

## SOUTHERN BLUE WHITING (SBW)

*(Micromesistius australis)*

## 1. FISHERY SUMMARY

### 1.1 Commercial fisheries

Southern blue whiting are almost entirely restricted in distribution to sub-Antarctic waters. They are dispersed throughout the Campbell Plateau and Bounty Platform for much of the year, but during August and September they aggregate to spawn near the Campbell Islands, on Pukaki Rise, on Bounty Platform, and near Auckland Islands over depths of 250–600 m. During most years fish in the spawning fishery range between 35–50 cm fork length (FL), although occasionally a smaller size class of males (29–32 cm FL) is also present.

Reported landings for the period 1971 to 1977 are shown in Table 1. Estimated landings by area from the trawl catch and effort logbooks and QMRs are given from 1978 to the present in Table 2. Landings were chiefly taken by the Soviet foreign licensed fleet during the 1970s and early 1980s, and the fishery fluctuated considerably peaking at almost 50 000 t in 1973 and again at almost 30 000 t in 1979. The Japanese surimi vessels first entered the fishery in 1986 and catches gradually increased to a peak of 76 000 t in 1991–92. A catch limit of 32 000 t, with area sub-limits, was introduced for the first time in the 1992–93 fishing year (Table 2). The total catch limit increased to 58 000 t in 1996–97 for three years. The southern stocks of southern blue whiting were introduced to the Quota Management System on 1 Nov 1999, with the TACCs given in Table 2. The fishing year was also changed to 1 April to 31 March to reflect the timing of the main fishing season. TACC changes since 2000–01 are shown in Table 2. A nominal TACC of 8 t (SBW 1) was set for the rest of the EEZ. Less than 20 t per year has been reported from SBW 1 since 2000–01.

Landings have averaged 26 000 t in the last five years, with the majority of the catch currently taken by Japanese surimi vessels and Ukrainian dressed vessels. On the Campbell Island Rise the TACC has been almost fully caught in each of the last 5 years. However, on the other grounds, the catch limits have generally been under-caught in most years since their introduction. This reflects the low economic value of the fish and difficulties in timing and locating aggregations experienced by

## SOUTHERN BLUE WHITING (SBW)

operators. On the Bounty Platform, the amount of fishing effort in any season depends largely on the timing of the west coast hoki fishery. If there is a delayed hoki season, then the vessels remain longer on the hoki grounds and consequently miss the peak fishing season on the Bounty Platform. On the Pukaki Rise and Auckland Islands Shelf, operators find it difficult to justify expending time to locate fishable aggregations, given the small allocation available in these areas and the relatively low value of the product.

From 1 April 2003, the TACC for the Bounty Platform stock was reduced from 8000 t to 3500 t and from 1 April 2006, the TACC for the Campbell Island Rise stock was reduced from 25 000 t to 20 000 t. The TACC was exceeded by 5% on the Campbell Island Rise and by 10% on the Bounty Platform in 2007–08.

**Table 1: Reported annual landings (t) of southern blue whiting from 1971 to 1977.**

Fishing year	Total
1971	10 400
1972	25 800
1973	48 500
1974	42 200
1975	2 378
1976	17 089
1977	26 435

**Table 2: Estimated catches (t) of southern blue whiting by area for the period 1978 to 2006–07 from vessel logbooks and QMRs. – no catch limit in place. \*, before 1997–98 there was no separate catch limit for Auckland Is. Estimates for 2006–07 are preliminary.**

Fishing year	Bounty Platform		Campbell Island Rise		Pukaki Rise		Auckland Is.		Total	
	Catch	Limit	Catch	Limit	Catch	Limit	Catch	Limit*	Catch	Limit
1978 <sup>f</sup>	0	–	6 403	–	79	–	15	–	6 497	–
1978–79+	1 211	–	25 305	–	601	–	1 019	–	28 136	–
1979–80+	16	–	12 828	–	5 602	–	187	–	18 633	–
1980–81+	8	–	5 989	–	2 380	–	89	–	8 466	–
1981–82+	8 325	–	7 915	–	1 250	–	105	–	17 595	–
1982–83+	3 864	–	12 803	–	7 388	–	184	–	24 239	–
1983–84+	348	–	10 777	–	2 150	–	99	–	13 374	–
1984–85+	0	–	7 490	–	1 724	–	121	–	9 335	–
1985–86+	0	–	15 252	–	552	–	15	–	15 819	–
1986–87+	0	–	12 804	–	845	–	61	–	13 710	–
1987–88+	18	–	17 422	–	157	–	4	–	17 601	–
1988–89+	8	–	26 611	–	1 219	–	1	–	27 839	–
1989–90+	4 430	–	16 542	–	1 393	–	2	–	22 367	–
1990–91+	10 897	–	21 314	–	4 652	–	7	–	36 870	–
1991–92+	58 928	–	14 208	–	3 046	–	73	–	76 255	–
1992–93+	11 908	15 000	9 316	11 000	5 341	6 000	1 143	–	27 708	32 000
1993–94+	3 877	15 000	11 668	11 000	2 306	6 000	709	–	18 560	32 000
1994–95+	6 386	15 000	9 492	11 000	1 158	6 000	441	–	17 477	32 000
1995–96+	6 508	8000	14 959	21 000	772	3 000	40	–	22 279	32 000
1996–97+	1 761	20 200	15 685	30 100	1 806	7 700	895	–	20 147	58 000
1997–98+	5 647	15 400	24 273	35 460	1 245	5 500	0	1 640	31 165	58 000
1998–00†	8 741	15 400	30 386	35 460	1 049	5 500	750	1 640	40 926	58 000
2000–01#	3 997	8000	18 049	20 000	2 864	5 500	19	1 640	24 938	‡35 140
2001–02#	2 261	8000	29 999	30 000	230	5 500	10	1 640	32 501	‡45 140
2002–03#	7 564	8000	33 433	30 000	508	5 500	254	1 640	41 775	‡45 140
2003–04#	3 812	3500	23 718	25 000	163	5 500	116	1 640	27 812	‡35 640

Table 2(Continued):

Fishing year	Bounty Platform		Campbell Island Rise		Pukaki Rise		Auckland Is.		Total	
	Catch	Limit	Catch	Limit	Catch	Limit	Catch	Limit*	Catch	Limit
2004–05#	1 477	3500	19 776	25 000	239	5 500	70	1 640	21 567	‡35 640
2005–06#	3 962	3500	26 190	25 000	58	5 500	50	1 640	30 260	‡35 640
2006–07#	4 395	3500	19 763	20 000	1 115	5 500	84	1 640	25 363	‡30 640
2007–08#	3 799	3500	20 996	20 000	392	5 500	106	1 640	25 293	‡30 640

f 1 April-30 September.

+ 1 October-30 September.

† 1 October 1998-31 March 2000

# 1 April -31 March.

‡ SBW 1 (all EEZ areas outside QMA6) had a TACC of 8 t, and reported catches of 9 t in 2000–01, 1 t in 2001–02, 16 t in 2002–03, 2.6 t in 2003–04, and 9 t in 2004–05, 2 t in 2005–06, 7 t in 2006–07 and 1 t in 2007–08.

## 1.2 Recreational fisheries

There is no recreational fishery for southern blue whiting.

## 1.3 Customary non-commercial fisheries

Quantitative estimates of the level of customary non-commercial take are not available.

## 1.4 Illegal catches

The level of illegal and unreported catch is thought to be low. However, the operators of one vessel were convicted for area misreporting; in 2002–03, the vessel caught about 204 t on the Campbell Island Rise (SBW 6I) that were reported against quota for the Pukaki Rise (SBW 6R), and another 480 t caught on the Campbell Island Rise were reported against quota for the Auckland Islands Shelf (SBW 6A). Table 2 shows corrected totals by area for 2002–03.

## 1.5 Other sources of mortality

Scientific observers have reported discards of undersize fish and accidental loss from torn or burst codends. There is no quantitative estimate of this mortality and no estimates of discards have been considered in the stock assessments.

