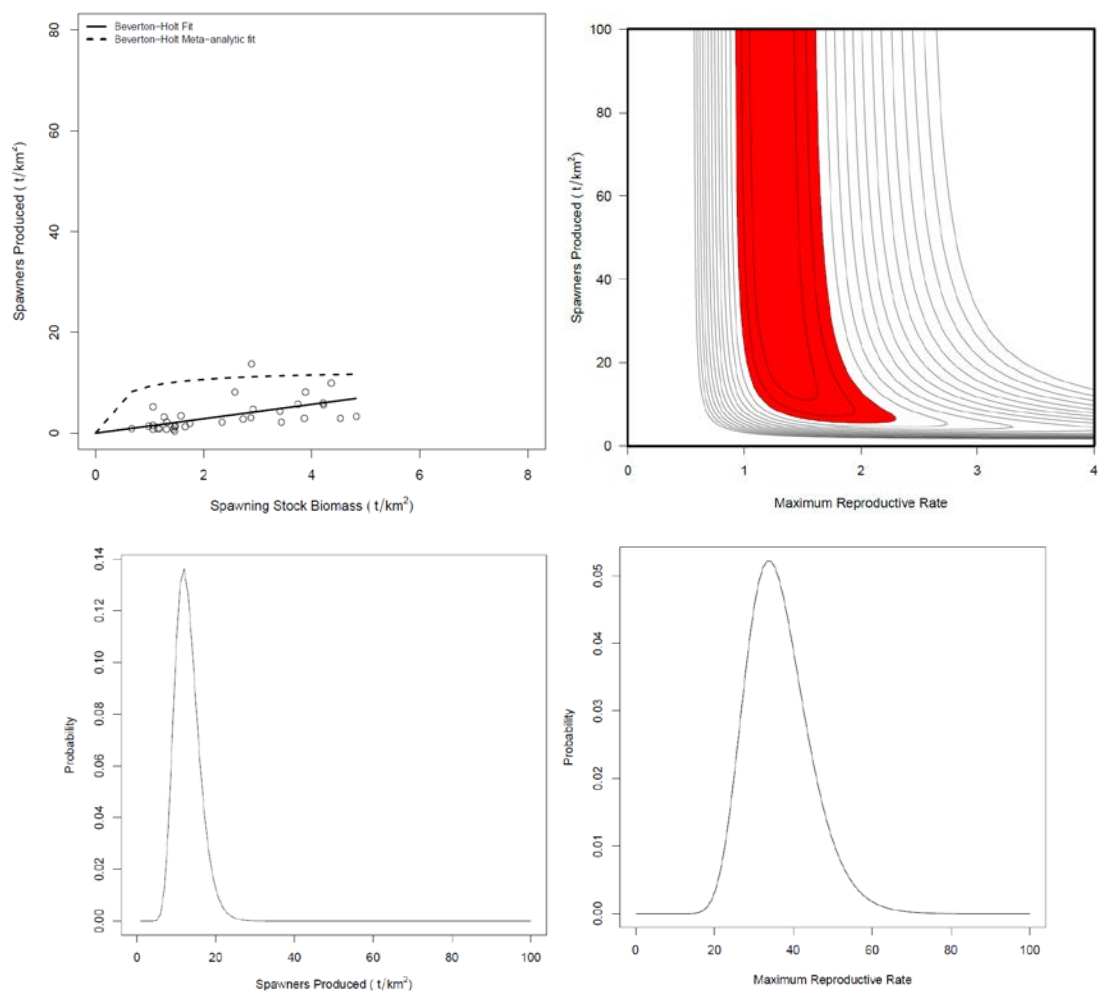


Figure 6. Comparison of current Eastern Georges Bank cod stock recruitment data with meta-population stock and recruitment parameters of Myers et al. (2001). (Top left) Stock and recruitment relationship (where recruitment is weight of spawners produced) scaled to tons per square kilometer as per Figure 3 in Myers et al. (2001). (Top right) Joint log-likelihood plot with for maximum reproductive rate (α) and asymptotic biomass of spawners produced. (Bottom left) Meta-analytic mixed-effects probability distributions for asymptotic spawner production and (bottom right) maximum reproductive rate (α) (Myers et al., 2001 Table 2). Note the different ranges for scale in the top right and bottom panels.

