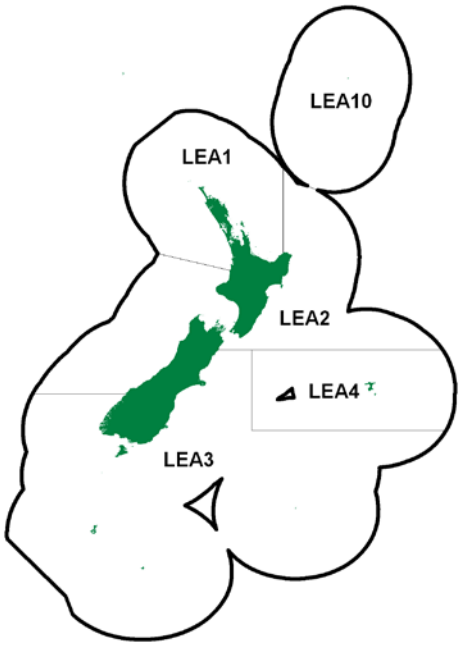
LEATHERJACKET (LEA)

(*Meuschenia scaber*)
Kokiri, Hiriri



1. FISHERY SUMMARY

Leatherjacket was introduced into the QMS on 1 October 2003, with allowances, TACCs and TACs shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Recreational and Customary non-commercial allowances, TACCs and TACs for leatherjacket by Fishstock.

Fishstock	Recreational Allowance	Customary Non-Commercial Allowance	Other sources of mortality	TACC	TAC
LEA 1	5	1	9	188	203
LEA 2	2	1	57	1 136	1 196
LEA 3	2	1	5	100	108
LEA 4	1	1	1	7	10
LEA 10	0	0	0	0	0
Total	10	4		1 431	1 517

1.1 Commercial fisheries

Nationally, very small landings were first reported in 1948. Most of the current leatherjacket catch is taken as a bycatch, and it is very likely that leatherjacket has always been primarily a bycatch species. From only a few tonnes in the early 1960s, reported landings increased to 200-400 tonnes in the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s (Table 2). Figure 1 shows the historical landings and TACC values for the main leatherjacket stocks. Landings increased further in the late 1990s to around 1000 to 1300 tonnes, but have decreased to less than 600 t in 2011-12. It is possible that actual catches were higher than reported prior to the 1970s, but that some catches were discarded without being reported due to low market demand in this period. On average over the last 4 years total landings have only been 31% of the TACC.

1.2 Recreational fisheries

The National Marine Recreational Fishing surveys in 1994, 1996 and 2000 do not provide an estimate of the non-commercial catches of leatherjacket because very few were caught. It is likely that recreational fishers, especially in the northern region, will have caught some leatherjacket by spear fishing, in rock lobster pots and setnets. Leatherjackets are seldom caught by hook and line.

Table 2: Reported commercial landings (tonnes) of leatherjacket by fishstock for the fishing years from 1989-90 to 2011-12. Landings for LEA 10 have not been shown as these were negligible and were rounded to zero.

Fishstock		LEA 1		LEA 2		LEA 3		LEA 4		
FMA (s)		1&9		2&8		3, 5 & 6		4		Total
	Landings	TACC	Landings	TACC	Landings	TACC	Landings	TACC	Landings	TACC
1989-90	114	-	169	-	42	-	-	-	325	-
1990-91	143	-	178	-	61	-	-	-	382	-
1991-92	160	-	85	-	100	-	-	-	345	-
1992-93	154	-	98	-	41	-	-	-	293	-
1993-94	188	-	62	-	37	-	-	-	287	-
1994-95	186	-	148	-	50	-	-	-	384	-
1995-96	152	-	296	-	38	-	-	-	486	-
1996-97	128	-	908	-	70	-	-	-	1 106	-
1997-98	151	-	165	-	66	-	-	-	382	-
1998-99	110	-	413	-	30	-	-	-	553	-
1999-00	115	-	1 136	-	35	-	-	-	1 286	-
2000-01	131	-	880	-	41	-	-	-	1 052	-
2001-02	185	-	953	-	43	-	-	-	1 181	-
2002-03	162	-	568	-	67	-	0	-	797	-
2003-04	189	188	396	1 136	28	100	0	7	613	1 431
2004-05	223	188	221	1 136	56	100	< 1	7	500	1 431
2005-06	173	188	172	1 136	60	100	0	7	405	1 431
2006-07	191	188	215	1 136	49	100	0	7	454	1 431
2007-08	135	188	258	1 136	73	100	0	7	466	1 431
2008-09	178	188	282	1 136	122	100	0	7	582	1 431
2009-10	181	188	455	1 136	117	100	0	7	754	1 431
2010-11	185	188	276	1 136	112	100	< 1	7	573	1 431
2011-12	167	188	277	1 136	127	100	< 1	7	571	1 431

