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## What can be expected of a T90 extension piece to improve selectivity in bottom trawl multispecific fisheries in the Bay of Biscay?

Kopp Dorothée <sup>1,\*</sup>, Morandeau Fabien <sup>1</sup>, Mouchet Maud <sup>2</sup>, Vogel Camille <sup>3</sup>, Méhault Sonia <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Unité de Sciences et Technologies Halieutiques, Laboratoire de Technologie et Biologie Halieutique IFREMERLorient, France

<sup>2</sup> UMR 7204 MNHN-UPMC-CNRS Centre d'Ecologie et des Sciences de la Conservation, CP135 Paris, France

<sup>3</sup> Fisheries Science for the English Channel and North Sea, Fisheries Resources Laboratory IFREMERPort-en-Bessin-Huppain, France

\* Corresponding author : Dorothée Kopp, email address : [dorothee.kopp@ifremer.fr](mailto:dorothee.kopp@ifremer.fr)

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### Abstract :

In the Bay of Biscay, the selective properties of otter trawls have mainly been studied with regard to single species. However, for bottom trawl multispecific fisheries targeting fish, it remains challenging to find a selective device capable of limiting catches of small individuals of several species without commercial losses. The present study focuses on an innovative technical solution to reduce catches of undersized individuals in a multispecies bottom trawl fishery in the Bay of Biscay. We tested a cylinder made of 100-mm diamond meshes turned at 90°, namely T90 inserted in the extension piece. We present the selectivity results obtained for six commercial species. This device allows the escape of small *Solea solea*, *Trachurus trachurus* and *Spondyllosoma cantharus* individuals. No commercial losses of *Sepia officinalis* were recorded. Patterns for *Dicentrarchus labrax* and *Mullus surmuletus* require further investigation due to limited fish size ranges in the dataset.

**Keywords :** Gear technology, Covered codend, Turned mesh, Escape, Discard ban

39 1. Introduction

40 In 2013, the European Union reformed its Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) and approved the landing  
41 obligation, prohibiting the discard of any individual of the species under quota (Official Journal of the  
42 European Union, 28 December 2013). *De minimis* exemptions to this landing obligation could be  
43 granted on the condition that scientific evidence indicates that increases in selectivity are very  
44 difficult to achieve (Council of the European Union, 2013). Thus the landing obligation serves as  
45 motivation for fishermen to implement selectivity measures to reduce discards. Among these  
46 measures, improving gear selectivity was identified as one way to reduce unwanted bycatch such as  
47 commercial species under specific legislation or individuals below the Minimum Conservation  
48 Reference Sizes (MCRS) (Graham 2006).

49 Gear selectivity can be improved by i) adding a selective device (e.g. Lomeli and Wakefield 2016), ii)  
50 changing mesh size and shape (e.g. Sala et al. 2008; Aydın and Tosunoğlu 2010) or iii) by combining  
51 both approaches (e.g. Lövgren et al. 2016; Vogel et al. 2017). Bycatch reduction devices, such as grids  
52 (Fonseca et al. 2005), horizontal separator panels (Ferro et al. 2007) or topless trawls (Revill et al.  
53 2006) have already proven to significantly reduce discards in fisheries. However, the diversity of  
54 species caught in multispecies fisheries, their corresponding morphologies and behaviours, as well as  
55 the variability in their MCRS may impede the overall efficiency of a given selective device (Bullough et  
56 al. 2007; Ryer 2008; Krag et al. 2014; Santos et al. 2015). Improvements of fishing gear selectivity in  
57 multispecies fisheries remain challenging and experimental testing of various selective techniques  
58 continues in Europe (e.g. Ordines et al. 2006; Sala et al. 2008; Bayse et al. 2016; Lövgren et al. 2016;  
59 Krag et al., 2016; Vogel et al. 2017).