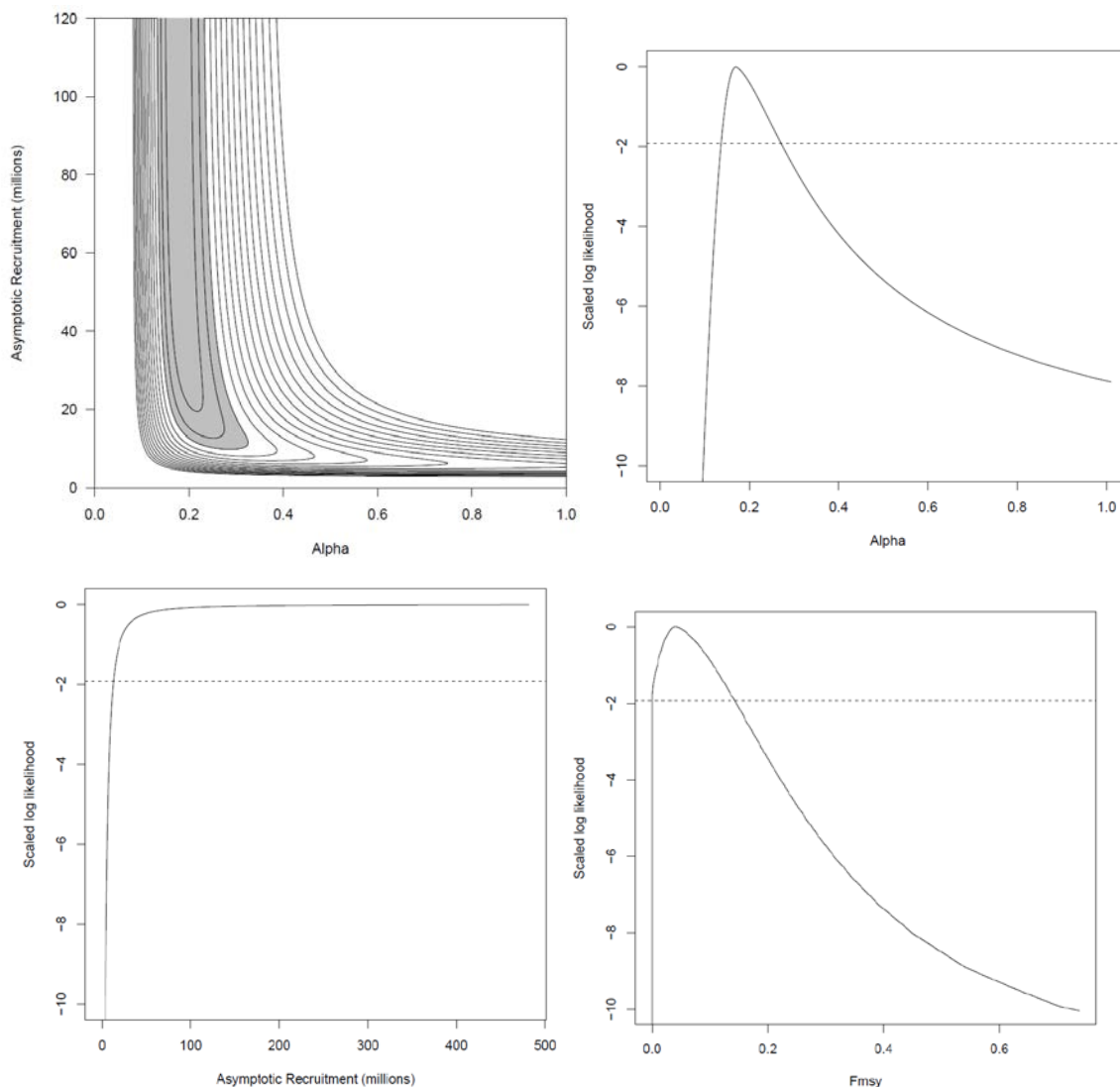


Figure 7. Log-likelihood profiles for the Beverton-Holt stock recruitment relationship for the full time series. (Top left) Joint log likelihood surface for the slope at the origin (α) and the asymptotic recruitment. (Top right) Profile log-likelihoods for α and (Bottom left) asymptotic recruitment. (Bottom right) Profile log-likelihood for F_{msy} obtained from the profile log-likelihood for the α parameter. Log-likelihoods were standardized to a maximum of zero by subtracting the maximum log-likelihood value. The intersection of the dashed-line and the log-likelihood profile shows the likelihood ratio based 95% confidence intervals for each parameter.