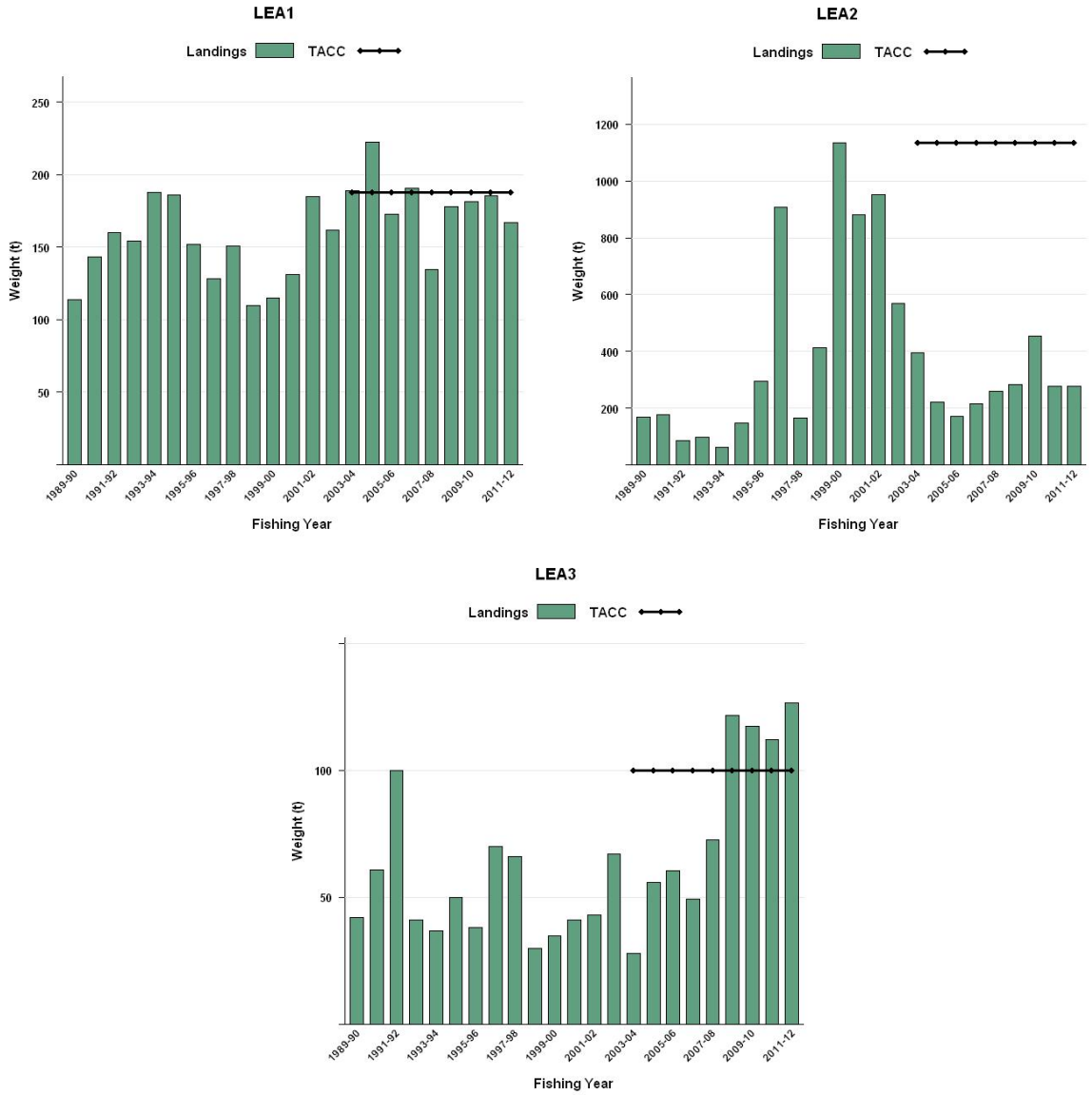


Figure 1: Historical landings and TACC for the main LEA stocks. From top left: LEA1 (Auckland), LEA2 (Central), and LEA3 (South East).

1.3 Customary non-commercial fisheries

There is no quantitative information available to allow the estimation of the amount of leatherjacket taken by customary non-commercial fishers.

