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Comité scientifique consultatif des pêches canadiennes dans l'Atlantique

CSCPCA Document de recherche 87/57

# Analysis of the Snow Crab (Chionoecetes opilio) Fishery in Newfoundland for 1986

by

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Research Documents are produced in the official language in which they are provided to the Secretariat by the author.

<sup>1</sup> Cette série documente les bases scientifiques des conseils de gestion des pêches sur la côte atlantique du Canada. Comme telle, elle couvre les problèmes actuels selon les échéanciers voulus et les Documents de recherche qu'elle contient ne doivent pas être considérés comme des énoncés finals sur les sujets traités mais plutôt comme des rapports d'étape sur les études en cours.

Les Documents de recherche sont publiés dans la langue officielle utilisée par les auteurs dans le manuscrit envoyé au secrétariat.

## Abstract

Population size estimates for snow crab (<u>Chionoecetes</u> opilio) off the east coast of Newfoundland are presented for the 1986 fishing season. Within given crab management areas estimates of population size ranged from 640 t to 2133 t and exploitation rates from 56 to 59%. Comparison of size frequency/shell conditions for 1985-86 in three management areas is also presented.

# Résumé

Les estimations des tailles de populations de crabes des neiges (Chionoecetes opilio) au large de la côte est de Terre-Neuve sont présentées pour la saison de pêche de 1986. Selon les diverses zones de gestion du crabe, les estimations de la taille des populations variaient de 640 t à 2 133 t, et les taux d'exploitation, de 56 à 59 %. La comparaison de la fréquence des tailles et de l'état des carapaces dans trois zones de gestion est aussi présentée pour 1985 et 1986.

#### Introduction

The Newfoundland snow crab (<u>Chionoecetes opilio</u>) fishery began in 1968 at Hant's Harbour, Trinity Bay. Development of this fishery proceeded at a moderate pace until the late 1970's when increased demand, processing capacity and harvesting capacity caused landings to increase yearly at a rapid pace until 1982. Since then the fishery in the Southern Zone has been in a state of collapse due to a combination of overexploitation, indicated by declining catch rates (Tables 1 and 2), and a failure of recruitment mechanisms within the snow crab population.

While the snow crab fishery began to decline in the Southern Zone, the fishery in the Northern Zone began to expand. Although this expansion was rapid in 1982, it proved to be brief and ended in 1985. At present, the Newfoundland snow crab fishery is in a state of crisis. While stocks were declining or collapsed, a total of 97 supplementary licenses were issued in the Northern Zone in 1985. The new licensees were not issued logbooks and therefore effort data on where and how many traps were hauled in each management area were not available for analysis. A further blow to the stability of the fishery occurred during the latter part of the 1985 season when enforcement of the regulation prohibiting the sale of soft-shelled crabs was relaxed. In 1986 this regulation was dropped altogether.

While it was hoped that conditions in 1986 would improve, the reverse has happened particularly in the Northern Zone. An additional 49 supplementary licenses were issued in this zone and to complicate assessment of the resource most fishermen, including those with full-time status, did not receive logbooks until the fishery had closed.

As a result of all these factors, we feel that with several exceptions, producing reliable biomass estimates for the various snow crab management areas is impossible. The best that can be accomplished is a consideration of the catch/effort trends and available size-frequency data as a means of assessing the general "health" of the stocks in various management areas.

In 1986 Resource Management Branch imposed quotas on all management zones. These quotas were loosely based on 1985 landings, but in areas where exploitation rates were excessive, quotas were set below 1985 landing levels (Table 6). While the quotas were overfished in several areas, this management initiative must be viewed as a positive step. It should also be noted that mid-season quota increases in Trinity Bay (Area 22) and for 3L excluding Bonavista, Trinity, and Conception bays were only permitted after available catch/effort data had been reviewed.

# Materials and Methods

Catch/effort data from fishermen's logbooks were analyzed and data for each management area compared to processors' sales slips in order to check their veracity. From these data biweekly catch/effort tables were constructed in order to determine whether Leslie analyses were feasible. These tables are summarized for each management area and catch per unit effort (CPUE) plotted against cumulative catch and presented in Figures 2-18.

In addition to an examination of catch/effort data, several research cruises were conducted using standard crab traps fished at randomly selected locations on the commercial fishing grounds in the Southern Zone. Catches were analyzed and size frequency/shell condition histograms for various management areas (Fig. 1) were drawn. These histograms have been compared to those based on 1984 data and presented in Figures 19 (Area 16), 20 (Area 18), and 21 (Area 25). A comparative summary of the performance of the crab fleet by zone is given in Table 4.

# Results and Discussion

As previously mentioned the fishery in the Southern Zone has virtually collapsed. In all offshore areas except Areas 10 and 12, CPUE has become so low that it is uneconomical for fishermen to prosecute the fishery (Table 1). Extremely low effort levels, the restriction of this effort to near shore areas and landing of soft-shelled crabs made Leslie analysis impractical for all areas except southwest Avalon.

In Bonavista and Conception bays, the dropping of soft-shell regulations resulted in artificially high CPUEs during the latter half of the season, and made standard Leslie analysis impossible.