60 The T90 mesh based techniques, i.e. a diamond mesh turned 90° and remaining wide open  
61 throughout the fishing process, was first introduced in the early 1990s in the Baltic Sea (Moderhak  
62 1997). It was later tested in the Bay of Biscay (Meillat and Morandau 2001) and in other European  
63 ecoregions (Madsen et al. 2012; Tokaç et al. 2014; Bayse et al. 2016). Conclusions on its selective  
64 properties vary, depending on whether roundfish or flatfish species are considered (Madsen et al.

65 2012; Herrmann et al. 2013; Bayse et al. 2016). Compared to equivalent diamond mesh sizes,  
66 enhanced selectivity in the codend is found for roundfish with T90 netting whereas T90 decreases  
67 selectivity for flatfish like plaice. So far, T90 meshes were mainly tested in the codend (Madsen et al.  
68 2012; Herrmann et al. 2013; Bayse et al. 2016) while other parts from the trawl might be relevant to  
69 increase fishing gear selectivity. The present study focuses on an innovative technical solution to  
70 reduce catches of undersized individuals in a multispecies fish-directed bottom trawl fishery in the  
71 Bay of Biscay, France. No selective studies have been reported to date on this fishery and there is a  
72 need to provide fishermen with selective devices adapted to multispecies catches, which can be  
73 extended to other demersal fisheries or areas. The experimental selective device we present, a  
74 cylinder composed of 100 mm T90 meshes mounted in the extension piece, is innovative since to our  
75 knowledge, T90 netting has never been tested in the extension piece of the trawl.

76

## 77 2. Materials and methods

### 78 2.1. Selective device and collection of escaping fish

79 The experiment was conducted onboard the commercial fishing vessel *Déesses de l'Océan* (NO  
80 930 461) using a single otter trawl with semi pelagic rig, with a 22 m ground rope and 18 m headline.  
81 The codend was 25 meshes deep, 140 free meshes in circumference and made of double-twine PE  
82 with a stretched-mesh size of  $74.6 \pm 3.1$  mm (70 mm nominal). The selective device was mounted in  
83 the extension piece, between 22 meshes in the anterior part and 10 meshes in the posterior part  
84 (Fig. 1). Fish were prevented from escaping these two sections by: i) a flapper (70 mm mesh) in the  
85 anterior part, ii) an overlapping net (100 mm mesh) used as connection with the inner bag in the  
86 posterior part (Fig. 1). To avoid escape from the codend, a fine mesh inner bag of  $37.2 \pm 0.8$  mm  
87 mesh size (20 mm nominal) was inserted there. The selective device used was a cylinder composed  
88 of  $113.9 \pm 1.8$  mm (100 mm nominal) meshes mounted in the extension piece with a netting  
89 orientation turned at  $90^\circ$  (T90 ; Fig. 2) with a 72 mesh circumference and 40 mesh length  
90 polyethylene (PE). The selective performance of the T90 extension piece was estimated using the

91 covered codend method (MacLennan 1992), held open by kites as developed by Madsen et al.  
92 (2001). The cover was made of polyamide netting with a 20 mm nominal mesh size, a circumference  
93 of 1370 meshes and a length twice as long as the extension piece and codend combined. A  
94 combination of kites, floats and chains was used to keep the cover away from the test extension  
95 piece (Madsen et al. 2001) (Fig. 1). Prior the sea trials, the kite cover and the selective device were  
96 tested and validated in the flume tank at IFREMER Lorient, using a half scale model. All mesh  
97 measurements of gear parts were made on 30 meshes with the Omega mesh gauge.