2. BIOLOGY

The New Zealand leatherjacket (*Meuschenia scaber*) is present around much of New Zealand, but is most common in the north. Trawl survey records show it to be widespread over the inner shelf north of East Cape and Cape Egmont, in the South Taranaki Bight, in Tasman and Golden Bays, Pegasus Bay and the South Canterbury Bight, extending to depths below 100 m, but with greatest abundance at 40–60 m (Anderson *et al.* 1998). It was less commonly caught along the east coast of the North Island south of East Cape, off the northeast South Island (Cook Strait to Pegasus Bay), northwest South Island (Cape Farewell to Cape Foulwind), and around the South Otago and Southland coast. It has not been taken by trawl on the west coast south of Cape Foulwind.

The New Zealand leatherjack*et al*so occurs in Australia, from New South Wales to the southern coast of West Australia. In the Australian southeast trawl fishery, *Meuschenia scaber* is the main leatherjacket species caught (Yearsley *et al.* 1999). It was once believed that two similar species of leatherjacket occurred in New Zealand – 'rough' and 'smooth' – but these are now considered a single species with variable colouring. Kokiri is the Maori name, but is not in common usage. 'Creamfish' is a New Zealand trade name for the processed (headed/gutted/skinned) product, rather than a name for the fish itself.

Leatherjacket usually occur near reefs and over rough seafloor, but may be found over sand or some distance above the bottom. Although not a schooling species, it does occur in small groups.

There are no published studies on the age and growth *M. scaber*. According to Francis (1996 and 2012) they live to at least 7 years, maturing at two years and 19-22 cm. The males defend territories and eggs are laid within nests on the seafloor in spring and summer (Ayling & Cox 1982, Milicich 1986).

3. STOCKS AND AREAS

There have been no biological studies directly relevant to the recognition of separate stocks.

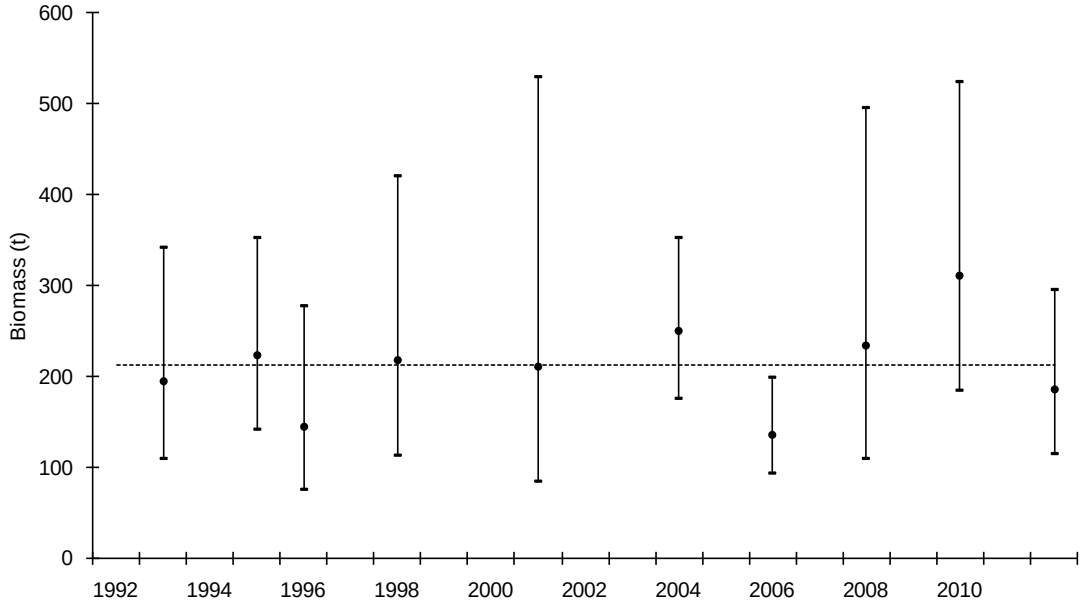


Figure 2: Leatherjacket biomass ±95% CI (estimated from survey CV's) and the time series mean (dotted line) estimated from the West Coast South Island trawl survey.