Effort levels in Conception Bay (Area 16) were extremely low, although slightly higher than in 1985. Although processors accepted soft-shelled crabs for most of the fishing season, landings were so sporadic and small that a plant sample could not be obtained in order to determine the percentage of soft-shelled landings. Therefore catch/effort data for Conception Bay are not suitable for Leslie analysis.

Only three other areas in the Southern Zone experienced significant effort and landings; Areas 8, 10, and 12. While Area 8 showed a significant decrease in landings, effort and X CPUE, Areas 10 and 12 showed an increase. This apparent increase in abundance is probably due to a large pulse of late-season recruitment. Spring port sampling of crabs from Area 10 showed a large percentage of newly hardened animals in the landings.

### Recruitment

The abundance of soft-shelled animals on the fishing grounds in many areas of the Southern Zone (Areas 8, 10, 12, 14, 16, 18, 22, and 25) indicate that yearly recruitment continues to occur. It is apparent however, that current recruitment levels are not sufficient to sustain viable catch rates. It is now patently obvious that effort in Areas 8, 16, 22, and 25 should be reduced in an attempt to stabilize the fishery. It has been demonstrated in previous assessments where Leslie analyses have been possible that exploitation rates have been excessive for several years and in the short term at least, this overexploitation has rendered the fishery non-viable in many areas.

## Water Temperature

Water temperatures on the commercial crab fishing grounds of Area 18 warmed considerably in 1986. A research cruise conducted during June of 1986 discovered large numbers of soft-shelled and newly hardened crabs, indicating that growth and recruitment had taken place during the winter and spring of that year (Fig. 20). However, the low catch rates that persisted in this area during 1986 indicate that this recruitment pulse was not sufficient to allow a significant recovery of the fishery.

#### Size-frequency/Shell Condition Distributions

Comparative size frequency/shell condition histograms for 1985 and 1986 indicate that while Conception Bay remains unchanged from 1985 (Fig. 19), Area 18 (Fig. 20) demonstrates a slight increase in animals just recruited into the fishery. However, in Bonavista Bay (Area 25, Fig. 21) there is a significant decrease in both the proportion of soft-shelled animals available and in the proportion of animals ≥95 mm carapace width (CW). The 1985 cruise was conducted after the fishing season had closed so comparison with plant samples is not possible. However, the scarcity of soft-shelled animals is quite probably due to the fact that since the regulation prohibiting the retention of soft-shelled crabs had been dropped, any newly molted crabs were simply retained by fishermen and sold to less than discriminating buyers.

## Reproductive Capacity

Research cruises were again conducted in three areas (16, 18 and 25) during 1986. Samples of females were collected using small meshed traps and examined macroscopically both internally and externally in order to determine reproductive status. Results of those examinations are summarized and presented in Table 5.

While the percentage of berried females has remained at the 100% level, one curious development raises concern about the reproductive health of the stock. For the first time berried females have been found to have no spermatophores in their spermathecae (examined macroscopically only). Without exception these females are primiparous. Whether these females have produced nonviable eggs because of a failure to mate successfully or have used all the spermataphores available to fertilize the egg clutch is unclear. However, one primiparous female with no observable spermataphores in the spermathecae was carrying eyed eggs. Additional field work on this phenomenon is planned for 1987. In addition, a number of egg-bearing primiparous females collected in Conception Bay during the November cruise are being held in the laboratory and development of their egg clutches is being monitored.

## Northern Zone

CPUE declined in all areas of the Northern Zone except Area 40 (Table 2). Fishermen's logbooks indicated that all areas experienced large catches of soft shelled animals during the summer months. While it appears that recruitment mechanisms are operating normally, it is becoming evident that yearly growth and recruitment are not sufficient to maintain catch rates in the face of such heavy fishing pressure.

Biomass estimates based on Leslie analyses of catch effort data extracted from all available logbooks indicate that fishable biomass in Areas 28, 30 and 32 (Fig. 11, 12, and 13, respectively) has declined dramatically and current exploitation rates are excessive.

Port sampling conducted in July and October indicates that the reduced availability may be tempting fishermen to land sub-legal animals. In October every fisherman sampled had in excess of 5% undersized in his catch while one fisherman landed a box of crab that was 95% undersized.

Area 40 is the one bright spot in 3K. The grounds are fairly extensive and highly productive. Without the contribution from this area the situation in the Northern Zone would be much bleaker.

### Supplementary Fishery

During 1986 an additional 49 vessels participated in the Northern Zone crab fishery bringing the total number of licenses to 146. Of the overall 4,000 t quota for the Northern Zone, supplementary vessels were allotted 1,000 t. Supplementary fishermen requested and were granted a split season with roughly half the quota allocated to a May fishery while the other half was set aside for the month of September.

In 3Ps the number of supplementary vessels was slightly reduced from 64 in 1985 to 62 in 1986. In this area, catches were similar to 1985, exceeding the quota by 51 t (Table 3). Here too, the quota of 600 t was split into a spring/fall fishery.