## 98 2.2. Field data collection

99 The sea trials were conducted in the fishing grounds of the Bay of Bourgneuf (Bay of Biscay, off  
100 France, 47°02N; 02°10W) in June 2016 (Fig. 3). Nine hauls were performed during daytime at a mean  
101 ( $\pm$  SD) depth of  $11 \pm 4$  m. Haul speed was 3.5 knots as under commercial conditions and tow duration  
102 was set at one hour. After each haul, the total catches from the codend (i.e. the fine mesh-size inner  
103 bag) and from the cover were sorted separately and by species. The weight of all individuals from a  
104 given species was recorded and the total length of each individual was measured. When the total  
105 catch was too large to allow measurement of every individual (e.g. for horse mackerel), sub-sampling  
106 was performed by randomly dividing the species catch into two baskets, repeating this operation  
107 until reaching a manageable and representative sample size. Resultant sampling ratios were used to  
108 elevate numbers at length used in the subsequent modelling process. The species investigated in this  
109 study were black seabream *Spondyliosoma cantharus*, cuttlefish *Sepia officinalis*, horse mackerel  
110 *Trachurus trachurus*, red mullet *Mullus surmuletus*, European seabass *Dicentrarchus labrax* and  
111 common sole *Solea solea*.

## 112 2.3. Data analysis

113 The size selectivity of our device was assessed by comparing the distribution of individual total length  
114 between the codend and cover fractions. Length–frequency curves were plotted for the six species in  
115 the codend and the cover. Proportions of fish retained per length class,  $P(l)$ , were calculated  
116 according to:

$$P(l) = \frac{N_{l,t}}{N_{l,c} + N_{l,t}}$$

117 where  $N_{l,t}$  is the sum of fish of length  $l$  in the codend and  $N_{l,c}$  the sum of fish of length  $l$  in the cover,  
 118 across all hauls.

119 For each one of the six species, the proportions  $P(l)$  were analyzed using Generalized Linear  
 120 Modelling (GLM), with the logit link function. The aim was to examine whether the retention and  
 121 escape of the different species was length related. A logistic model, whose parameters  $a$  and  $b$  were  
 122 estimated by maximum likelihood, was adjusted to the observed retention proportions  $P(l)$  (Fryer  
 123 1991; Millar and Fryer 1999).

124 In the case of the covered codend method, the logistic model is reduced to

$$\text{logit}(P(l)) = \ln\left(\frac{P(l)}{1 - P(l)}\right) = a + b \cdot l$$

125 where  $P(l)$  is the probability that a fish of length  $l$  will be retained in the test codend given it enters  
 126 the trawl. The goodness of fit of the model to data was evaluated by plotting the deviance residuals  
 127 vs the fitted values. When a pattern was observed from GLM residuals, polynomial of second order  
 128 GLM was tested.

129 Finally, the selectivity parameters  $L_{50}$  (50% retention length) and  $SR$  (selection range) were calculated  
 130 from the 1<sup>st</sup> order polynomial model parameters (Wilemand et al. 1996):

$$131 \quad L_{50} = \frac{-a}{b} \quad \text{and} \quad SR = \frac{2 \log(3)}{b}$$

132 All statistical analyses were performed in R (R Core Team, 2017).

133

### 134 3. Results

135 Catches per length classes displayed contrasting retention patterns for the different species (Fig. 4).  
 136 Sole from 5 to 24 cm were able to escape the fishing gear, but this trend steadily decreased from  
 137 length 25 cm and upwards. For black seabream, individuals between 15 and 23 cm escaped, while  
 138 individuals below 15 cm and over 23 cm were mostly retained and those above 28 cm were always  
 139 captured in the codend. On the whole range of length classes observed (most of the catch was made

140 up of individuals below 18 cm), cuttlefish was always more numerous in the codend than in the  
141 cover. It is worth noting that, even though no size related differences in seabass retention rates could  
142 be detected by the model, there was a slight increase in the catch proportion in the codend. Red  
143 mullets escaped on the whole length range observed. For horse mackerel, more individuals of 10-15  
144 cm long were recorded in the cover than in the codend.

