

Commercial testing of a sorting grid to reduce catches of juvenile hake (



Mediterranean demersal fisheries have experienced an ongoing decline in catches over the past 20 years as a result of excessive increases in effort caused both by growth in trawler engine power and by rapid technological advances in fish finding and fishing technology. This has led to an overexploitation of these resources. An increasing share of the catches consists of immature individuals. This study was undertaken to test a sorting grid with a bar spacing of 20 mm as a means of excluding juveniles in the commercial hake (*Merluccius merluccius*) fishery in the Catalan Sea, western Mediterranean. The grid was placed in the extension section of the gear 5 m in front of a cod-end. Divided cod-end design was used to collect the escapees and target species. The mean selection length (L50) of the ten hauls was 14.2 ± 0.7 cm SE, with a selection range of $7.3 \text{ cm} \pm 0.4$ SE. The biomass of hake under L50 that escaped through the grid represented $50.1\% \pm 6.7$ SE of the total hake biomass. These results are promising and indicate that a sorting grid can be used in excluding young hake. This was a first step toward implementation of sorting grids in commercial trawl

gears as means of avoiding unwanted catches of small individuals in the hake fisheries in the Mediterranean Sea. Further trials are required to improve the sorting efficiency of the grid.

Auteurs du document : Francesco Sardà, N. Bahamón, Francesc Sardà-Palomera, Balbina Molí

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