There was no supplementary crab fishery in inshore Labrador during 1986. This was probably due in part to an excellent 1986 cod fishery and the fact that fishermen were disappointed with inshore crab catches in 1985.

#### Labrador

A total of 6 vessels, 5 from the Southern Zone and one from Labrador, began to prosecute this fishery in July of 1986. However, low catch rates supposedly caused by "dirty water" forced them to abandon the fishery until early August.

While catch rates throughout the renewed fishing season remained good (Table 2, Fig. 18) bad weather shortened the fishing season significantly. As a result the quota allocated by Resource Management Branch was not caught.

Port sampling conducted during September indicated that there were significant numbers of recently hardened animals, suggesting that recruitment mechanisms are in good health.

### Summary

With the exception of the southwestern portion of the Avalon Peninsula in the Southern Zone, the crab fishery remains in a depressed state. However, the presence of many recently molted pre-recruits points to a potential revival of the crab fishery.

In the Northern Zone, with the exception of Area 40 and Labrador, the fishery is in a state of near collapse. Management should give serious consideration to reducing quotas in this zone in an attempt to stabilize the fishery.

## References

Taylor, D. M., and P. G. O'Keefe. 1986. Analysis of the snow crab (Chionoecetes opilio), fishery in Newfoundland for 1985. CAFSAC Res. Doc. 86/57.

Area	Year	Effort (trap hauls)	Landings (mt)	CPUE kg/trap	Estimated biomass (mt) haul) (confidence limits)	Exploitation rate (%)
8	1979 1980 1981 1982 1983 1983 1984 1985 1986	1,260 11,150 48,350 37,780 35,400 23,300 19,570	8 168 506 274 264 164 102	6.7 15.0 10.5 7.3 7.5 7.1 4.8	- - 551 (500-646) 341 (306-409) - -	- - 92 80 - -
10	1983 1984 1985 1986	3,080 18,700 44,890 91,608	43 175 385 930	13.9 9.4 8.6 10.2		- - -
12	1980 1981 1982 1983 1984 1985 1986	13,825 45,455 49,975 99,280 135,883 86,937 116,919	292 854 732 955 1068 627 1267	21.1 18.9 14.7 9.6 7.9 7.2 10.8	377 (311-728) 1291 (1114-1639) 974 (938-1017) 1045 (948-1316) - 2133 (1752-2965)	78 66 75 91 - 59
13	1982 1983 1984 1985 1986	7,295 61,089 41,080 -	114 733 397 -	15.6 12.0 9.7 -	- - 592 (501-790) -	- 67 -
14	1979 1980 1981 1982 1983 1984 1985 1986	37,950 5,860 27,113 32,320 23,165 17,340 12,710 4,690	762 121 434 465 190 93 64 47	20.1 20.6 16.0 14.4 8.2 5.4 5.0 10.0	1095 (891-1681) 614 (506-1043) 209 (181-260) 119 (96-275)	70 71 91 79
15	1981 1982 1983 1984 1985 1986	18,128 66,949 1,320 1,140	404 1056 138 - 6 -	22.3 15.8 10.5 5.7	1861 (1465-3024) - - -	56 - - - -
16	1979 1980 1981 1982 1983 1984 1985 1986	28,845 56,393 43,546 60,753 64,175 52,330 26,060 32,620	464 869 502 694 564 333 139 193	$ \begin{array}{r} 16.1 \\ 15.4 \\ 11.2 \\ 11.4 \\ 8.8 \\ 6.4 \\ 5.3 \\ 5.9 \\ \end{array} $	1351 (951-3204) 1571 (1214-2890) 689 (619-747) 1073 (951-1255) - - -	34 55 73 65 - - -

Table 1. Summary of statistics for the Newfoundland Snow Crab fishery, 1979-86.

Table 1. (Cont'd.)

Area	Year	Effort (trap hauls)	Landings (mt)	CPUE kg/trap	Estimated biomass (mt) haul) (confidence limits)	Exploitation rate (%)
18	1979 1980 1981 1982 1983 1983 1984 1985 1986	398,939 236,417 413,815 153,238 71,905 38,690 10,580 22,086	6870 4944 6769 1847 473 219 43 97	17.2 20.9 16.4 12.1 6.7 5.7 4.0 4.4	14359 (11,778-19,792) 14166 (9348-59867) 11289 (910-17067) 	44 46 60 - 70 -
19	1981 1982 1983 1984 1985 1985	65,978 218,356 150,432 47,845 5,955	1840 4194 1662 431 31	28.0 19.2 11.0 9.0 5.2	7744 (5983-12022) 2016 (1684-2739) 588 (504-811)	- 54 82 73 -
20	1979 1980 1981 1982 1983 1984 1985 1986	4,165 4,550 14,970 10,535 12,120 2,180 4,980 3,420	67 59 110 65 72 17 19 18	16.0 12.9 7.4 6.1 6.0 6.9 3.8 5.1	- - - - - - - - -	
22	1979 1980 1981 1982 1983 1984 1985 1986	56,887 58,160 24,782 13,755 20,065 38,240 27,560 30,725	569 494 178 95 107 202 113 165	9.9 8.5 7.2 6.9 5.3 5.3 4.1 2.9	1467 (1011-3233) 912 (788-1103) - 260 (213-366)	39 54 - - 78 -
25*	1979 1980 1981 1982 1983 1984 1985 1986	171,685 96,330 205,353 248,962 251,720	1586 1905 1376 905 1101 1327 728 626	9.2 9.9 8.0 9.4 5.4 5.3 2.9 4.6	1391 (1054-2445) 1802 (1434-2914)	- 65 61 93 76 -

1 In areas indicated by an asterisk (\*), logbook data are incomplete. Therefore effort figures are incomplete. Mean CPUE is based on catches where effort is given in logbooks.