145 GLM of first order polynomial was fitted to cuttlefish, horse mackerel, red mullet, seabass and sole  
146 data and polynomial of second order GLM was fitted to black seabream data. For all species, graphics  
147 of deviance residuals versus fitted values did not display any special pattern and less than 5% of the  
148 values were found outside the 95%-confidence interval. GLMs identified significant size related  
149 differences in retention rates for cuttlefish, sole, black seabream.  $L_{50}$  for sole is 26.1 cm with  
150 associated  $SR$  of 55.7 cm. The  $L_{50}$  for cuttlefish is 0.7 cm, showing a poor selectivity of the device for  
151 this species (Table 1). Associated prediction curves correctly pick up the retention profile of the T90  
152 cylinder for cuttlefish and black seabream (Fig. 4), while it is less evident for sole. No size related  
153 differences in retention rates could be shown for horse mackerel, red mullet and seabass based on  
154 the GLM procedure, leading to the absence of  $L_{50}$  (Table 1).

155

#### 156 4. Discussion

157 Our experiments demonstrate that, for coastal trawlers from the Bay of Biscay, a T90 cylinder  
158 mounted in the extension piece let escape part of the unwanted catch such as horse mackerel  
159 though selection of other commercial species are mixed and discussed hereafter.

160 Results for sole showed a  $L_{50}$  of 26 cm with most of the individuals from 5 to 24 cm escaping when  
161 using the selective device. However, a wide  $SR$  of 55.7 cm is observed, which leads to both  
162 escapement of commercial size individuals and retention of unwanted individuals. Bayse et al. (2016)  
163 observed a smaller selection range of 3.5 cm when using a 80 mm T90 codend. Such difference  
164 suggests that the position of the selective mesh in the trawl has an effect on fish contact probability,  
165 which is supported by Graham et al. (2003) who found that a square mesh panel provides better

166 escapement rates when placed close to the codend than in the extension piece. Fish behaviour  
167 combined to the contact probability of the device are known to have an effect on selectivity patterns  
168 (Ryer 2008; Krag et al. 2014, 2016; Santos et al. 2016), which may explain wider *SR* from extension  
169 than from codend selective device.

170 Sole falls under the new PCP legislation and the landing obligation. Given that its MCRS is set at 26  
171 cm in the Bay of Biscay, the escape of individuals under MCRS is beneficial to both fishermen and the  
172 stock, as escaping individuals would not account for TAC but would contribute to stock dynamics. The  
173 implementation of the T90 cylinder would lead to less discards. Moreover, according to Suuronen  
174 (2005) and references therein, mortality observed for escaped individuals may be relatively low for  
175 flatfish; for example, a survival probability of nearly 100% was estimated for escaped white flounder  
176 (DeAlteris and Reifsteck 1993).

177 The three-part pattern observed for black seabream could be explained by two independent  
178 processes. While large individuals (> 23 cm) are mechanically retained, smaller individuals seem to be  
179 under physiological constraints; thus individuals smaller than 15 cm are retained in the codend whilst  
180 individuals 15-23 cm are able to escape. Based on Breen et al. (2004), we hypothesize that larger  
181 individuals are able to swim for a longer time whereas smaller ones drop back rapidly into the  
182 codend.

183 Our experiment revealed that nearly the whole fraction of horse mackerel under 15 cm total length  
184 escaped from the T90 cylinder, which is the species MCRS. As this species constitutes the third most  
185 discarded species (in tons) in the coastal bottom trawl fisheries of the Bay of Biscay (Cornou et al.  
186 2016), this escape would allow fisherman to avoid lengthy sorting periods while later discarding the  
187 fish. Moreover this species shows particularly low survival probability when exposed to air on deck  
188 (Morfin et al. 2017); their direct escape at sea from the gear would be highly beneficial for the  
189 species stock. Finally, because the catch is mostly composed of individuals below 15 cm, these  
190 immature fish (Mahé al. 2007) may further contribute to the stock replenishment. Moreover,  
191 schooling behaviour characterise horse mackerel aggregations (Masse et al. 1996) and may be



192 responsible for the high escapement rate observed during our experiment. Although the  
193 phenomenon provides a particularly interesting demonstration of escapement from the T90 cylinder,  
194 the dominance of the 10-15 cm size-class compared to the whole size range of the species impairs  
195 the model ability to pick up an overall pattern and flattens the shape of the retention curve.