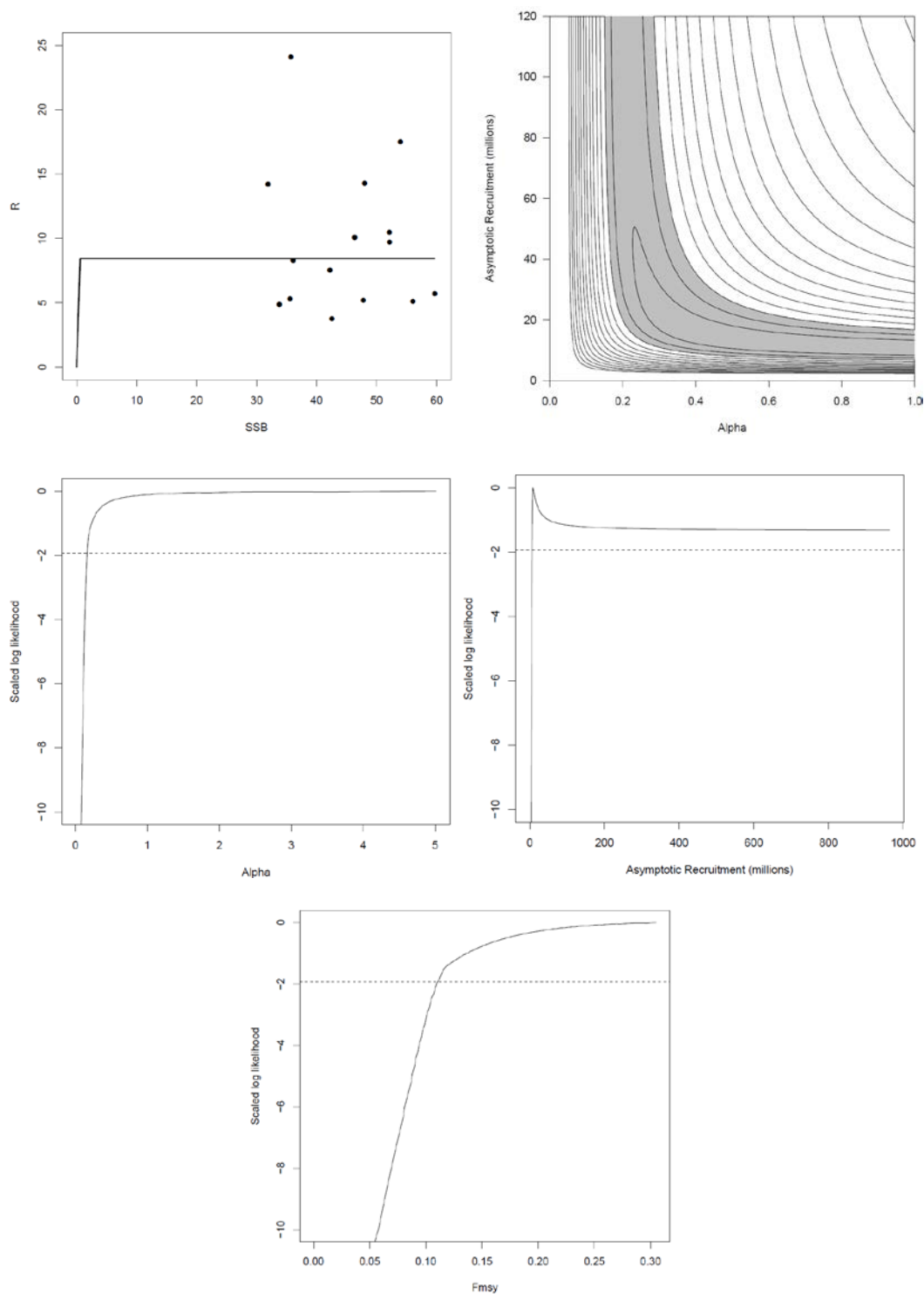


Figure 8. Log-likelihood profiles for the Beverton-Holt stock recruitment relationship (Top upper left) for the time period of 1978-1992. (Top upper right) Joint log likelihood surface for the slope at the origin (α) and the asymptotic recruitment. (Middle) Profile log-likelihoods for α (left) and asymptotic recruitment (right). (Bottom) Profile log-likelihood for F_{msy} obtained from the profile log-likelihood for the α parameter. Log-likelihoods were standardized to a maximum of zero by subtracting the maximum log-likelihood value. The intersection of the dashed-line and the log-likelihood profile represents the likelihood ratio 95% confidence intervals for each parameter.