Area	Year	Effort (trap hauls)	Landings (mt)	CPUE kg/trap	Estimated biomass (mt) haul) (confidence limits)	Exploitation rate (%)
28*	1983 1984 1985 1986	28,169 43,583 52,615 40,997	387 444 433 360	13.7 10.2 8.2 4.7	583 (498-779) 640 (463-1304)	76
30*	1983 1984 1985 1986	163,138 120,628 88,661 34,666	1470 1019 630 535	9.0 8.4 7.1 6.0	2426 (1876-3765) 902 (747-1236)	42 59
32*	1979 1980 1981 1982 1983 1984 1985 1986	46,183 33,261 54,416 130,305 88,288 76,491 81,139 77,412	491 374 650 1352 537 502 476 938	10.6 9.9 11.9 10.4 6.1 6.6 5.9 3.8	882 (76-1077) 787 (583-1229) 1845 (1193-6615) 2213 (1605-4284) 1097 (845-1874) 1037 (821-1526) 808 (691-1022)	56 43 35 42 49 48 59
34*	1979 1980 1981 1982 1983 1984 1985 1986	11,830 7,330 19,250 51,347 105,756 173,038 81,655 113,132	141 96 322 735 1210 1576 478 654	11.9 14.3 16.7 14.3 11.5 9.1 5.9 3.9	106 (74-273) 604 (502-792) 1016 (839-7423) 2023 (1632-3023) 3092 (2354-5457) 757 (665-908)	91 53 68 60 51 63
36*	1979 1980 1981 1982 1983 1984 1985 1986	21,298 17,864 19,840 32,917 68,497 79,401 84,153 108,300	156 158 230 418 583 524 386 453	7.3 8.8 11.6 12.7 8.5 6.6 4.6 3.3	383 (265-887) 276 (218-412) 504 (403-710) 1619 (1099-4692) 685 (533-1114)	41 57 46 36 56
38*	1983 1984 1985 1986	66,123 102,102 96,796 49,924	681 948 472 246	10.3 9.3 4.9 2.7	- 719 (575-1099) 375 (300-574)	66
40*	1984 1985 1986	11,035 40,420 95,408	67 225 772	6.1 5.6 7.1	- -	- - -
41	1985 1986	20,419 39,695	311 467	15.2 11.8	-	-

Table 2. Summary of statistics for the Newfoundland Snow Crab fishery (Northern Zone - all vessels<sup>1</sup>), 1979-86.

1 In areas indicated by an asterisk (\*), logbook data are incomplete. Therefore effort figures are incomplete. Mean CPUE is based on catches where effort is given in logbooks.

Area	Vessels	Landings (t)
ЗК	146	1411
3Ps	62	651
TOTAL		2062

Table 3. Landings of snow crab by supplementary crab licensed vessels.

	Southern Zone		Northern Zone		Total Newfoundland	
Year	Catch (ț)	Effort ('000 trap hauls)	Catch (t)	Effort ('000 trap hauls)	Catch (t)	Effort ('000 trap hauls
1979	9,426	666	788	79	10,214	745
1980	8,190	527	628	58	8,818	585
1981	12,636	808	1,202	94	13,838	902
1982	10,673	762	2,505	215	13,178	977
1983	9,182	745	4,868	520	14,050	1,265
1984	4,526	679	5,080	606	9,606	1,285
1985	2,673	496.	4,274 <sup>a</sup>	546.	6,947 <sup>C</sup>	1,042 <sup>D</sup>
1986	3,406	496 449 <sup>b</sup>	4,425 <sup>a</sup>	560 <sup>b</sup>	7,831	1,285 1,042 <sup>b</sup> 1,009 <sup>b</sup>

Table 4. Summary of performance of Newfoundland snow crab fishery, 1979-86.

<sup>a</sup>Includes Labrador and supplementary landings

<sup>b</sup>Figures are minimal as incomplete logbook returns made calculations incomplete.

<sup>C</sup>Does not include 3Ps supplementary landings

					Spermataphore type			
Area	Year	Month	<pre># in sample</pre>	% berried females	% 01d	% New	% Both	% None
16	1984	October	57	99	14	-	86	0
	1985	November	45	98	7	40	53	0
	1986	November	72	100	28	26	28	18
18	1984	May	37	100	97	-	3	0
	1985	June	55	89	42	4	55	0
	1986	June	60	98	70	7	3	20
25	1984	August	131	99	22	1	77	0
	1985	August	106	100	8	22	70	0
	1986	August	83	100	35	25	8	31

Table 5. Summary of reproductive status of female snow crab, <u>Chionoecetes</u> opilio, in three management areas in Newfoundland, 1984-86.