## 2. BIOLOGY

Southern blue whiting is a schooling species that is confined to sub-Antarctic waters. Early growth has been well documented with fish reaching a length of about 20 cm FL after one year and 30 cm FL after two years. Growth slows down after five years and virtually ceases after ten years. Ages have been validated up to at least 15 years by following strong year classes, but ring counts from otoliths suggest individual fish may reach 25 years.

The age and length of maturity, and recruitment to the fishery, varies between areas and between years. In some years a small proportion of males mature at age 2, but the majority do not mature until age 3 or 4, usually at a length of 33–40 cm FL. The majority of females also mature at age 3 or 4 at a length of 35–42 cm FL. Ageing studies have shown that this species has very high recruitment variability.

Southern blue whiting are highly synchronised batch spawners. Four spawning areas have been identified on Bounty Platform, Pukaki Rise, Auckland Islands Shelf, and Campbell Island Rise. The Campbell Island Rise has two separate spawning grounds to the north and south. Fish appear to recruit first to the southern ground but thereafter spawn on the northern ground. Spawning on Bounty Platform begins in mid August and finishes by mid September. Spawning begins 3–4 weeks later in the other areas, finishing in late September/early October. Spawning appears to occur at night, in mid-water, over depths of 400–500 m on Campbell Island Rise but shallower elsewhere.

Natural mortality ( $M$ ) was estimated using the equation  $\log_e(100)/\text{maximum age}$ , where maximum age is the age to which 1% of the population survives in an unexploited stock. Using a maximum age of 22 years,  $M$  was estimated to equal 0.21. The value of 0.2 is assumed to reflect the imprecision of this value. Recent Campbell Island stock assessments have estimated  $M$  within the model, using an informed prior with a mean of 0.2 (see Table 3).

## SOUTHERN BLUE WHITING (SBW)

**Table 3: Estimates of biological parameters for the Campbell Island Rise southern blue whiting stock.**

Estimate					Source
1. Natural mortality ( <i>M</i> )	Males		Females		
	0.2		0.2		Hanchet (1992)
2. Weight = $a(\text{length})^b$ (Weight in g, length in cm fork length)					
	Males		Female		
	a	b	a	b	
	0.00515	3.092	0.00407	3.152	Hanchet (1991)

**Note:** Estimates of natural mortality and the length weight coefficients are assumed to be the same for the other stocks. Observed length at age data are used for all stocks.

### 3. STOCKS AND AREAS

Hanchet (1998, 1999) reviewed the stock structure of southern blue whiting. He examined historical data on southern blue whiting distribution and abundance, reproduction, growth, and morphometrics. There appear to be four main spawning grounds of southern blue whiting on the Bounty Platform, Pukaki Rise, Auckland Islands Shelf, and Campbell Island Rise. There are also consistent differences in the size and age distributions of fish, in the recruitment strength, and in the timing of spawning between these four areas. Multiple discriminant analysis of data collected in October 1989 and 1990 showed that fish from Bounty Platform, Pukaki Rise and Campbell Island Rise could be distinguished on the basis of their morphometric measurements. The Plenary concluded that this constitutes strong evidence that fish in these areas return to spawn on the grounds to which they first recruit. No genetic studies have been carried out, but given their close proximity, it is unlikely that there would be detectable genetic differences in the fish between these four areas.

For the purposes of stock assessment it is assumed that there are four stocks of southern blue whiting with fidelity within stocks: the Bounty Platform stock, the Pukaki Rise stock, the Auckland Islands stock, and the Campbell Island stock.

### 4. STOCK ASSESSMENT

In 2008, a preliminary assessment was carried out for the Bounty Platform stock. New abundance data were available from an industry acoustic survey of the Bounty Platform carried out in August 2007, adding to data from previous industry surveys in 2004 and 2006. An attempt was made to fit this time-series of industry acoustic data, along with a time series of Tangaroa acoustic surveys and catch-at-age data, in a population model. Because of the poor fit to the acoustic data the model results are not reported here, but the Working Group did provide conservative estimates of biomass (section 4d) based only on the acoustic survey results to allow yield estimates (CAY) to be determined for the management of the fishery.

No new assessments are available for the Campbell Island and Pukaki Rise stocks. No assessment has been made of the Auckland Islands Shelf stock. The years given in the biomass and yield sections of this report refer to the August-September spawning/fishing season.

#### 4.1 Estimates of fishery parameters and abundance indices

During the 2007 season an acoustic survey of the Bounty Platform was undertaken from an industry vessel (O'Driscoll *et al.* 2007). Five acoustic snapshots of the Bounty Platform were completed by the *Tomi Maru 87*, on which the hull-mounted transducer had been calibrated prior to the start of the survey. The first two snapshots were completed on a small aggregation containing light marks southeast of the Bounty Islands. Snapshots 3-5 were carried out 10 days later on a much more extensive aggregation further west. Snapshots 4 and 5 covered adjacent areas and were separated in time by only 3 hours so these snapshots were combined. The acoustic biomass was calculated by averaging snapshots 3 and the sum of snapshots 4+5 which equalled 157 000 t (CV = 31%). This was an order of magnitude higher than the estimates of 4+ fish from the previous wide-area survey of the Bounty Platform in 2001 and the estimates of spawning stock biomass from an industry survey of the

Bounty Platform in 2004, and about 7 times higher than estimates from an industry survey in 2006 (Table 4).

**Table 4: Estimates of biomass (t) for age 4+ fish from research acoustic surveys of the Bounty Platform in 1993–2001 (from Grimes *et al.* 2007), and of spawning stock biomass (SSB) from acoustic estimates from *FV Tomi Maru 87* in 2004, 2006, and 2007 (O’Driscoll *et al.* 2007). All estimates were calculated using the new absorption co-efficient and a new target strength relationship. Sampling CVs are given in parentheses.**

Year	<i>Tangaroa</i>	<i>Tomi Maru 87</i>
	Age 4+ fish	SSB
1993	47 087 (64%)	–
1994	20 844 (25%)	–
1995	23 480 (24%)	–
1997	31 929 (32%)	–
1999	34 194 (73%)	–
2001	16 396 (36%)	–
2004	–	13 625 (69%)
2006	–	21 667 (17%)
2007	–	157 079 (31%)

Estimates of biomass from acoustic surveys from the Bounty Platform, Pukaki Rise and Campbell Island Rise are shown in Table 5. These have not been calculated using the new absorption co-efficient and a new target strength relationship.

**Table 5: Estimates of biomass (000 t) for age 1, 2, 3 and 4+ fish from acoustic surveys of Bounty Platform, Pukaki Rise, and Campbell Island Rise, and CPUE indices for the Campbell Island Rise. – no data. \*Estimates include fish from outside the standard survey area.**

Year	Bounty Platform				Pukaki Rise				Campbell Island Rise					
	1	2	3	4+	1	2	3	4+	1	2	3	4+	CPUE	
1986	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	1.00
1987	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	0.91
1988	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	0.88
1989	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	1.38
1990	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	1.06
1991	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	1.30
1992	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	0.60
1993	8.81	6.87	1.41	62.86	0.58	26.85	9.32	31.15	1.82	71.90	14.78	24.03	–	1.03
1994	0.09	5.87	32.07	27.67	0.01	1.19	6.36	35.97	0.33	12.26	139.55	28.84	–	1.19
1995	59.28	4.86	6.66	30.77	0.00	0.10	0.78	11.74	0.00	11.18	23.23	130.54	–	1.23
1996	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	2.28
Year	Bounty Platform				Pukaki Rise				Campbell Island Rise					
1997	1.68	4.14	24.60	37.52	0.02	2.84	0.86	34.09	–	–	–	–	–	2.28
1998	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	2.28	13.14	28.02	167.67	–	1.74
1999	0.43	0.75	4.97	42.72	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	2.55
2000	–	–	–	–	0.06	3.04	2.07	29.45	0.96	10.46	8.42	135.61	–	1.85
2001	0.14	2.55	6.01	21.68	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	1.83
2002*	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	3.06	3.83	11.84	152.18	–	1.94
2004*	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	1.51	17.33	34.53	56.20	–	–
2006*	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	1.07	19.81	9.90	80.34	–	–

A standardised CPUE analysis of the Campbell Island stock was completed up until the 2002 fishing season, and the indices are shown in Table 5. In the past there has been concern that because of the highly aggregated nature of the fishery, and the associated difficulty in finding and maintaining contact with the highly mobile schools in some years, the CPUE series may not be monitoring abundance. The indices have therefore not been used in the stock assessment since 1998. A standardised CPUE analysis was also recently carried out for the Bounty Platform. However, this analysis was based on a much more limited data set, the results were inconsistent with the acoustic survey estimates, and there was strong evidence of targeting. The indices were therefore rejected by the WG as indices of abundance and not used in the assessment.