196 The T90 cylinder does not let cuttlefish escape from the trawl; almost the whole species catch is  
197 found in the codend. Given that there is no MCRS for that species, status quo is preserved: no discard  
198 reduction or commercial loss are observed. Further work would need to be carried out on the  
199 financial implications for fishermen, as potential economic losses on other associated demersal  
200 species may be compensated for by cuttlefish catches.

201 Concerning European seabass, it is worth noting that, while the model detects high escapement rate  
202 and a weak size effect on retention, the length range observed in the experimental hauls does not  
203 cover the whole size range of the species in the wild nor the MCRS set at 42 cm in the Bay of Biscay.  
204 Therefore, no conclusion can be drawn on commercial size retention though, based on a small  
205 number of individuals, our experiment suggests that retention is initiated from 32cm.

206 Finally, from the sea trials, it appears that the T90 let escape a majority of red mullet individuals  
207 across the observed size range. However, the small number of individuals captured during the trial  
208 limits our understanding of the effect of the T90 cylinder on this species. Even if the landing tonnage  
209 of this species is rather small compared to the other commercial species caught, its high market  
210 value (around 10€/kg in 2014) (Coupeau et al. 2016) and its low legal minimum landing weight (40g;  
211 Council Regulation (EC) No 2406/96) renders the cylinder detrimental in terms of financial outcomes  
212 for fishermen. Red mullets reach sexual maturity above 15 cm total length (Mahé et al. 2013) and  
213 from a stock management point of view, the escape of immature individuals by the implementation  
214 of the T90 cylinder would be beneficial for further fish reproduction and subsequent stock  
215 recruitment.

216 To the best of our knowledge, this is the first time that the T90 mesh configuration has been tested  
217 in a cylinder located in the extension part of the trawl, although the T90 codend has been frequently

218 tested (Moderhak 1997; Digre et al. 2010; Herrmann et al. 2013; Bayse et al. 2016). Also, it is  
219 expected that the gear configuration we tested enhances escapees' survival potential by giving  
220 unwanted fish the opportunity to escape before entering the codend and preventing them from  
221 swimming related exhaustion in the trawl body. It may also help preserving the physical integrity of  
222 escapees since they do not face compression in the codend nor are in contact with abrasive objects  
223 within the catch bulk such as crustacean pincers or bivalve shells. The large size of the mesh (100  
224 mm) as well as the mesh orientation (i.e., not classical diamond mesh but T90 open meshes) prevent  
225 escaped fish from injuries due to skin and scale loss as already observed for round fish passing  
226 through a T90 codend (Digre et al. 2010).

227 To conclude, based on the multispecies approach we present, the proposed 100 mm T90 cylinder  
228 mounted in the extension part of a coastal otter trawl provides fishermen with a selective device  
229 relevant to reduce discards. The device appears especially efficient when by-catch is made of high  
230 proportion of pelagic species displaying schooling behaviour, as demonstrated for horse mackerel in  
231 our experiment. Such a selective device may therefore be of interest for other multispecies demersal  
232 fisheries facing by-catch of anchovy, sardine and sprat in the Bay of Biscay, and herring in the  
233 Channel and North Sea areas.