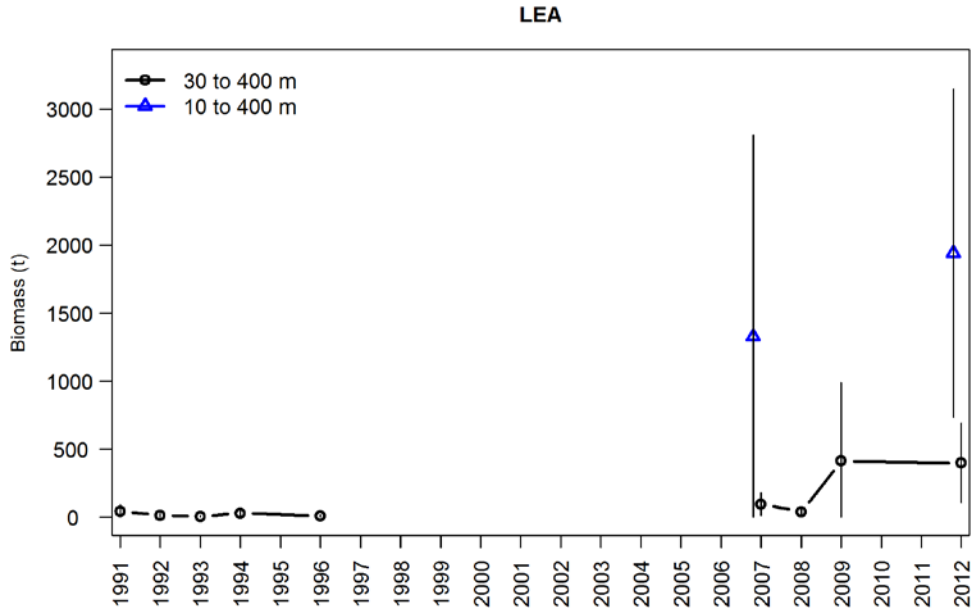


Figure 3: Biomass and 95% confidence intervals (total biomass only) for the leatherjacket caught by the ECSI trawl survey core strata (30–400), and core plus shallow strata (10–400 m).

The West Coast South Island (WCSI) trawl survey probably monitors pre-recruit biomass of leatherjacket. The total biomass trends are shown in Figure 2.

The length distributions from the East Coast South Island trawl survey (Beentjes and MacGibbon in press) show at least three clear modes at about 10 cm, 16 cm, and 23 cm (combined males, females, and unsexed). If they reach 20 cm after 1 year, as described by Ayling & Cox (1982), then the 16 cm mode represents the 0+ cohort turning 1 in August to November, and the 23 cm mode is comprised of multiple age classes (2 to 7 years). However, this explanation does not explain the presence of the smaller mode at 10cm which seems more likely to be 0+ fish. The survey is therefore monitoring both pre-recruited cohorts, and fish in the recruited size range.

Plots of time series length frequency distributions (Figure 4) show that they were not caught in significant numbers until 2007 when the shallow strata were included in the surveys. Very few fish were sexed on any of the surveys. The two larger modes are consistently represented and overall the distributions show the presence of the pre-recruited cohorts, with 2012 having a larger proportion of recruited fish. The addition of the 10–30 m depth range has changed the shape of the distribution significantly and only the core plus shallow strata (10–400 m) time series that includes 2007 and 2012 is acceptable.

Biomass estimates in the core strata (30–400 m) are not valid given that so few fish were caught, and coefficients of variations are generally high ranging from 36 to 66% (mean = 55%). The additional biomass captured in the 10–30 m depth range accounted for 93% and 79% of the biomass in the core plus shallow strata (10–400 m) for 2007 and 2012 respectively, indicating that the core plus shallow strata (10–400 m) (Figure 3) is the only valid depth range within which to monitor leatherjacket biomass. The biomass in 2012 was marginally higher than that estimated in 2007.

4. STOCK ASSESSMENT

There has been no scientific assessment of the maximum sustainable yield, reference or current biomass of any of the leatherjacket stocks.