Management zone	Quota allocated (t)	Reported Amount over/under landings (t) quota (%)
Labrador	925	515 under 410 (44)
Northern Zone (full time)	3000	2702 under 298 (10)
Northern Zone (suppl.)	1000	1447 over 447 (45)
Bonavista Bay	500	588 over 88 (18)
Trinity Bay	200	208 over 8 (4)
Conception Bay	200	198 under 2 (1)
Southern Zone (excluding bays)	2400	2329 under 71 (3)
3Ps (suppl.)	600	616 over 16 (3)

Table 6. Summary of Canadian Atlantic Quota Report for the Newfoundland Snow  $^1$  Crab Fishery, December 31, 1986.

<sup>1</sup> Figures presented for Bonavista Bay are those of the authors. Other figures are taken directly from the quota report.

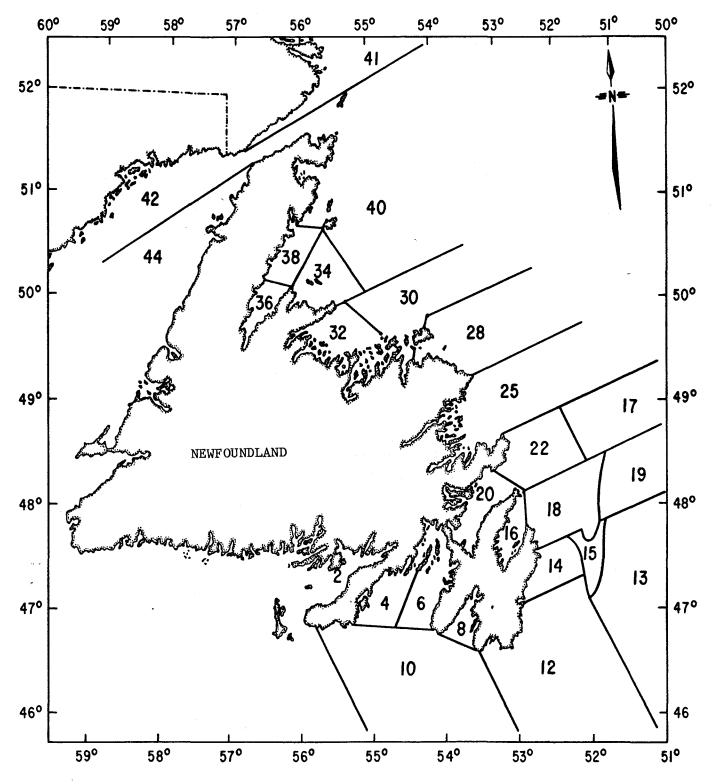
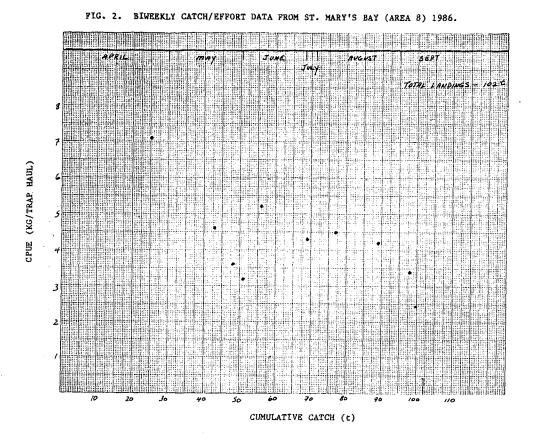


Fig. 1. Newfoundland snow crab management areas.