234

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241

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330

331 **Table 1** Results of the selectivity analysis. Numbers of fish escaped and caught,  $p$ -value corresponds  
 332 to the significance of the length/length<sup>2</sup> parameters in the GLM,  $L_{50}$  and  $SR$  are presented only when  
 333 the length parameter is significant in case of first order polynomial model

| Species        | Number<br>escaped | Number<br>caught | $p$ -value  | $L_{50}$ | $SR$ |
|----------------|-------------------|------------------|-------------|----------|------|
| Black seabream | 31                | 86               | 0.012/0.006 | -        | -    |
| Cuttlefish     | 50                | 472              | 0.000       | 0.7      | 8.1  |
| Horse mackerel | 5037              | 172              | 0.917       | -        | -    |
| Red mullet     | 76                | 35               | 0.828       | -        | -    |
| Seabass        | 109               | 31               | 0.384       | -        | -    |
| Sole           | 88                | 66               | 0.034       | 26.1     | 55.7 |

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336 Figure captions

337 **Fig. 1** Diagram of the selective device with location details within the trawl body (left side) and of the  
338 covered codend (right side)

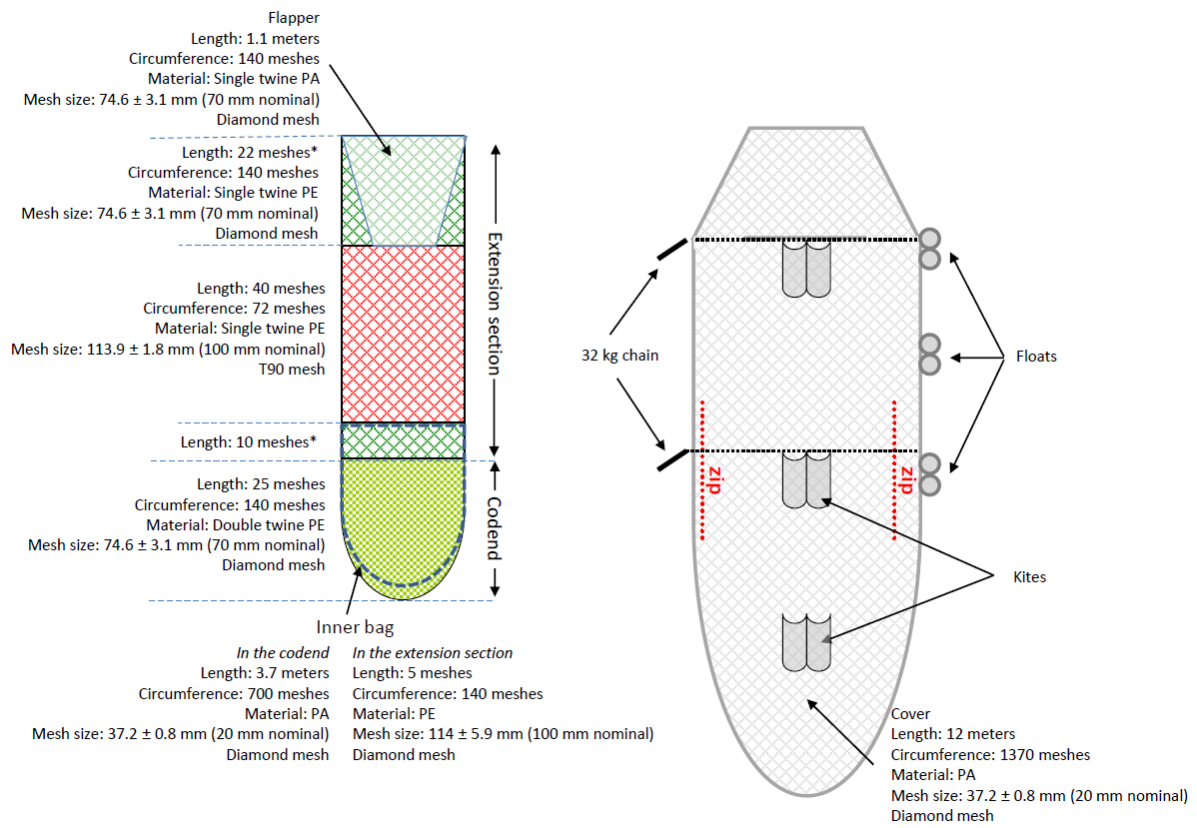
339 **Fig. 2** a- standard netting used onboard commercial vessel, b- the turned mesh T90 netting used in  
340 this study in the extension piece