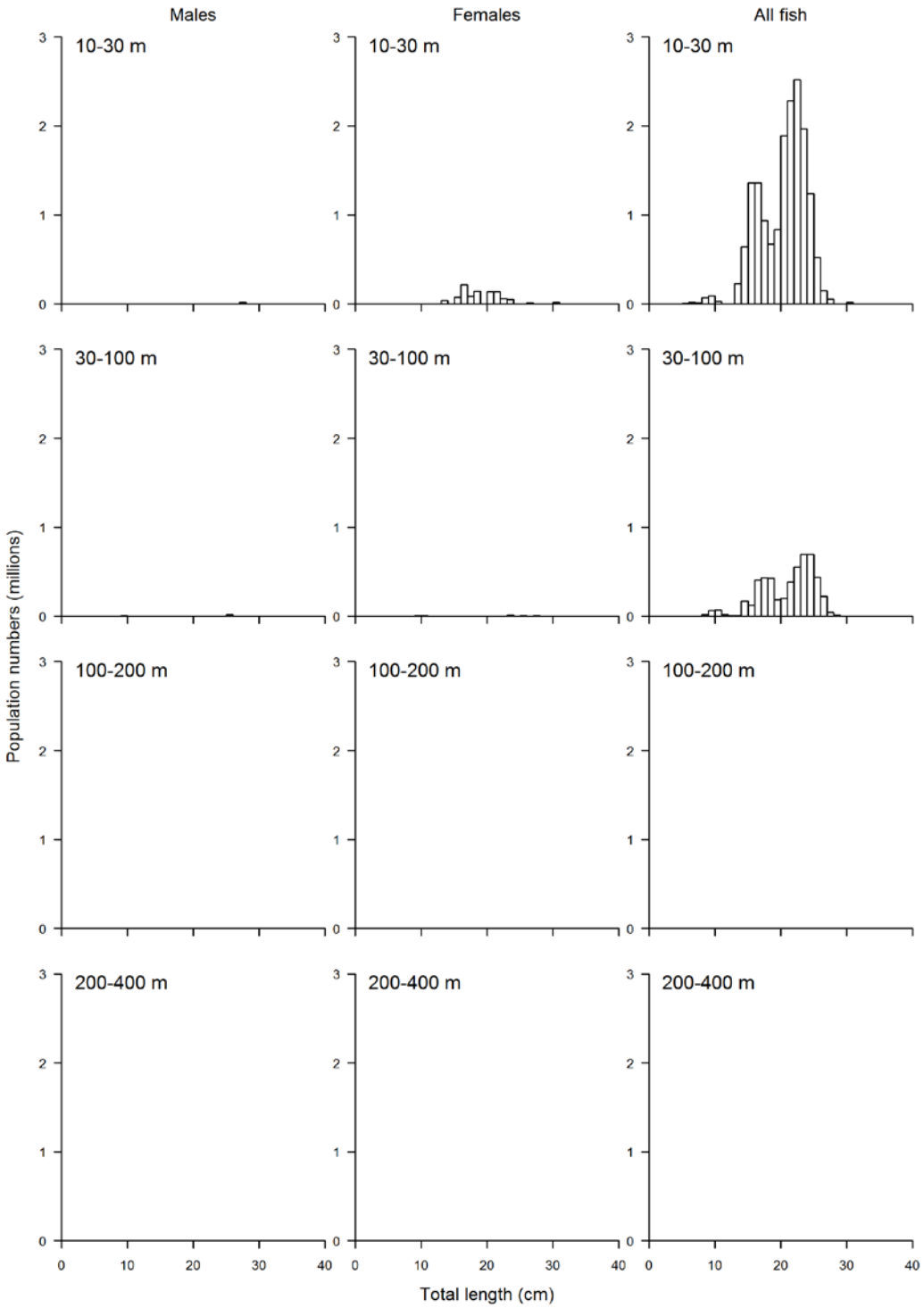


Figure 4: Scaled length frequency distributions for the leatherjacket by depth range for all nine east coast South Island winter surveys combined. The 10–30 m depth range include only the last four surveys (2007, 2008, 2009, and 2012).

A characterisation and CPUE analysis for the LEA 3 fishery was undertaken by Langley (2013). Leatherjacket, in LEA 3, are landed throughout the year almost exclusively by bottom trawl gear in Statistical Areas 021-25 and 030 (Figure 5). Almost all of LEA catch taken in the 10-50 m depth range. The characterisation revealed that most of the increase in LEA 3 catch from 2005/06 is attributable to the increased landings of leatherjacket catch from bottom trawls targeting spiny dogfish in Foveaux Strait (025).

A CPUE standardisation was undertaken using catch and effort data that included all trips that landed or targeted LEA 3, but did not include zero LEA 3 catch trips. Landed catch was assigned to effort records proportional to estimated catch, following the Starr (2007) methodology, with some

refinements where the data were aggregated to CELR equivalent format (vessel/day/method/stat/target) and then the records were defined as CELR equivalent. This method was somewhat problematic due to difference in the reliability of reporting of fishing location and target species between the CELR and TCER form types. The Foveaux Strait and Canterbury Bight fisheries were analysed separately. The Foveaux Strait analysis was rejected by the Working Group and is therefore not reported further.