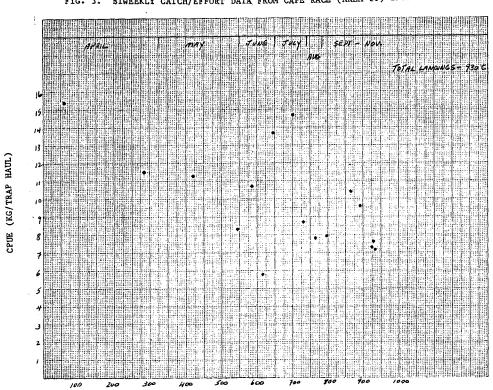
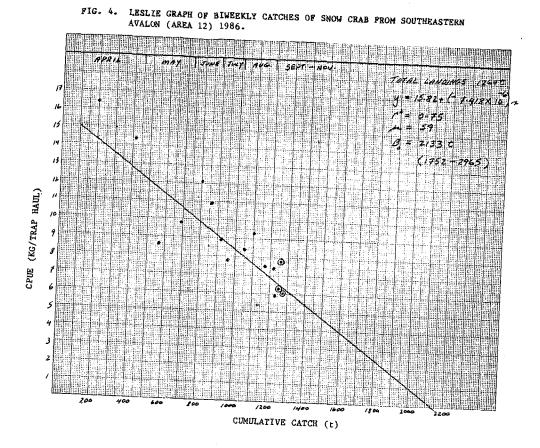
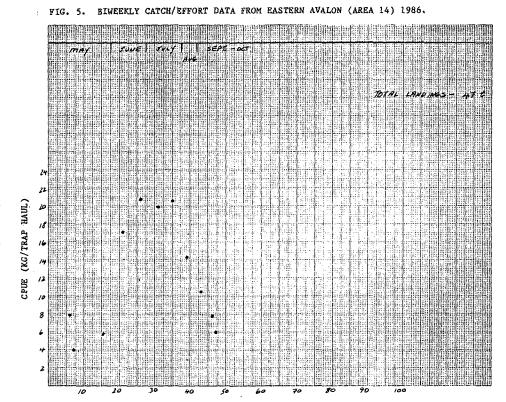
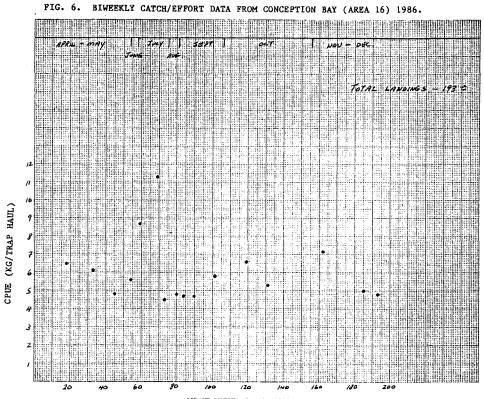


FIG. 3. BIWEEKLY CATCH/EFFORT DATA FROM CAPE RACE (AREA 10) 1986.

CUMULATIVE CATCH (t)







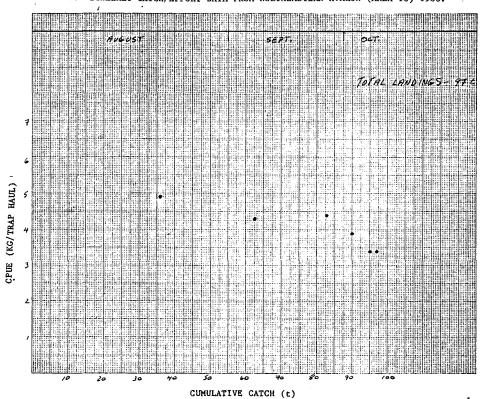
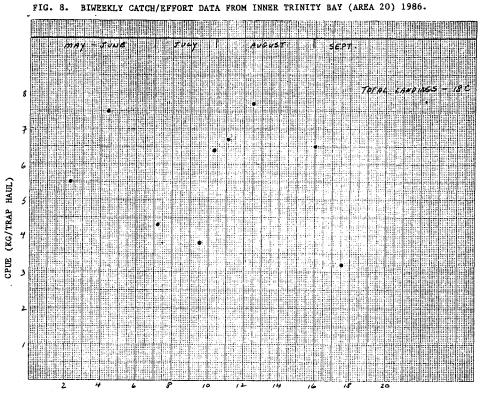
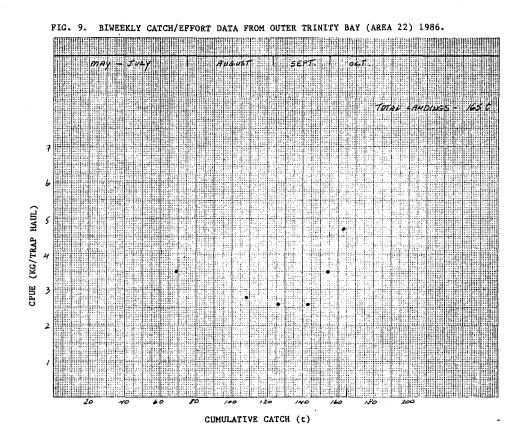
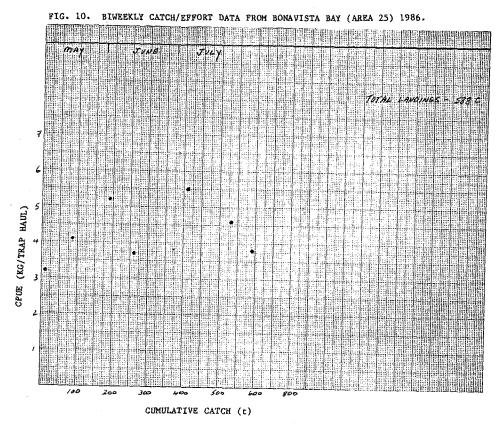


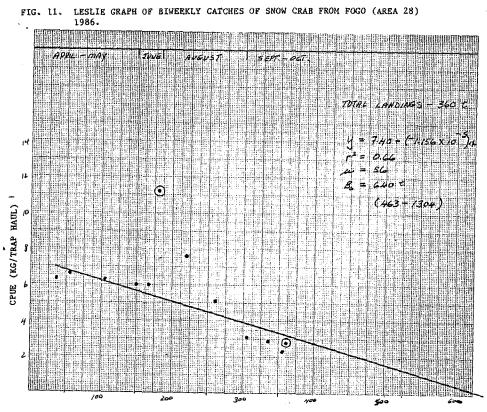
FIG. 7. BIWEEKLY CATCH/EFFORT DATA FROM NORTHEASTERN AVALON (AREA 18) 1986.











