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Gulf of America Tilefish Data Triage and Assessment progress



Gulf Branch SFD
NOAA Fisheries - SEFSC

SSC Meeting • July 2026

Overview

- The SEFSC was asked to assess the Tilefish complex as our first extra-SEDAR assessment.
- Tilefish (Golden, Blueline, and Goldface) are managed as a complex.
- First, we conducted a data triage in order to decide on next steps to provide management advice.



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Management History

- The commercial quota for the tilefishes share category in 2024 was 582,000 pounds gutted weight (lb gw). This quota level has remained unchanged since 2012.
 - Split between longline (75%) and handline (25%).
- Under the IFQ program's history (2010–2024), tilefish landings have never exceeded the annual quota. The highest utilization rate occurred in 2015 at 92%, and landings have fluctuated below that mark ever since.
- Recreational bag limit of 20 per person per day since 1997.



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Assessment history

- Golden Tilefish
 - SEDAR 22 (SS3 and SRA models)
 - Not directly used for management advice
- From the SSC review:
 - The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) voted 10-1 that the assessment model did not capture the dynamics of the Gulf tilefish stock well enough to provide useful management advice. Even though the review noted the assessment used the best available data and met the terms of reference, the NOAA General Counsel advised that declaring it "best available scientific information" would legally require it to be used for management—so the SSC instead formally declared the model inadequate for that purpose.
- Blueline Tilefish
 - Data provided during SEDAR 22, but there were not enough data to conduct an individual assessment.



Specific SEDAR 22 issues

The model suffered from some major data and structural issues:

- **Contradictory abundance trends:** The model poorly fit the indices.
- **Age data issues:** There were no distinct year classes visible in the age compositions, and older ages were missing entirely, likely due to difficulties with aging.
- **Unreliable recruitment estimates:** The model lacked a strong recruitment signal, which made the entire assessment overly sensitive to σ_R .



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Alternate assessment approach

- In order to decide which modeling approach better fits the data, we conducted a full data provision.
- Multiple working papers produced to document all the analyses (due July 10th)
- Will be housed on the SEDAR website (designation TBD)