The Canterbury Bight analysis was limited to the bottom trawl (BT) fishery in stat areas 020, 022, targeting a range of target species (RCO, BAR, FLA, ELE, TAR, WAR and GUR). The data set included trips where 1 kg or more of LEA 3 were landed. The analysis had large numbers of very small catches. Eight vessels accounted for 80% of the catch. The working group requested that the Canterbury Bight delta lognormal model targeting FLA, ELE, GUR from 2002 (Target FLA,GUR,ELE post QMS) be used as these are the years when the reporting is likely to be more reliable. There was an indication that CPUE from the Canterbury Bight fishery has increased since the early 2000s, and these indices were robust to some key assumptions. The index (Figure 6) showed that the CPUE remained low at the start of the series and then began to increase from 2007/08 to 2011/12. However, some concerns were raised about the low number of vessels in the analysis and the development of new markets for this species that may have increased targeting or retention of this species in recent years, suggesting that the index may not be reliable as an index of abundance.

The Working Group concluded that this analysis only pertains to the stock unit for the East Coast of the South Island; is the best available information on the stock abundance at this stage but trawl survey data may provide better information in the medium and long-term; and that this is a Level 2 assessment and should be given a medium or mixed (2) overall assessment quality rank.

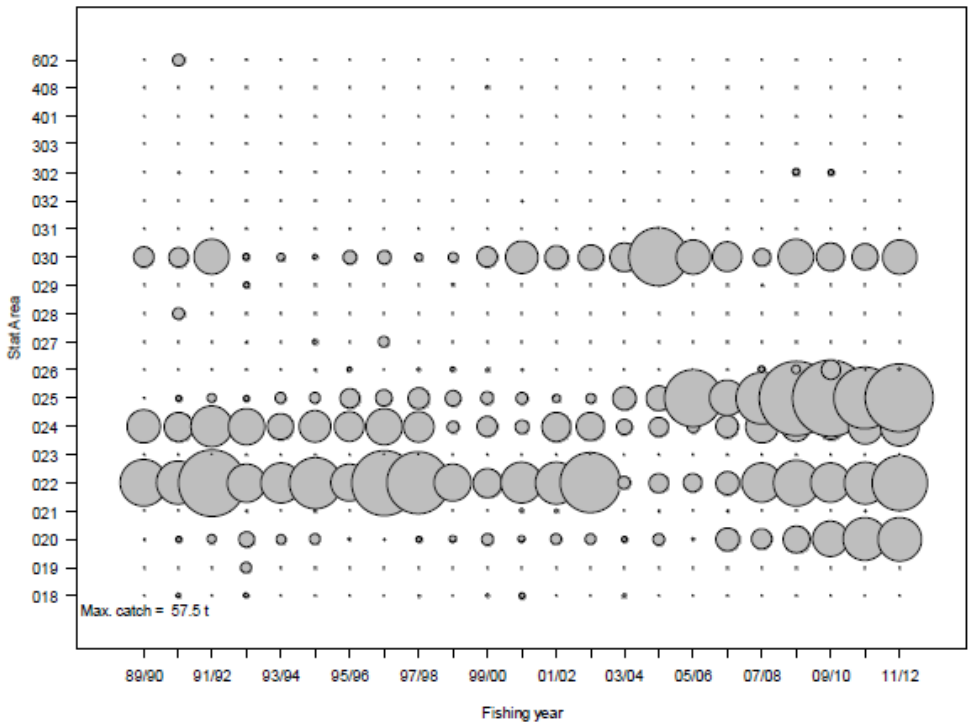


Figure 5: Distribution of reported catch for bottom trawl by Statistical Area in LEA 3 and fishing year from trips which landed leatherjacket in LEA 3 (Langley 2013).