## 4.2 Biomass estimates

### (i) Campbell Island stock

#### The stock assessment model

The stock assessment model partitions the Campbell Island stock into two sexes and age groups 2–11, with a plus group at age 11. There are two time steps in the model (Table 6). In the first time step 90% of natural mortality takes place. In the second time step, fish ages are incremented; the 2-year-olds are recruited to the population, which is then subjected to fishing mortality; and the remaining 10% of natural mortality.

**Table 6:** Annual cycle of the stock model, showing the processes taking place at each step, and the available observations. Fishing mortality ( $F$ ) and natural mortality ( $M$ ) that occur within a time step occur after all other processes.  $M$ , proportion of  $M$  occurring in that time step.

Period	Process	M	Length at age	Observations
1. Nov–Aug	Natural mortality	0.9	–	–
2. Sep–Oct	Age, recruitment, F, M	0.1	Matrix applies here	Proportion at age, acoustic indices

The model assumes that the fishing selectivity after age 4 is 1.0, and estimates selectivity for each sex for ages 2 to 4. Selectivities were assumed constant over all years in the fishery, and hence there was no allowance for annual changes in selectivity. In line with previous assessments no stock-recruitment relationship is assumed in the model. The proportion of males at recruitment (age 2) was assumed to be 0.5 of all recruits. As it is a spawning fishery, the maturity ogive was assumed to be the same as the selectivity ogive estimated in the model. Note that the maturity ogive is only used to report spawning stock biomass. The maximum exploitation rate ( $U_{max}$ ) was set at a value of 0.7. The choice of the maximum exploitation rate has the effect of determining the minimum possible virgin biomass allowed by the model. Because of the large inter-annual differences in growth, caused by the occurrence of the strong and weak year classes, length-at-age vectors were calculated for each year, and used in the modelling. Lengths-at-age were converted to weights-at-age in the model using the length-weight relationship given in Table 3.

The model was fitted to the two series of acoustic biomass estimates of ages 2, 3, and 4+ fish given in Table 7 and the proportions-at-age data from the commercial fishery. The acoustic survey estimates were used as relative estimates of mid-season biomass (i.e., after half the catch has been removed), with associated CVs estimated from the survey analysis. Catch-at-age observations were available from the commercial fishery for the period 1979 to 2005. Catch-at-age data were fitted to the model as proportions-at-age, where estimates of the proportions-at-age and associated CVs by age were estimated using the NIWA catch-at-age software by bootstrap (Bull & Dunn 2002). Zero values were replaced with the value 0.0002 with an associated CV of 1.5. Ageing error was assumed to be zero.

Lognormal errors, with known CVs were assumed for the relative biomass and proportions-at-age data. The CVs available for these data allow for sampling error only. However, additional variance assumed to arise from differences between model simplifications and real world variation, was added to the sampling variance. The additional variance, termed process error, was estimated in an initial run of the model using all the available data. A process error of 0.4 was estimated for the proportions-at-age data and was added to each observation for all subsequent model runs. The process error estimated for the acoustic indices was zero.

**Table 7:** Decomposed biomass estimates (t) and CVs by survey and age group used for the Campbell Island Rise stock assessment.

Year	Age 2		Age 3		Age 4+	
	Biomass	CV	Biomass	CV	Biomass	CV
1993	71 902	23	14 781	22	24 033	21
1994	12 259	38	139 552	37	28 841	36
1995	11 176	25	23 228	28	130 535	30
1998	13 142	20	28 022	19	167 668	18
2000	10 460	23	8421	20	135 612	17
2002	3829	76	11 842	72	152 184	68
2004	17 327	16	34 527	27	56 197	38

## Estimation

Model parameters were estimated using Bayesian methods implemented using the NIWA stock assessment program CASAL v2.07 (Bull *et al.* 2004). For initial runs only the mode of the joint posterior distribution was sampled. For the final runs presented here, the full posterior distribution was sampled using Markov Chain Monte Carlo (MCMC) methods, based on the Metropolis-Hastings algorithm.

MCMC chains were estimated using a burn-in length of 1 million iterations, with every 10 000<sup>th</sup> sample taken from the next 10 million iterations (i.e., a final sample of length 1000 was taken from the Bayesian posterior).

Equilibrium “virgin” biomass is equal to the population that there would have been if all the YCS were equal to one and there was no fishing. However, there was a period of unknown (and possibly large) catches from the Campbell Island stock before 1979, and there is high recruitment variability in the stock, so the initial 1979 biomass was allowed to differ from the equilibrium virgin biomass. The initial population in 1979 (ages 3 to 11+) was estimated for each sex. Year class strengths were estimated for all years from 1977 to 2003, under the assumption that the estimates from the model should average one.

## Prior distributions and penalty functions

The assumed prior distributions used in the assessment are given in Table 8. Most priors were intended to be uninformed, and had wide bounds. However, a log-normal prior was used for natural mortality and for the acoustic survey 4+  $q$ .

**Table 8:** The distributions, priors, and bounds assumed for the various parameters being estimated in the Campbell Island Rise stock assessment. The parameters are mean and CV for lognormal; and mean and s.d. for normal. \*The prior for the adult (4+) acoustic  $q$  used for a sensitivity run. The process errors were fixed at their MPD values when carrying out the MCMCs.

Parameter	N	Distribution	Values		Bounds	
			Mean	CV / s.d.	Lower	Upper
$B_0$	1	Uniform-log	–	–	30 000	800 000
Acoustic $qs$ age 2, 3	2	Uniform-log	–	–	0.1	2.8
YCS	28	Lognormal	1.00	1.30	0.001	100
Initial population	18	Uniform-log	–	–	2e5	2e12
Selectivity ages 2-4 (by sex)	6	Uniform	–	–	0.0001	1
M (average)	1	Lognormal	0.20	0.20	0.075	0.325
M (difference)	1	Normal	0.00	0.05	-0.05	0.05
Process errors	4	Uniform-log	–	–	0.0001	1
Acoustic age 4+ $q$	1	Lognormal	1.40	0.20	0.1	2.8
*Acoustic age 4+ $q$	1	Uniform-log	–	–	0.1	2.8

The informed prior for the adult (4+) acoustic  $q$  was obtained using the approach of Cordue (1996). Uncertainty over various factors including mean target strength, acoustic system calibration, target identification, shadow or dead zone correction, and areal availability were all taken into account. In addition to obtaining the bounds, a mean for each factor was also assumed. The factors were then multiplied together. This independent evaluation of the bounds on the acoustic  $q$  suggested a range of 0.65–2.8, with a mean of 1.4 and a CV of 0.2. As the 90% confidence bounds of  $q$  from preliminary MCMC runs extended lower than 0.65, the WG agreed to extend the lower bound to 0.1. The informed prior for the adult acoustic  $q$  will need to be revised in future to take account of the new estimates of the absorption coefficient, towbody motion (pitch and roll), and the target strength-fish length relationship.

The prior on natural mortality was determined by assuming that the true value could differ from the current value by about 0.05, and not more than 0.1. Natural mortality was parameterised by the average of male and female, with the difference estimated with an associated normal prior with mean zero and standard deviation 0.05. Penalty functions were used to constrain the model so that any

## SOUTHERN BLUE WHITING (SBW)

combinations of parameters that did not allow the historical catch to be taken were strongly penalised. A small penalty was applied to encourage the estimates of year class strengths to average to 1.