CUMULATIVE CATCH (t)

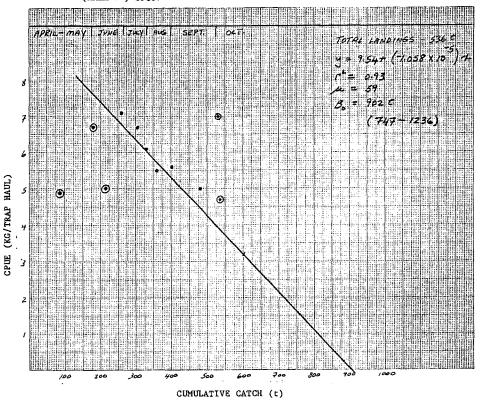
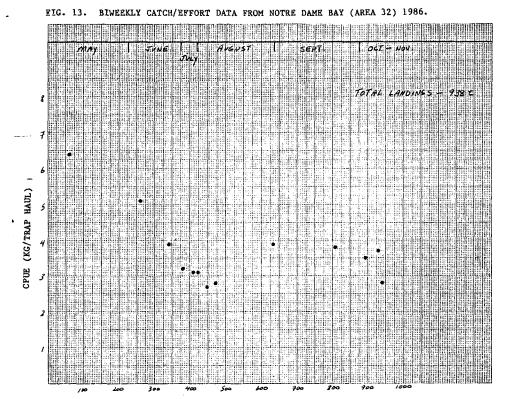
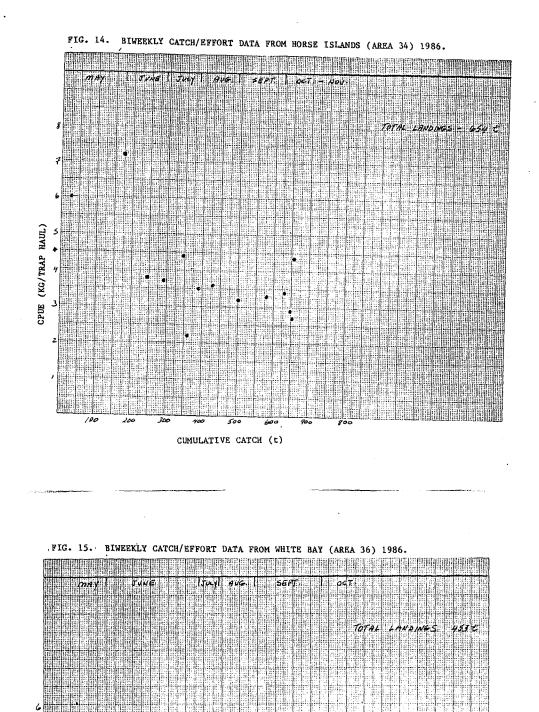


FIG. 12. LESLIE GRAPH OF BIWEEKLY CATCHES OF SNOW CRAB FROM TWILLINGATE (AREA 30) 1986.





CPUE (KG/TRAP HAUL)

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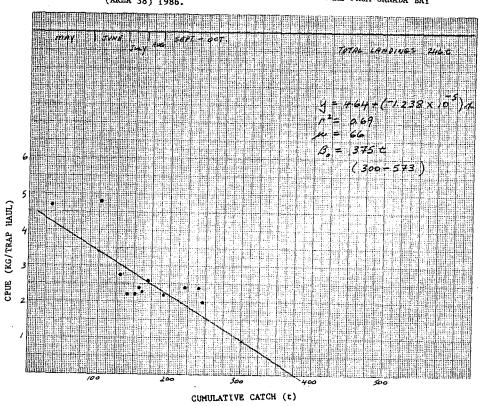
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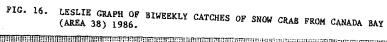
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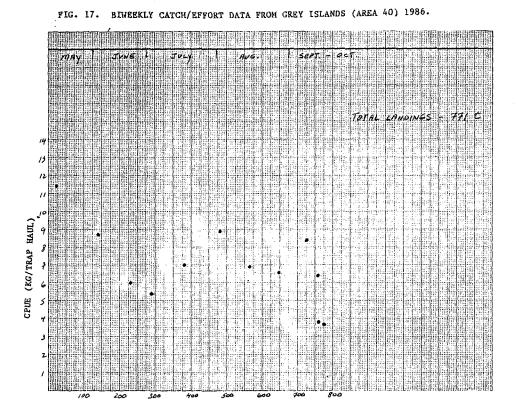
100

200

300 400 CUMULATIVE CATCH (t)







CUMULATIVE CATCH (t)