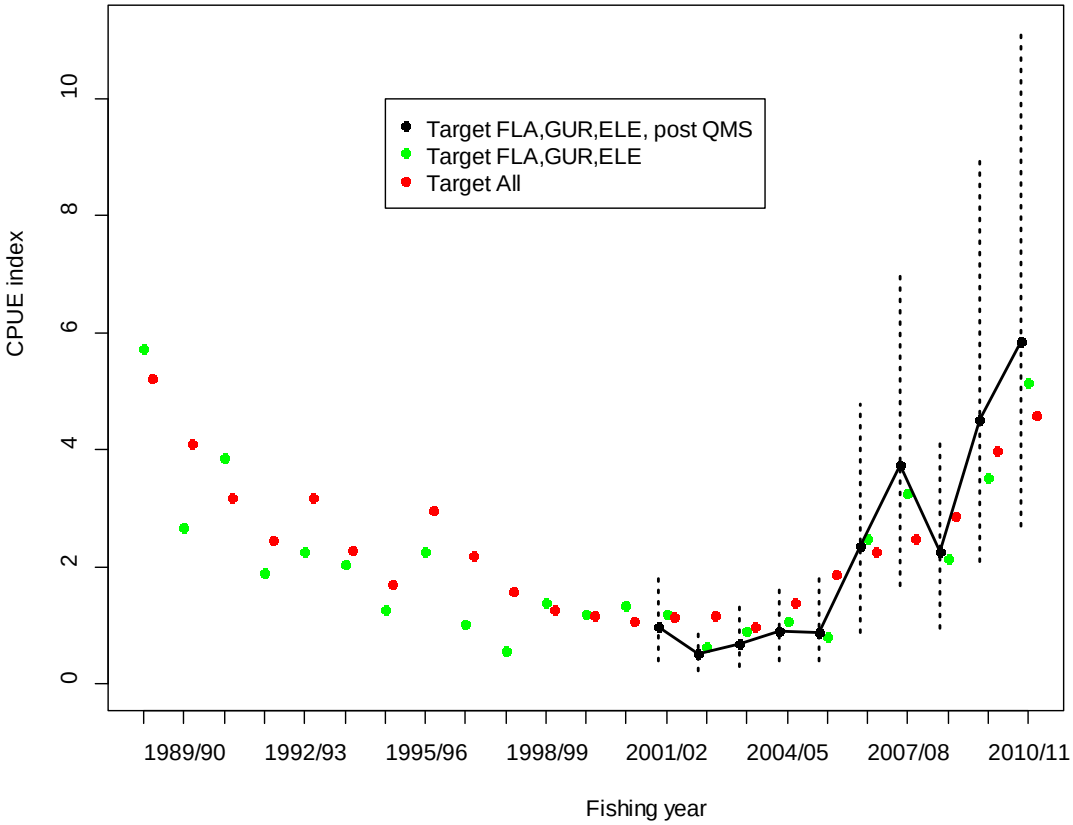


Figure 6: A comparison of the 2013 standardised CPUE indices for leatherjacket on the East Coast South Island.

5. STATUS OF THE STOCK

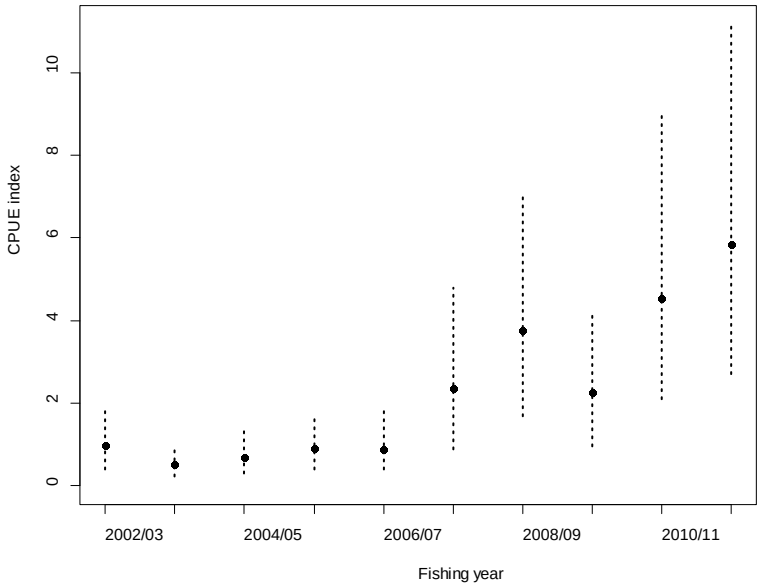
Stock Structure Assumptions

Stock structure is unknown but for management purposes the QMA boundaries are assumed to represent the stock boundaries for this species. There are two distinct areas of catch distribution within LEA 3 (Foveaux Strait and East Coast South Island) and these may represent distinct biological stocks.

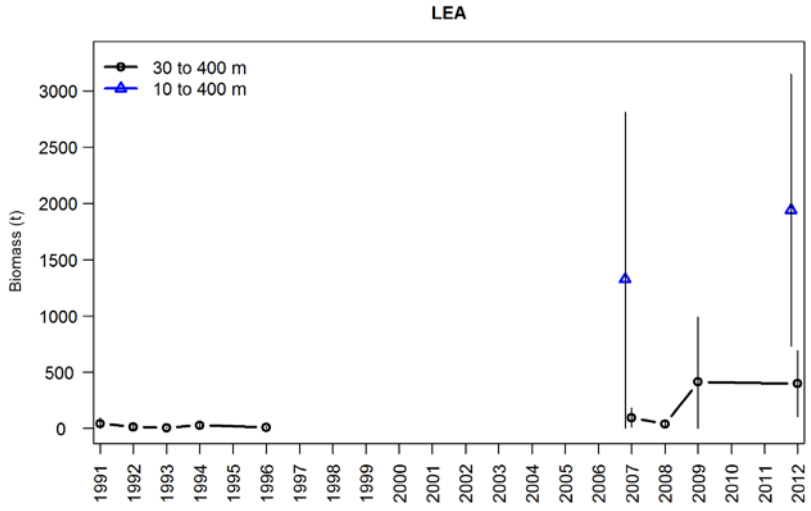
LEA 3 (East Coast South Island only**)**