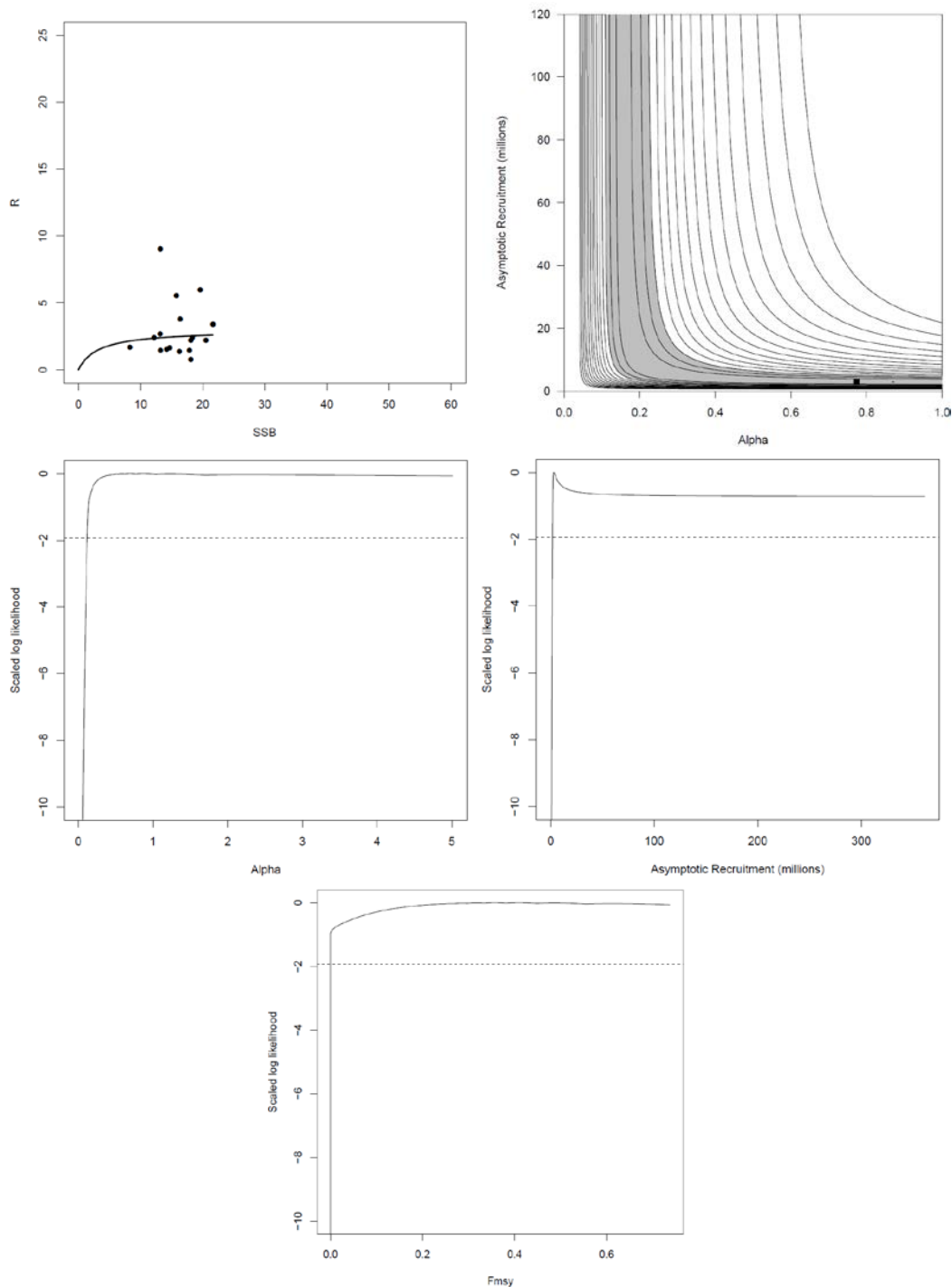


Figure 9. Log-likelihood profiles for the Beverton-Holt stock recruitment relationship (Top upper left) for the time period of 1994-2010. (Top upper right) Joint log likelihood surface for the slope at the origin (alpha) and the asymptotic recruitment. (Middle) Profile log-likelihoods for alpha (left) and asymptotic recruitment (right). (Bottom) Profile log-likelihood for F_{msy} obtained from the profile log-likelihood for the alpha parameter. Log-likelihoods were standardized to a maximum of zero by subtracting the maximum log-likelihood value. The intersection of the dashed-line and the log-likelihood profile represents the likelihood ratio 95% confidence intervals for each parameter.