### Base case

The WG considered only one model run, which was an update of the 2006 base case assessment, including new catch and catch at age data from the 2006 fishery and the 2006 acoustic survey indices. This run used an informed prior on  $q$  and included the acoustic biomass indices incorporating all surveyed strata, not just the core strata.

**Table 9: Model run labels and descriptions for the base case.**

Model label	Description
Base case	Lognormal prior on adult acoustic $q$ and acoustic biomass series incorporating all surveyed strata

Since 2001, the Plenary has used  $B_{1991}$  as a limit reference biomass level for the Campbell Island Rise stock. Recruitment in the Campbell Island Rise stock is characterised by periods of moderate recruitment interspersed by relatively rare, extremely strong, recruitment events. Only one such event (1991 year class) has been observed within the timeframe of the model, although historical data suggests that this may have happened in the past. Given the high variability in recruitment levels,  $B_0$  is probably not well determined. Therefore, the Plenary considered that  $B_{1991}$  may be a better limit reference point than the more commonly used 20%  $B_0$ . Based on the assumptions of the model and the available data,  $B_{1991}$  is estimated to be about 17% of  $B_0$  and there is only a slight probability that  $B_{1991}$  exceeds 20%  $B_0$  (Figure 1).

The Plenary agreed that the probability of falling below  $B_{1991}$  should be kept low for several reasons including: the stock biomass has only been observed at that low level once in the time series; the exceptionally strong recruitment from the 1991 year class has only been observed once in the 27 years covered by the stock assessment; and although no stock recruitment relationship is assumed in the model, the risks of poor recruitment may be higher at  $B_{1991}$  levels than at 20%  $B_0$ .

The Plenary did not have an agreed target reference biomass level or associated risk level for the Campbell Island Rise stock. The development of an appropriate target reference biomass level will be the focus of future discussions, and will require some direction from fisheries managers on the acceptable levels of risk and the harvest strategy to be applied.

For each model run, MPD fits were obtained and qualitatively evaluated. MCMC estimates of the median of the posterior and 90% credible intervals are reported for virgin biomass,  $B_{2006}$ ,  $B_{2006}$  (as % $B_0$ ), and  $B_{2006}$  (as % $B_{1991}$ ).

## Results

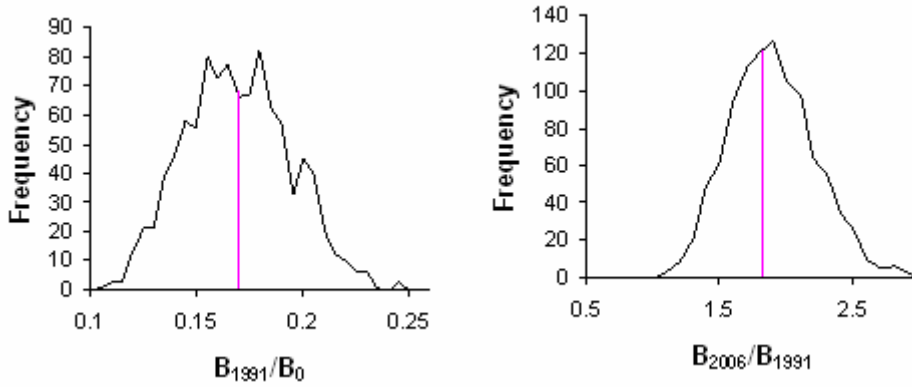
The estimated MCMC marginal posterior distributions for spawning stock biomass by year are shown for the base case in Figure 2, and the results summarised in Table 10. The run suggests that the stock biomass showed a steady decline from the early 1980s until 1993 followed by a large increase to 1996, and a decline thereafter. Exploitation rates are shown in Figure 3. The catch is dominated numerically by the 2001 and 2002 year classes, and the strong 1991, 1995, 1996, and 1998 year classes now contribute to only a small proportion of the commercial catch (Figure 4). The 2004 year class is also estimated to be above average by the model, but since it appears only once in the catch-at-age data and once in the acoustic survey it is not well estimated. It is however used in the projections. Estimates of the adult acoustic  $q$ , the 2006 exploitation rate and  $M$  are given in Table 10.

The sensitivity runs show that the estimates of  $B_{2005}$  and stock status are very sensitive to the choice of acoustic biomass series but only slightly sensitive to the prior used for the acoustic  $q$ .

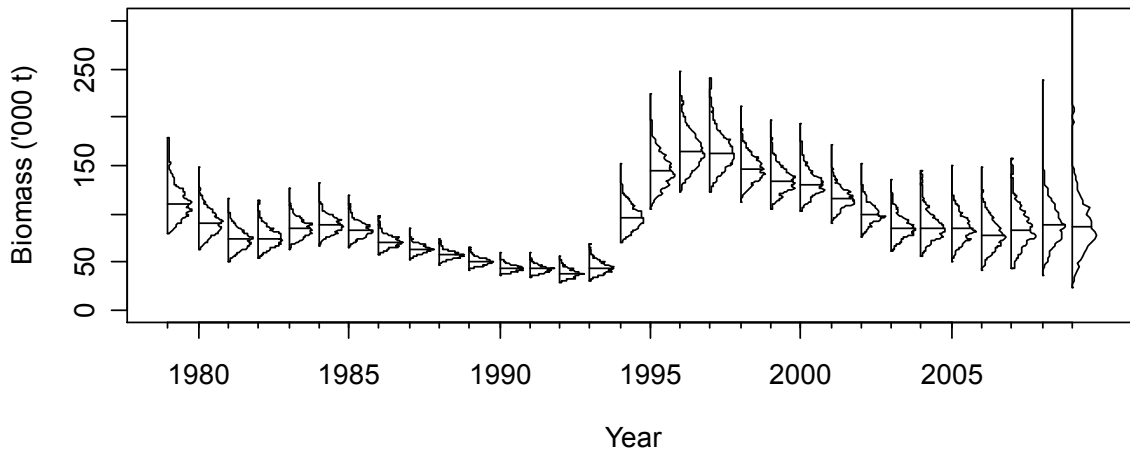


**Table 10: Bayesian median and 90% credible intervals of  $B_0$ ,  $B_{2006}$  (in '000 t),  $B_{2006}$  as a percentage of  $B_{1991}$  and of  $B_0$ ,  $B_{1991} / B_0$ , adult 4+ acoustic  $q$ , the 2006 exploitation rate, and  $M$  for the base case run for the Campbell Island stock.**

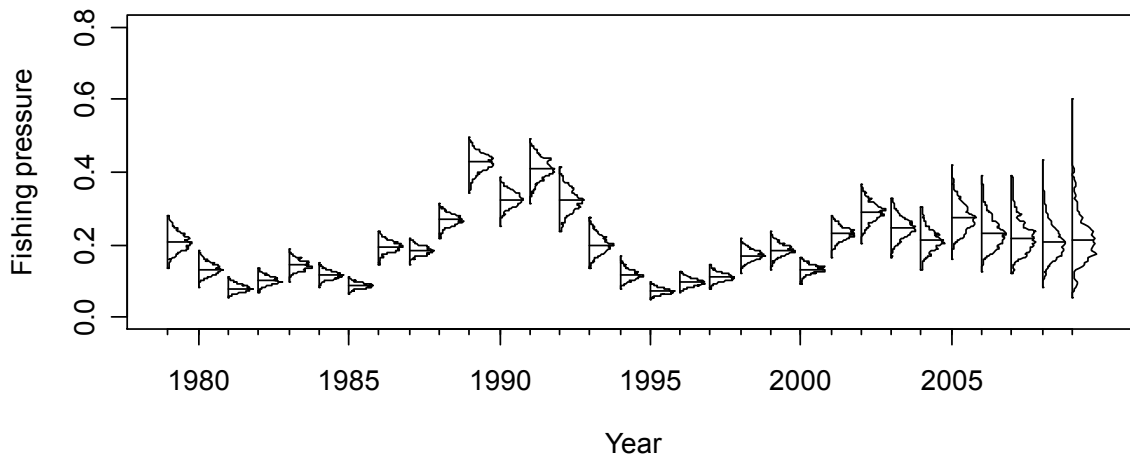
Model run	$B_0$	$B_{2006}$	$B_{2006} (\%B_{1991})$	$B_{2006} (\%B_0)$	$B_{1991} / B_0$	$q$	$U_{2006}$	$M$
Median	256	78	182	30	0.17	1.11	0.23	0.17
90%CI	(233–294)	(56–106)	(134–241)	(20–41)	(0.13–0.21)	(0.95–1.29)	(0.17–0.31)	(0.13–0.21)