Stock Status	
Year of Most Recent Assessment	2013
Assessment Runs Presented	CPUE: Target FLA, GUR, ELE post QMS
Reference Points	Target: 40% B_0 Soft Limit: 20% B_0 Hard Limit: 10% B_0 Overfishing threshold: F_{MSY}
Status in relation to Target	Unknown
Status in relation to Limits	Soft Limit: Unknown Hard Limit: Unlikely (< 40%)
Status in relation to Overfishing	It is Unknown whether overfishing is occurring

Historical Stock Status Trajectory and Current Status



The 2013 standardised CPUE index for leatherjacket on the East Coast South Island.



Biomass and 95% confidence intervals (total biomass only) for the leatherjacket caught by the ECSI trawl survey core strata (30–400), and core plus shallow strata (10–400 m).

Fishery and Stock Trends	
Recent Trend in Biomass or Proxy	CPUE remained low at the start of the series (2002) and then began to increase from 2007-08 to 2011-12. The biomass index from the East Coast South Island trawl survey 30-400m strata has increased since 2008.
Recent Trend in Fishing Intensity or Proxy	Unknown because new markets for this species may have increased targeting or retention in recent years.
Other Abundance Indices	-
Trends in Other Relevant Indicators or Variables	-

Projections and Prognosis	
Stock Projections or Prognosis	Unknown
Probability of Current Catch or	Soft Limit: Unknown

Assessment Methodology and Evaluation			
Assessment Type	Level 2 - Partial Quantitative Stock Assessment		
Assessment Method	Standardised CPUE		
Assessment Dates	Latest assessment: 2013	Next assessment: 2015	
Overall assessment quality rank	2 - Medium or Mixed Quality: CPUE may be compromised by the low number of vessels in the analysis and trends in targeting or retention of leatherjacket; the trawl survey has only covered the entire habitat since 2007.		
Main data inputs (rank)	- catch and effort data from bottom trawl sets targeting FLA, GUR and ELE - trawl survey biomass index		2 - Medium or mixed quality 2 - Medium or mixed quality
Data not used (rank)	Foveaux Strait CPUE index The trawl survey biomass estimates from the 10-400m strata.	3 – Low Quality: based on only a single vessel that has recently started targeting LEA. 3 – Low Quality: confidence intervals large and only two data points	
Changes to Model Structure and Assumptions	New model		
TACC causing Biomass to remain below or to decline below Limits	Hard Limit: Unknown		
Probability of Current Catch or TACC causing Overfishing to continue or to commence	Unknown		

Major Sources of Uncertainty	The low number of vessels in the analysis and new markets for this species may have increased targeting or retention in recent years. Trends in CPUE may therefore be a result of changes in reporting and retention rather than abundance. Total trawl survey biomass estimates for the entire survey area (10-400m) have large confidence intervals.
Qualifying Comments	
-	

Fishery Interactions
Leatherjacket are landed in fisheries targeting RCO, BAR, FLA, ELE, TAR, WAR and GUR, but are most commonly caught in FLA, GUR and ELE target bottom trawl sets. Some concerns have been raised about catch being taken in “hay paddocks”; these are polychaete worm beds that are biologically sensitive, habitat forming areas, which appear to be diminishing in areal extent as a consequence of disturbance from bottom trawling.

Research Needs
Fishery characterisations that include interviews with fishers and processors are required to assess the degree to which changes in fishing practices and economic drivers may have influenced CPUE trends. Trawl surveys need to continue to include the shallow strata in order to monitor the abundance of leatherjacket on the east coast of the South Island.

Reported landings and TACCs by Fishstock for the 2011-12 fishing year are summarised in Table 3.

Table 3: Summary of TACCs (t) and reported landings (t) of leatherjacket for the most recent fishing year.

Fishstock		FMA	2011-12 Actual TACC	2011-12 Reported landings
LEA 1	Auckland (East) (West)	1, &9	188	167
LEA 2	Central (East) (West), Challenger	2,7&8	1 136	277
LEA 3	South east (coast), Southland, Sub-Antarctic	3, 4, 5 & 6	100	127
LEA 4	South east (Chatham)		7	< 0.1
Total			1 431	571

6. FURTHER INFORMATION

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