341 **Fig. 3** Map of the study area in the Bay of Biscay presenting the location of sampling sites (black dots)

342 **Fig. 4** Selectivity curves for fish including 95% confidence intervals (grey shaded areas). Black dots  
343 represent experimental retention proportions. Solid black lines represent the catch size frequency  
344 distribution in the cover and dotted black lines represent the catch size frequency distribution in the  
345 codend

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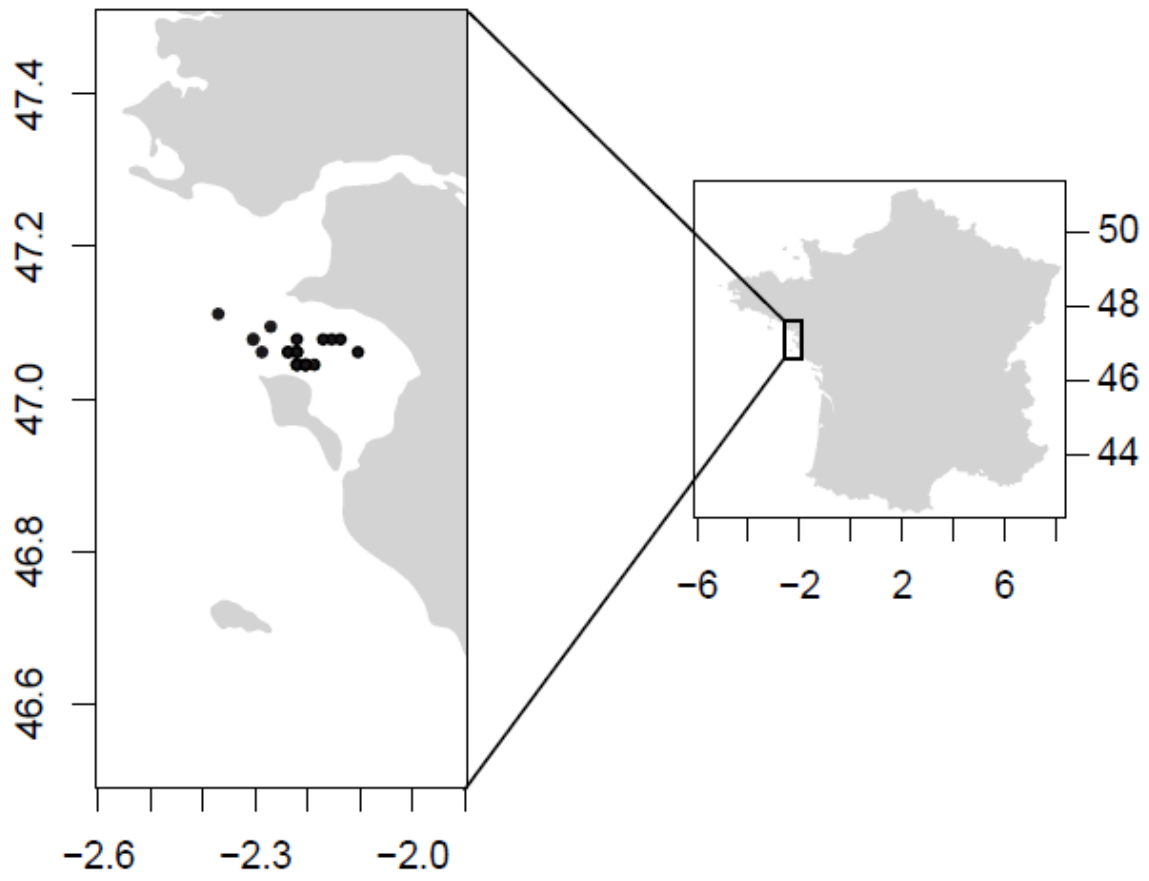
349 Figure 1