**Figure 1: Posterior distributions for  $B_{1991}/B_0$  (median 0.17) and  $B_{2006}/B_{1991}$  (median 1.82) for the Campbell Island stock for the base case.**



**Figure 2: Estimated posterior distributions of biomass trajectories for the Campbell Island stock for the base case.**



**Figure 3: Estimated posterior distributions of exploitation rates for the Campbell Island stock for the base case.**

## SOUTHERN BLUE WHITING (SBW)

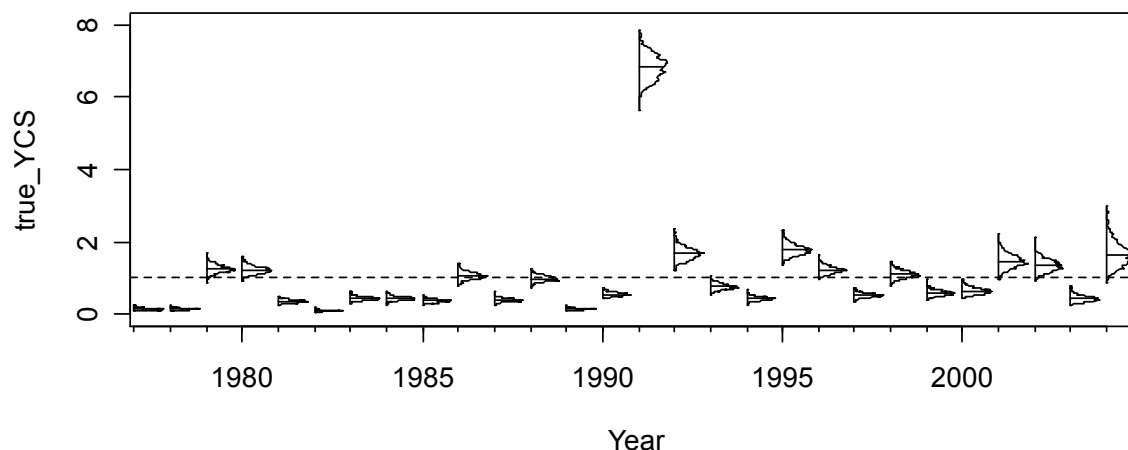


Figure 4: Estimated posterior distributions of year class strengths for the Campbell Island stock for the base case.

Projections were made assuming fixed catch levels of 20 000 per year using the MCMC samples. Recruitments were drawn randomly from the distribution of year class strengths estimated by the model over the period 1977 to 2004. The probability that the mid-season biomass for the specified year will be less than the limit reference biomass ( $B_{1991}$ ) is reported in Table 11.

Table 11: Probability that the projected mid-season vulnerable biomass for 2007, 2008, and 2009 will be less than the mid-season vulnerable biomass in 1991 and the median projected biomass as a percentage of  $B_0$  (with 90% credible intervals) for a projected constant catch of 20 000 t for the Campbell Island stock base case run.

Constant catch (t)	Probability ( $B_{proj} < B_{1991}$ )			Median biomass as percentage $B_0$		
	2007	2008	2009	2007	2008	2009
20 000	<0.01	<0.01	0.03	32 (21–44)	34 (21–54)	33 (19–64)

### (ii) Bounty Platform stock (2004 assessment)

The assessment documented below was completed in 2004 and included data up to the 2003 season. It differs from the 2002 assessments in the following ways: two extra years of catch data, one extra year of catch-at-age data, use of the CASAL software, 2-sex model, individual CVs on the acoustic survey estimates and catch-at-age data, and estimation of process error. In addition, the model differs from the 2002 NIWA model in the use of Bayesian estimation and the use of a lognormal prior on the adult (4+) acoustic  $q$ .

### The stock assessment model structure

The stock assessment model partitions the Bounty stock into two sexes and age groups 2–11, with a plus group at age 11. There are two time steps in the model (Table 6). In the first time step 90% of natural mortality takes place. In the second time step, fish ages are incremented; the 2-year-olds are recruited to the population, which is then subjected to fishing mortality and the remaining 10% of natural mortality.

The model assumes that the fishing selectivity after age 4 is 1.0, and estimates selectivity for each sex for ages 2 to 4. In line with previous assessments no stock-recruitment relationship is assumed in the model. The proportion of males at recruitment (age 2) was assumed to be 0.5 of all recruits. As it is a spawning fishery, the maturity ogive was assumed to be the same as the selectivity ogive estimated in the model. Note that the maturity ogive is only used to report spawning stock biomass. The maximum exploitation rate ( $U_{max}$ ) was set at a value of 0.8. The choice of the maximum exploitation rate has the effect of determining the minimum possible virgin biomass allowed by the model. Because of the large inter-annual differences in growth, caused by the occurrence of the strong and weak year classes, length-at-age vectors were calculated for each year, and used in the modelling. Lengths-at-age were converted to weights-at-age in the model using the length-weight relationship given in Table 3.

Three different starting conditions were explored. In the base case, the initial numbers at age in the population in 1990 were estimated for each sex. Year class strengths were estimated for all years from 1988 to 2000. In the other two runs, the model was started at the beginning of the fishery in 1971. In one of these, the population in 1971 was assumed to be at the virgin level (i.e., at  $B_0$ ). In the other, the population in 1971 was allowed to be different to virgin biomass and was estimated ( $B_{init}$ ). (Note that equilibrium virgin biomass is equal to the population that there would have been if all the YCS were equal to 1 and there was no fishing.) In these two runs, year class strengths were estimated for all years from 1970 to 2000. In all three runs it was assumed that the estimates of YCS should average one.

The catch history assumed in the model runs were the revised estimates of catch by year since 1978 given in previous stock assessment documents (e.g., Hanchet *et al.* 2003). Annual catches from 1971 to 1977 for the Bounty Platform stock are unknown, but were assumed to be equal to the average proportion of the catch from the Bounty Platform over the period 1978 to 2003 (23% of the total).

### Observations

The model was fitted to the acoustic biomass estimates of ages 2, 3, and 4+ fish (Table 12) and the proportions-at-age data from the commercial fishery. The acoustic survey estimates were used as relative estimates of mid-season biomass (i.e., after half the catch has been removed), with associated CVs estimated from the survey analysis. Catch-at-age observations by sex were available from the commercial fishery for the period 1990 to 2002. These catch-at-age data were fitted to the model as proportions-at-age, where estimates of the proportions-at-age and associated CVs by age were estimated using the NIWA catch-at-age software by bootstrap (Bull & Dunn 2002). For the 1990–03 model the plus group was at age 11, but for the runs back to 1971 the plus group was at age 17, which allowed the estimation of more year class strengths. A set of unsexed proportion-at-age data was also available for the period 1972 to 1977 from Russian scientists (Shpak 1977). Preliminary analysis suggested that the ages were one year too high, so to be consistent with the NZ data one year was subtracted from the age given in that paper. These ageing data were based on scale readings, and were assumed to be less precise than ages from otoliths. Each proportion-at-age was therefore arbitrarily assigned a CV equal to 1.5 times the median CV from the corresponding age class in the 199002 data set. For both data sets, zero values were replaced with the value 0.001 with an associated CV of 2.0, and ageing error was assumed to be zero. The 1972 to 1977 period was treated as a separate fishery within the model, thus allowing fishing selectivity to be estimated for ages 2 to 4 separately for this time period.