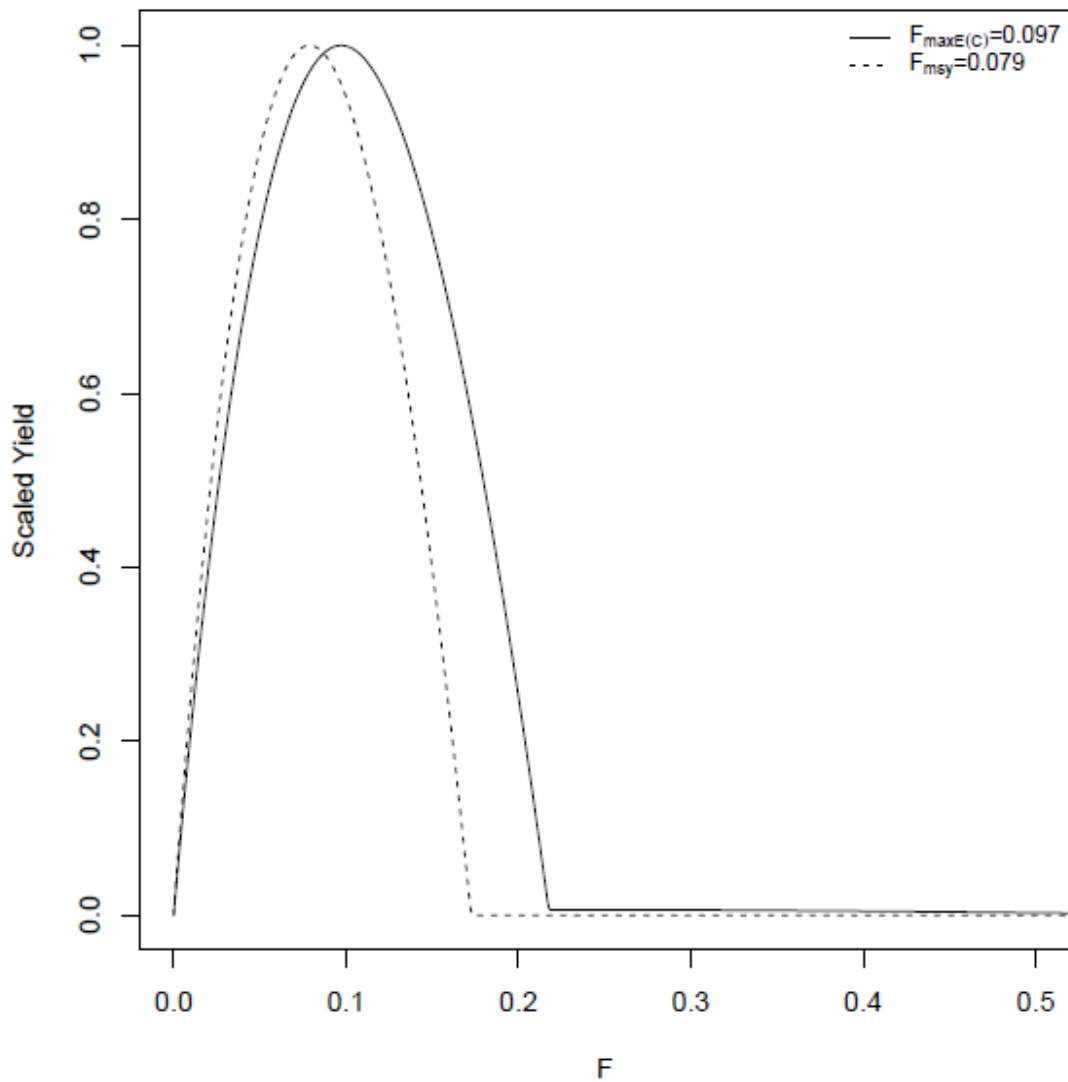


Figure 10. Relationships between equilibrium yield and F following the decision theoretic (solid line) and production model (dashed line) for the full time series of stock recruitment data using the recent life history data for the spawner and yield per recruit analysis. Reference points of $F_{\max E(C)}$ and F_{msy} represent the maximum equilibrium yield for each.

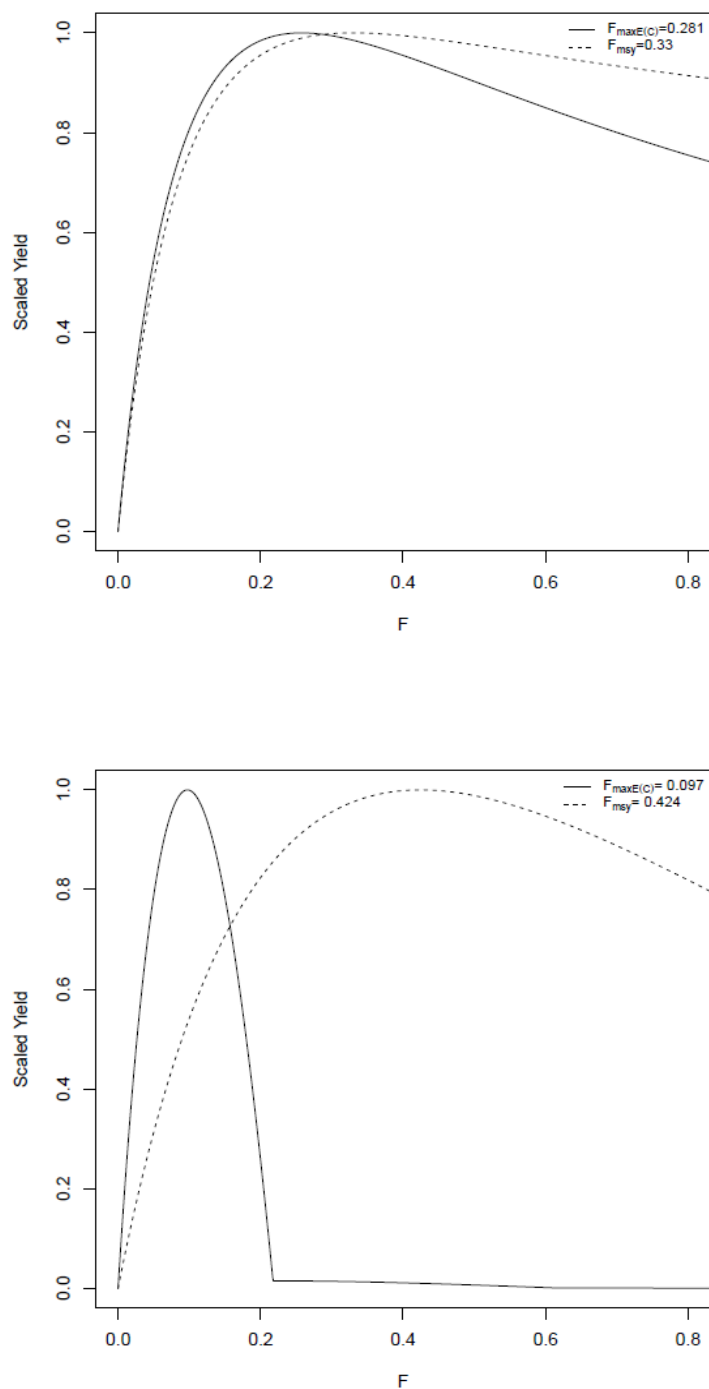


Figure 11. Relationships between equilibrium yield and F following the decision theoretic (solid line) and MLE (dashed line) production models for the 1978-1992 (upper) and 1994-2010 (lower) series of stock recruitment data using the time period specific life history data for the spawner and yield per recruit analysis. Reference points of $F_{maxE(C)}$ and F_{msy} represent the F at maximum yield for each curve.