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351  
352 Figure 2

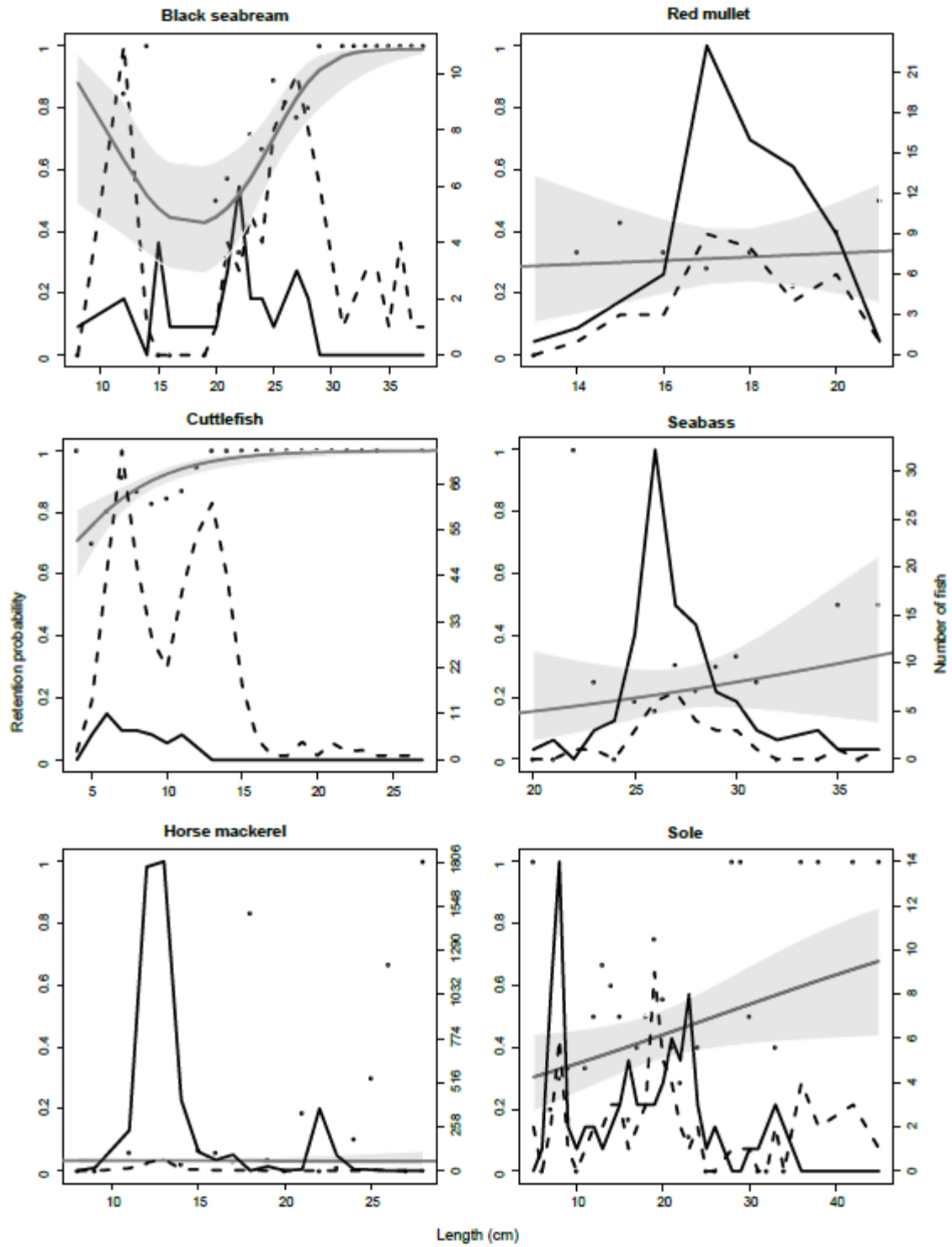
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355 Figure 3

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358 Figure 4