**Table 12: Decomposed biomass estimates (t) and CVs by survey and age group used for the Bounty Platform stock assessment.**

Year	Age 2		Age 3		Age 4+	
	Biomass	CV	Biomass	CV	Biomass	CV
1993	6 870	0.43	1 410	0.46	62 857	0.46
1994	5 871	0.87	32 066	0.22	27 672	0.22
1995	4 856	0.24	6 658	0.24	30 770	0.24
1997	4 144	0.12	24 598	0.35	37 518	0.35
1999	745	0.39	4 969	0.77	42 722	0.77
2001	2 551	0.28	6 010	0.35	21 677	0.35

### Estimation

Model parameters were estimated using Bayesian methods implemented using the NIWA stock assessment program CASAL v2.06 (Bull *et al.*, 2004). For initial runs only, the mode of the joint posterior distribution was sampled. For the final runs presented here, the full posterior distribution was sampled using Markov Chain Monte Carlo (MCMC) methods, based on the Metropolis-Hastings algorithm.

Lognormal errors, with known CVs were assumed for the relative biomass and proportions-at-age data. The CVs available for these data allow for sampling error only. However, additional variance assumed to arise from differences between model simplifications and real world variation, was added to the sampling variance. The additional variance, termed process error, was estimated in each of the initial runs (MPDs) using all the available data. Process errors ranging from 0.37 to 0.44 were

## SOUTHERN BLUE WHITING (SBW)

estimated for the 1990-02 proportions-at-age data, and from 0.75 to 0.90 for the 1972 to 1977 proportion-at-age data. The process error estimated for the acoustic indices were zero for the age 4+ index, and ranged from 0.51 to 0.6 for the age 3 index and from 0.66 to 0.92 for the age 2 index. The MPD process errors were added to each observation for all subsequent MCMC runs.

MCMC chains were estimated using a burn-in length of  $5 \times 10^5$  iterations, with every 5 000<sup>th</sup> sample taken from the next  $5 \times 10^6$  iterations (i.e., a final sample of length 1000 was taken from the Bayesian posterior). Tests for autocorrelations and single chain convergence (Heidelberger & Welch 1983; Geweke 1992) were applied to resulting chains to look for evidence of non-convergence. Note that because of poor convergence, the number of iterations was doubled for the run where  $B_{\text{initial}}$  was estimated (Binit.7103).

### Prior distributions and penalty functions

The assumed prior distributions used in the assessment are given in Table 13. Most priors were intended to be uninformed, and had wide bounds. However, a log-normal prior was used for the acoustic survey 4+  $q$ . This prior was obtained using the approach of Cordue (1996). Uncertainty over various factors including mean target strength, acoustic system calibration, target identification, shadow or dead zone correction, and areal availability were all taken into account. In addition to obtaining the bounds, a mean for each factor was also assumed. The factors were then multiplied together. This independent evaluation of the bounds on the acoustic  $q$  suggested a range of 0.5–2.5, with a mean of 1.4 and a CV of 0.2.

Penalty functions were used to constrain the model so that any combinations of parameters that did not allow the historical catch to be taken were strongly penalised. A small penalty was applied to encourage the estimates of year class strengths to average to 1.

**Table 13: The distributions, priors, and bounds assumed for the various parameters being estimated for the Bounty Platform stock assessment. The parameters are mean and CV for lognormal; and mean and s.d. for normal. Note acoustic qs were treated as nuisance parameters in base case 1.**

Parameter	Run	N	Distribution	Values		Bounds	
				Mean	CV	Lower	Upper
All runs							
$B_0$	1–3	1	Uniform-log	–	–	20 000	250 000
NZ select. ages 2-4 (by sex)	1–3	6	Uniform	–	–	0.0001	1
Russian select. ages 2–4	2–3	3	Uniform	–	–	0.0001	1
Process errors	1–3	4	Uniform-log			0.0001	1
Process errors (Russian age)	2–3	1	Uniform-log			0.0001	1
Acoustic 4+ $q$	1–3	1	Lognormal	1.40	0.20	0.1	2.8
Acoustic $q$ age 2, 3	1–3	2	Uniform-log	–	–	0.1	2.8
YCS (1988–2000)	1–3	13	Lognormal	1.00	1.30	0.01	100
YCS (1970–1987)	2–3	18	Lognormal	1.00	1.30	0.01	100
Initial population (by sex)	1	18	Uniform	–	–	5e4	2e8
B initial	2	1	Uniform-log			1 000	200 000

### Model runs and sensitivity tests

The WG considered several alternative assessments and agreed to present the three model runs described in Table 14. In recent stock assessments of SBW the estimates of current biomass have been driven to a large extent by the estimate of the 4+ (adult) acoustic  $q$ . In the 2002 assessment of the Bounty stocks, the estimated values for this  $q$  were considered to be unrealistic by the WG and runs with  $q$  fixed (or with informed priors) were used instead. Therefore, for all runs in the current assessment the adult acoustic  $q$  was estimated with an informed (lognormal) prior. (The method for deriving this prior is described above). The three runs presented differ in the starting date and initial starting conditions. In the first run, which is analogous to the 2002 assessment, the model was started in 1990 and estimated the initial numbers-at-age. In the other two runs the model was started in 1971 and two alternate starting conditions were assumed. In one run the starting biomass was allowed to be different from  $B_0$ , in the other run the starting biomass was assumed to be at  $B_0$ .

For each model run, MPD fits were obtained and qualitatively evaluated. MCMC estimates of the median posterior and 90% credible intervals are reported for virgin biomass, initial biomass,  $B_{2003}$ , and  $B_{2003}$  (as % $B_0$ ).

**Table 14: Model run labels and descriptions for the three runs.**

Model label	Description
Cinit.9003	Model starting in 1990 and estimating initial numbers-at-age
Binit.7103	Model starting in 1971 and estimating initial biomass with equilibrium age structure
B0.7103	Model starting in 1971 at virgin biomass with equilibrium age structure

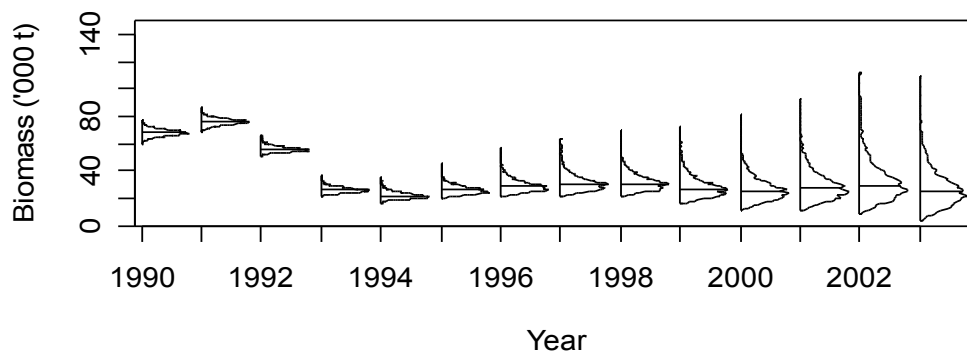
**Results**

The base case MCMC estimates of marginal posterior distributions for spawning stock biomass by year are shown in Figure 5 and are summarised in Table 15. The results suggests that the stock biomass increased up until 1991 followed by a large decline from 1991 to 1993, as a result of the large catch of almost 60 000 t taken in 1992. Biomass increased gradually up until 1998 as the 1991 to 1994 year classes recruited into the fishery, and has since remained relatively stable at about 25 000–30 000 t. Year class strengths since 1994 have been below average, with the 2000 year class being amongst the lowest on record (Figure 6).