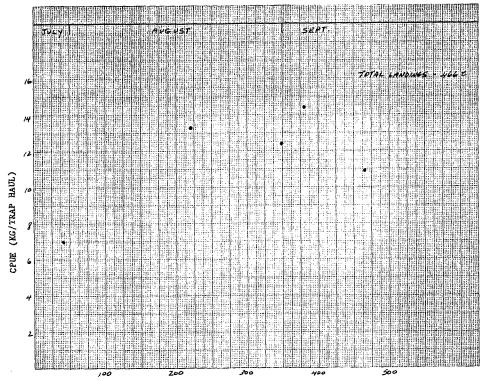
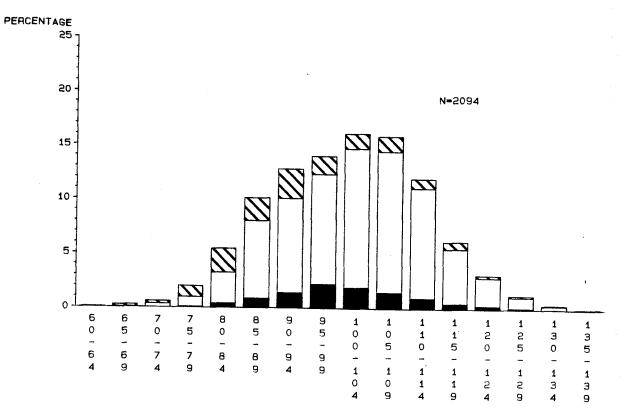


FIG. 18. BIWEEKLY CATCH/EFFORT DATA FROM LABRADOR (AREA 41) 1986.

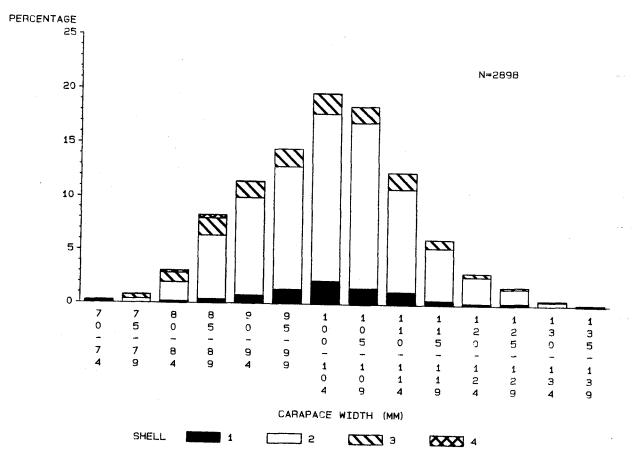
CUMULATIVE CATCH (t)



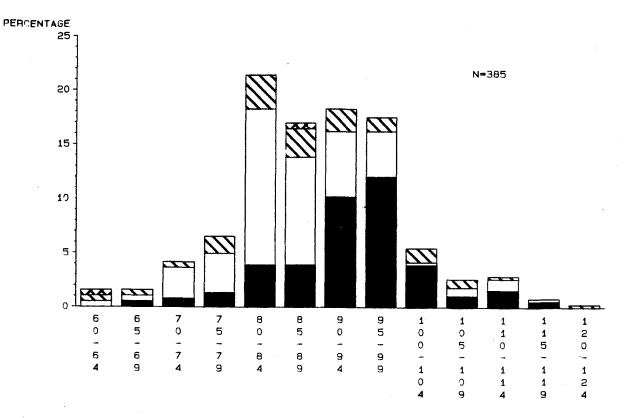
#### SNOW CRAB SIZE FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION CONCEPTION BAY SEA SAMPLE NOV 1985-MALES VESSEL-SHAMOOK TRIP-123 GEAR-1



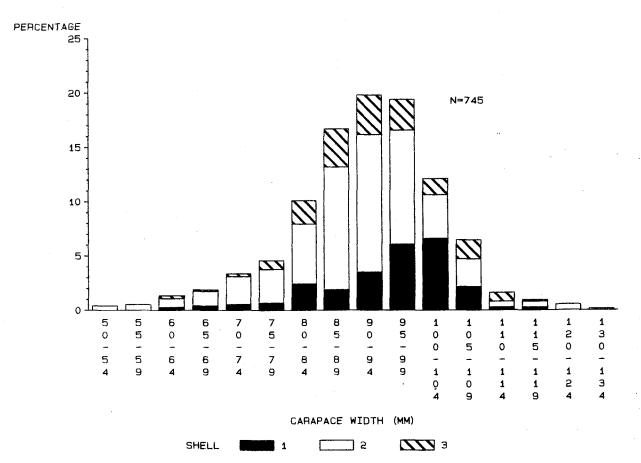
SNOW CRAB SIZE FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION CONCEPTION BAY RESEARCH SAMPLE NOV-86 MALES VESSEL=SHAMOOK GEAR=1



#### SNOW CRAB SIZE FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION N E AVALON RESEARCH SAMPLE JUNE-85 MALES VESSEL=SHAMOOK GEAR=1



SNOW CRAB SIZE FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION N E AVALON AT SEA SAMPLE JUNE 1986-MALES VESSEL=SHAMOOK TRIP=126 GEAR=1



#### 26 SNOW CRAB SIZE FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION BONAVISTA BAY RESEARCH SAMPLE AUG-85 MALES VESSEL-MARINUS GEAR-1