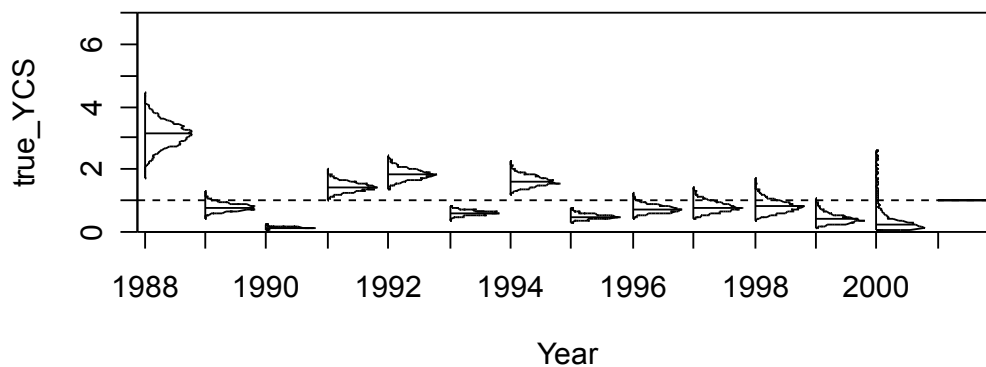
The biomass trajectories from the two runs covering the period 1971 onwards were generally similar, but differed in the estimates of biomass at the start and end of the period (Table 15). Under the  $B_{initial}$  starting conditions,  $B_{1971}$  was 34 000 t and the current biomass was 22 000 t. Under the  $B_0$  starting conditions,  $B_{1971}$  was much higher at 69 000 t, and the current biomass was much lower at 13 000 t. In contrast, estimates of  $B_{1990}$  were almost identical between all runs.

**Table 15: Bayesian median and credible intervals of  $B_0$ ,  $B_{2003}$  (in ‘000 t), and  $B_{2003}$  as a percentage of  $B_0$  for the various runs.**

Model run	$B_0$	$B_{init}$	$B_{2003}$	$B_{2003}$ (% $B_0$ )	Adult acoustic $q$
Base case	86 (70–111)	64 (60–68)	25 (10–52)	30 (15–46)	1.35 (1.12–1.56)
Binit.7103	76 (70 – 87)	34 (27–44)	22 (10–45)	29 (14–52)	1.37 (1.16–1.54)
B0.7103	69 (65 – 75)	69 (65–75)	13 (6 – 25)	19 (8 – 33)	1.48 (1.32–1.63)



**Figure 5: Estimated posterior distributions of biomass trajectories for the Bounty stock for the base case.**



**Figure 6: Estimated posterior distributions of year class strengths for the Bounty stock for the base case.**

## SOUTHERN BLUE WHITING (SBW)

### (iii) Pukaki Rise stock

A new assessment of the Pukaki Rise stock was carried out in 2002. The sSPA model was used to estimate the numbers at age in the initial population in 1989 and subsequent recruitment. The model estimates selectivity for ages 2, 3, and 4 and assumes that the selectivity after age 4 is 1.0. No stock-recruitment relationship is assumed in the sSPA.

Preliminary runs of the model were fitted to proportion-at-age data from 1989 to 2000, and the acoustic indices given in Table 5. The indices were fitted in the model as relative estimates of mid-season biomass (i.e., after half the catch has been removed), with the CVs as shown in Table 16. The proportion-at-age data are assumed to be multinomially distributed with a median sample size of 50 (equivalent to a CV of about 0.3). Details of the input parameters for the initial and sensitivity runs are given in Table 16.

**Table 16: Values for the input parameters to the separable Sequential Population Analysis for the initial run and sensitivity runs for the Pukaki Rise stock.**

Parameter	Initial run	Sensitivity runs
M	0.2	0.15, 0.25
Acoustic age 3 and 4+ indices <i>CV</i>	0.3	0.1, 0.5
Acoustic age 1, 2 indices <i>CV</i>	0.7	0.5, 1.0
Weighting on proportion-at-age data	50	5, 100
Years used in analysis	1989–2000	1979–2000
Acoustic <i>q</i>	estimated	0.68, 1.4, 2.8

Biomass estimates in the initial run and also in the sensitivity runs all appeared to be over-pessimistic because the adult (4+) acoustic *q* was very high. For example, for the initial run the 4+ acoustic *q* was estimated to be 2.7. The WG did not accept this initial run as a base case assessment, but agreed to present a range of possible biomass estimates. The Plenary also agreed to present a range, based on assumptions concerning the likely range of the value for the acoustic *q*.

Bounds for the adult (4+) acoustic *q* were obtained using the approach of Cordue (1996). Uncertainty over various factors including mean target strength, acoustic system calibration, target identification, shadow or dead zone correction, and areal availability were all taken into account. In addition to obtaining the bounds, a ‘best estimate’ for each factor was also calculated. The factors were then multiplied together. This independent evaluation of the bounds on the acoustic *q* suggested a range of 0.65–2.8, with a best estimate of 1.4. Clearly the *q* from the initial run is almost at the upper bound and probably outside the credible range. When the model was run fixing the acoustic *q* at 0.65 and 2.8, estimates of  $B_0$  were 18 000 t and 54 000 t, and estimates of  $B_{2000}$  were 8000 t and 48 000 t respectively (Table 17, Figure 7). Within these bounds current biomass is greater than  $B_{MAY}$ . Assuming the ‘best estimate’ of *q* of 1.4 gave  $B_0$  equal to 22 000 t and  $B_{2000}$  equal to 13 000 t.

Based on the range of stock biomass modelled in the assessment, the average catch level since 2002 (380 t) is unlikely to have made much impact on stock size. A more intensive fishery or more consistent catches from year to year would seem to be required to provide any contrast in the biomass indices. This stock has been only lightly exploited since 1993, when over 5000 t was taken in the spawning season.

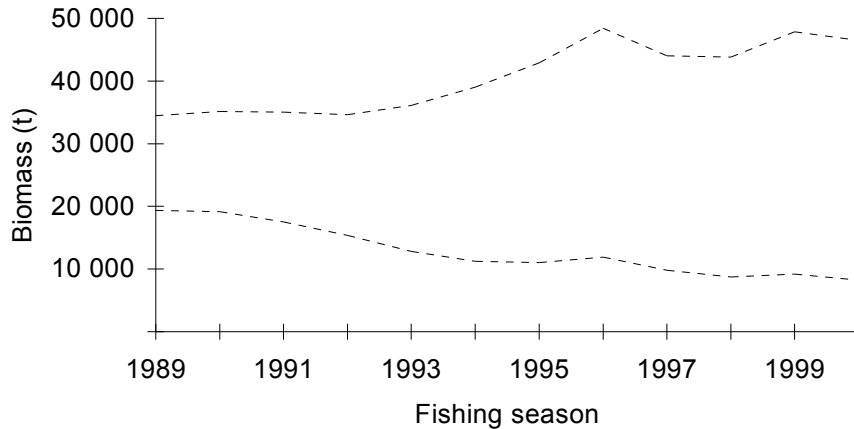


Figure 7: Mid-season spawning stock biomass trajectory bounds for the Pukaki Rise stock. Bounds based on acoustic  $q$  of 0.65 and 2.8.

Table 17: Parameter estimates for the Pukaki stock as a result of fixing the adult 4+ acoustic  $q$  at various values.  $B_{mid}$ , mid-season spawning stock biomass;  $N_{2,1992}$  size of the 1990 year class (millions). All values in  $t \times 10^3$ .

Fixing the acoustic $q$ value	$B_0$	$B_{mid\ 89}$	$B_{mid\ 00}$	$N_{2,1992}$	$B_{mid\ 00}$ (% $B_0$ )	$B_{mid\ 00}$ (% $B_{may}$ )
$q = 0.65$	54	36	48	63	88	246
$q = 1.4$	22	22	13	28	58	161
$q = 2.8$	18	19	8	23	44	123

(iv) **Auckland Islands stock**

No estimate of current biomass is available for the Auckland Islands Shelf stock. The acoustic estimate of the adult biomass in 1995 was 7800 t.

**4.3 Other yield estimates and stock assessment results**

**Decision tables**

As an alternative to the CAY estimates, the results have been presented in the form of decision tables. In the Campbell Island Rise assessment the probability of biomass falling below the limit biomass level (1991 biomass) is presented for a catch level of 20 000 t (Table 11).

**Yield estimates**

Estimates of sustainable yields have been calculated for the Campbell Island Rise stock. Estimates of sustainable yields were made for each of the runs. Yield estimates were based on the 1000 samples from the Bayesian posterior, with yield estimates based on stochastic simulations run over 100 years (Bull *et al.* 2003). The simulation method of Francis (1992) was used to estimate MAY and CAY subject to the constraint that spawning stock biomass should not fall below 20% of  $B_0$  more than 10% of the time. The estimates of  $B_{MAY}$ , MAY, and  $CAY_{2006-07}$  are given for the Campbell Island stock in Table 18. MCY and  $B_{MCY}$  estimates have not been presented for the current assessment update due to the fact that the methods for calculating these reference points are currently under revision.

Table 18: Yield estimates (MAY and CAY) and associated parameters.

Model run	$B_{MAY}$ (% $B_0$ )	MAY (t)	$U_{CAY}$	$CAY_{2005-06}$ (t)
Campbell Island Rise	34	18 600	0.20	16 400

For the Campbell Island Rise stock the Plenary noted that the limit biomass assumed in the yield estimation simulations is 20% $B_0$ , which is different from the use of  $B_{1991}$  for assessing risk in projections. No corresponding yield estimates based on the  $B_{1991}$  limit biomass reference point were available for consideration by the Plenary.

## SOUTHERN BLUE WHITING (SBW)

### 4.4 Additional stock assessment results for the Bounty Platform (2008 results)

In 2008, a preliminary assessment was carried out for the Bounty Platform stock. New abundance data were available from an industry acoustic survey of the Bounty Platform carried out in August 2007. The biomass estimate from this survey was 157 000 t (CV = 31%). This represented a 10-fold increase since the 2004 industry survey and 7 fold increase since the 2006 industry survey. Catch-at-age data from the fishery showed that a strong year class has recently entered the fishery. However, the stock assessment model was unable to fit the large biomass increase given the observed catch-at-age data. The Working Group agreed that a very strong year class (2002) had entered the fishery, but that the size of this year class, and hence current biomass, was very uncertain.

In order to provide advice on sustainable yields for the Bounty Platform stock for the 2008–09 fishing year, the Working Group agreed to provide conservative estimates of absolute abundance for the Bounty Platform stock that would be used to determine yield estimates for management of the fishery.

The Working Group made the following assumptions:

- That the acoustic biomass estimate of 157 079 t (CV = 0.31) was equal to vulnerable biomass and was lognormally distributed.
- That the 80% quantiles (i.e., the 10<sup>th</sup> and 90<sup>th</sup> percentiles) represent an adequate bound on the sampling uncertainty in the acoustic estimate for 2008.
- That an adequate representation of the potential bias in the estimated target strength of southern blue whiting is  $\pm 3$  dB, which approximates to a doubling or halving of the resulting biomass calculated from the target strength relationship.

Table 19 gives the estimates of absolute biomass from the 2007 *Tomu Maru* acoustic survey.

**Table 19: Estimates of absolute vulnerable biomass and 80% confidence intervals from the 2007 *Tomu Maru* acoustic survey, for three alternative target strength assumptions.**

TS multiplier	Biomass estimate		
	10 <sup>th</sup> percentile	Mean	90 <sup>th</sup> percentile
0.5	50 883	78 540	110 601
1.0	101 765	157 079	221 201
2.0	203 530	314 158	442 402

Assuming a reference fishing exploitation rate of 0.20 (i.e., the  $U_{CAY}$  that was previously calculated for southern blue whiting on the Bounty Platform in the most recent assessment), allows CAY proxy yields to be directly calculated for the biomass estimates in Table 19 (see Table 20).

**Table 20: Estimates of CAY with 80% confidence intervals for three alternative target strength assumptions. A value of  $U_{CAY} = 0.20$  was assumed in the calculations.**

TS multiplier	Biomass estimate		
	10 <sup>th</sup> percentile	Mean	90 <sup>th</sup> percentile
0.5	10 177	15 708	22 120
1.0	20 353	31 416	44 240
2.0	40 706	62 832	88 480

The lower bound on the target strength with the point estimate of absolute biomass gives a CAY yield of about 15 000 t while the 10<sup>th</sup> percentile of the biomass estimate with the assumed target strength gives CAY yield of about 20 000 t (shaded values in Table 20). The Working Group concluded that the risk that the biomass would drop below 20%B<sub>0</sub> in 2008 if the TACC was based on these yield estimates would be negligible.



## 5. STATUS OF THE STOCKS

In 2008, a preliminary assessment was carried out for the Bounty Platform stock. New abundance data were available from an industry acoustic survey of the Bounty Platform that indicated that there has been a very large increase in biomass in this stock since 2004. An attempt was made to fit this time-series of industry acoustic data, along with a time series of Tangaroa acoustic surveys and catch-at-age data, in a population model. Because of the poor fit to the acoustic data the model results are not reported here, but the Working Group did provide conservative estimates of biomass (section 4d) based only on the acoustic survey results to allow yield estimates (CAY) to be determined for the management of the fishery.

No new assessments are available for the Campbell Island and Pukaki Rise stocks. No assessment has been made of the Auckland Islands Shelf stock. The years given in this section of the report refer to the August-September spawning/fishing season.

### **Campbell Island stock**

The 2007 stock assessment was not updated. For the base case,  $B_{2006}$  was estimated to be 78 000 t (90% credible interval 56 000–106 000 t), corresponding to 30% $B_0$  (90% credible interval 20–41%).

The catch is dominated numerically by the strong 2001 and 2002 year classes, and the incoming 2004 year class also appears to be above average. The TACC was reduced to 20 000 t in 1 April 2006, and at this level of catch, the biomass is projected to remain stable over the next few years. At the current TACC level, the probability that the biomass will drop below  $B_{1991}$  is projected to rise to 3% by 2009 (Table 11). The assessment is much more optimistic than the equivalent stock assessment presented in 2006, particularly in the projections, as stock size is not predicted to decrease with future catches of 20 000 t (current TACC).

### **Bounty Platform stock**

A survey carried out by the fishing industry in August 2007 indicated that there has been a very large increase in biomass in this stock since 2004. Catch-at-age data suggest that a strong year class (born in 2002) has recently entered the fishery. However, the stock assessment model was unable to reconcile the very large biomass increase with the series of observed catch-at-age data, and so estimates of the size of this year class and the current biomass are very uncertain.

The 2004 stock assessment estimated a virgin stock size of 86 000 t based on the mean recruitment estimated from 1988 to 2000. The range of estimates of biomass from the 2007 acoustic survey are above that level. The most conservative estimate is about 60% of the estimated virgin stock size and leads to the conclusion that the biomass of this stock is well above  $B_{MSY}$ .

Without a formal stock assessment it is not possible to quantify the size of the SBW 6B stock and to determine a CAY for the fishery. However, conservative estimates of CAY were made by applying the reference fishing mortality to a conservative estimate of current vulnerable biomass based directly on the acoustic survey. The range of CAY was 15 000 to 20 000 t. The Working Group concluded that the risk that the biomass would drop below 20% $B_0$  in 2008 would be negligible, if the TACC was based on these yield estimates.

### **Pukaki Rise stock**

The assessment of this stock has not been updated since 2002. Recent catch levels (average 380 t since 2002) are unlikely to have made much impact on stock size. This stock has been only lightly exploited since 1993, and is likely to be above the level that will support the MAY.

### **Auckland Islands stock**

No estimates of current biomass or yield are available. It is unknown if recent catches are sustainable or if they will allow the stock to move towards a size that will support the MSY. The only information available on stock size is from an acoustic survey in 1995.

## SOUTHERN BLUE WHITING (SBW)

**Table 21: Summary of TACCs and preliminary estimates of landings (t). (1 April–31 March fishing year).**

Area	2007–08 Actual TACC	2007–08 Landings
SBW 1 (EEZ excluding Sub-Antarctic)	8	1
Campbell Island	20 000	20 996
Bounty Platform	3500	3 799
Pukaki Rise	5500	392
Auckland Islands Shelf	1640	106
Total	30 648	25 294

## 6. FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

- Bull B., Dunn A. 2002. Catch-at-age: User manual v1.06.2002/09/12. NIWA Internal Report 114. 23 p. NIWA. (Unpublished report).
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