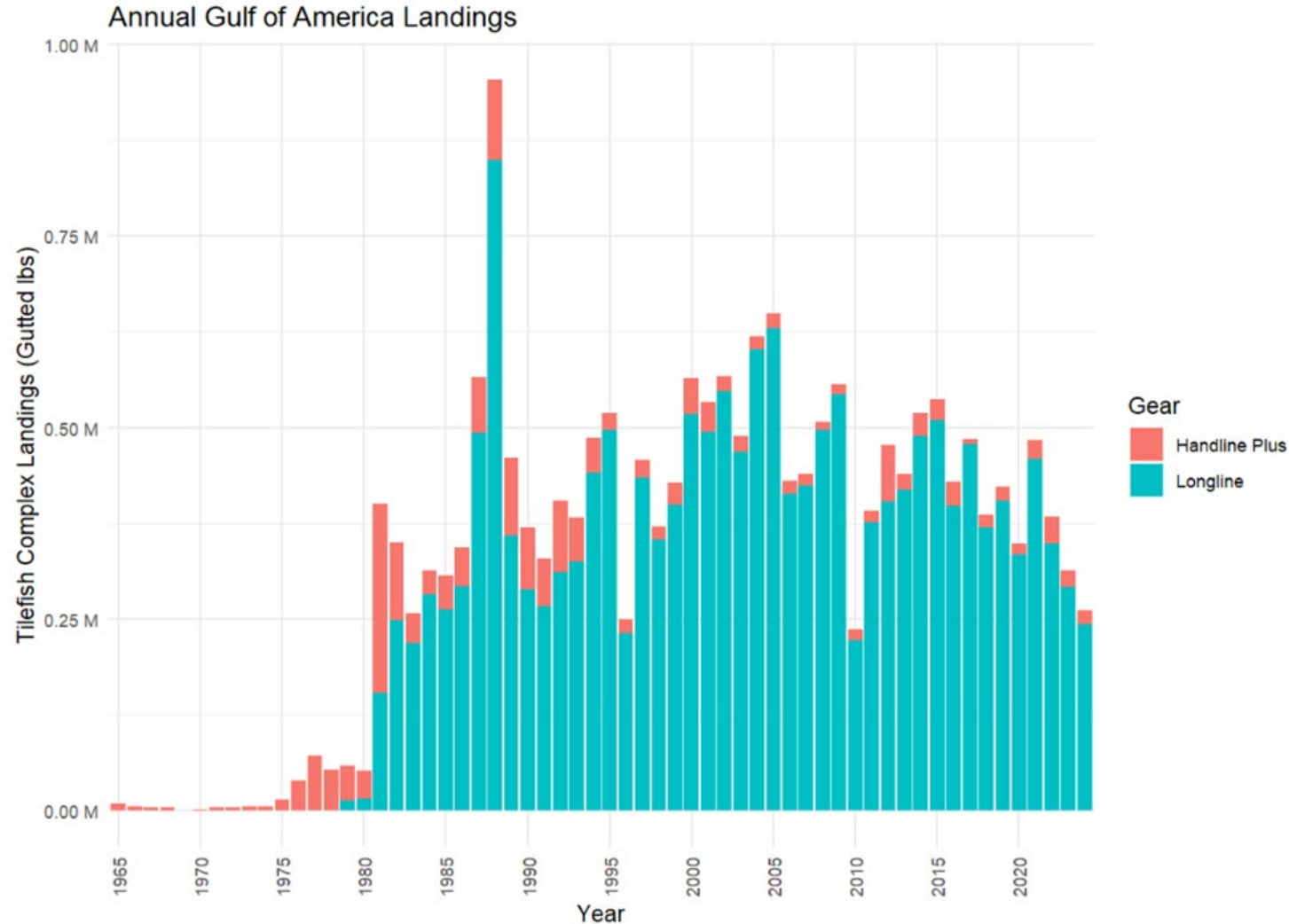


Data



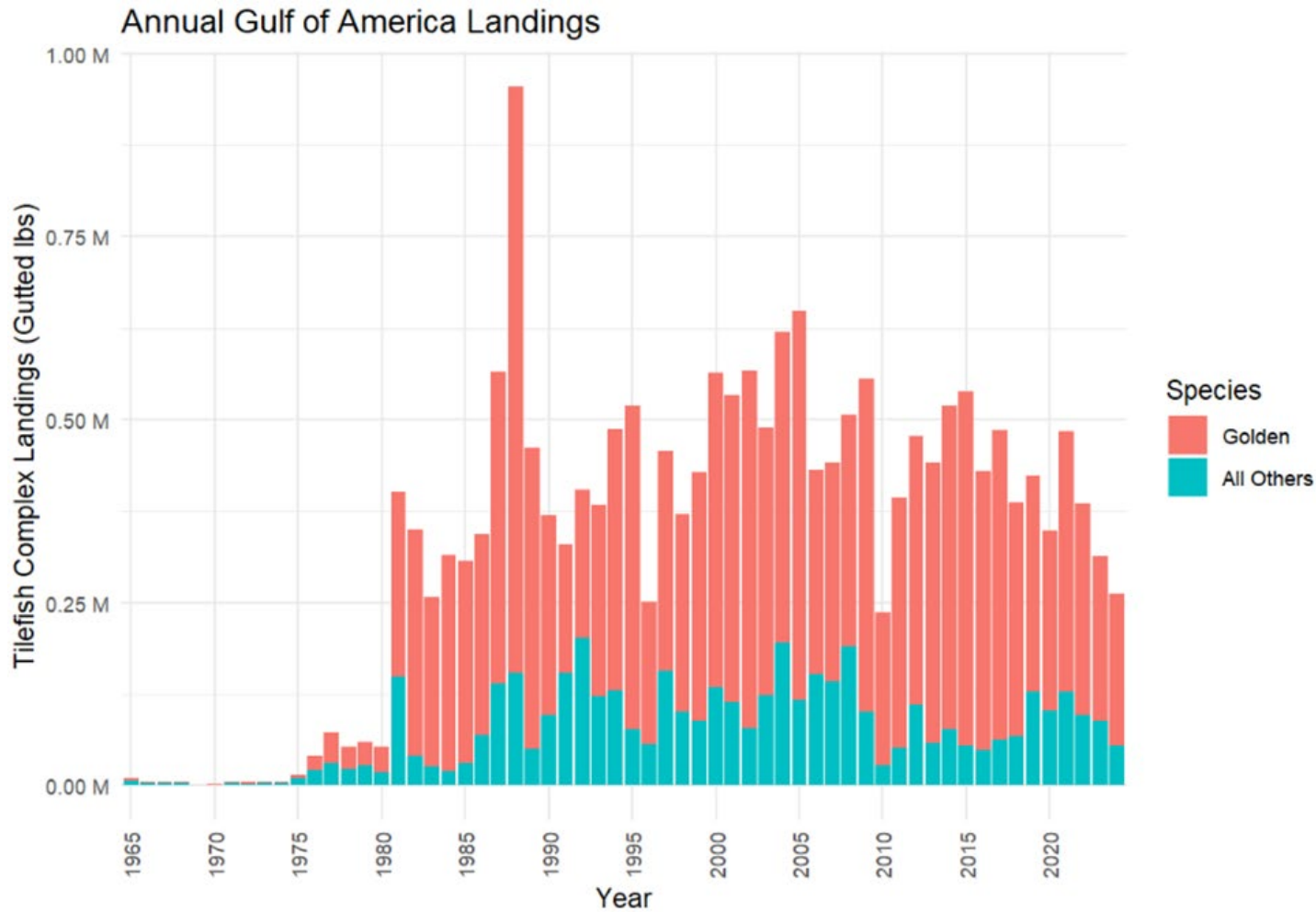
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Tilefish complex commercial landings



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Golden Tilefish and All Others Commercial Landings

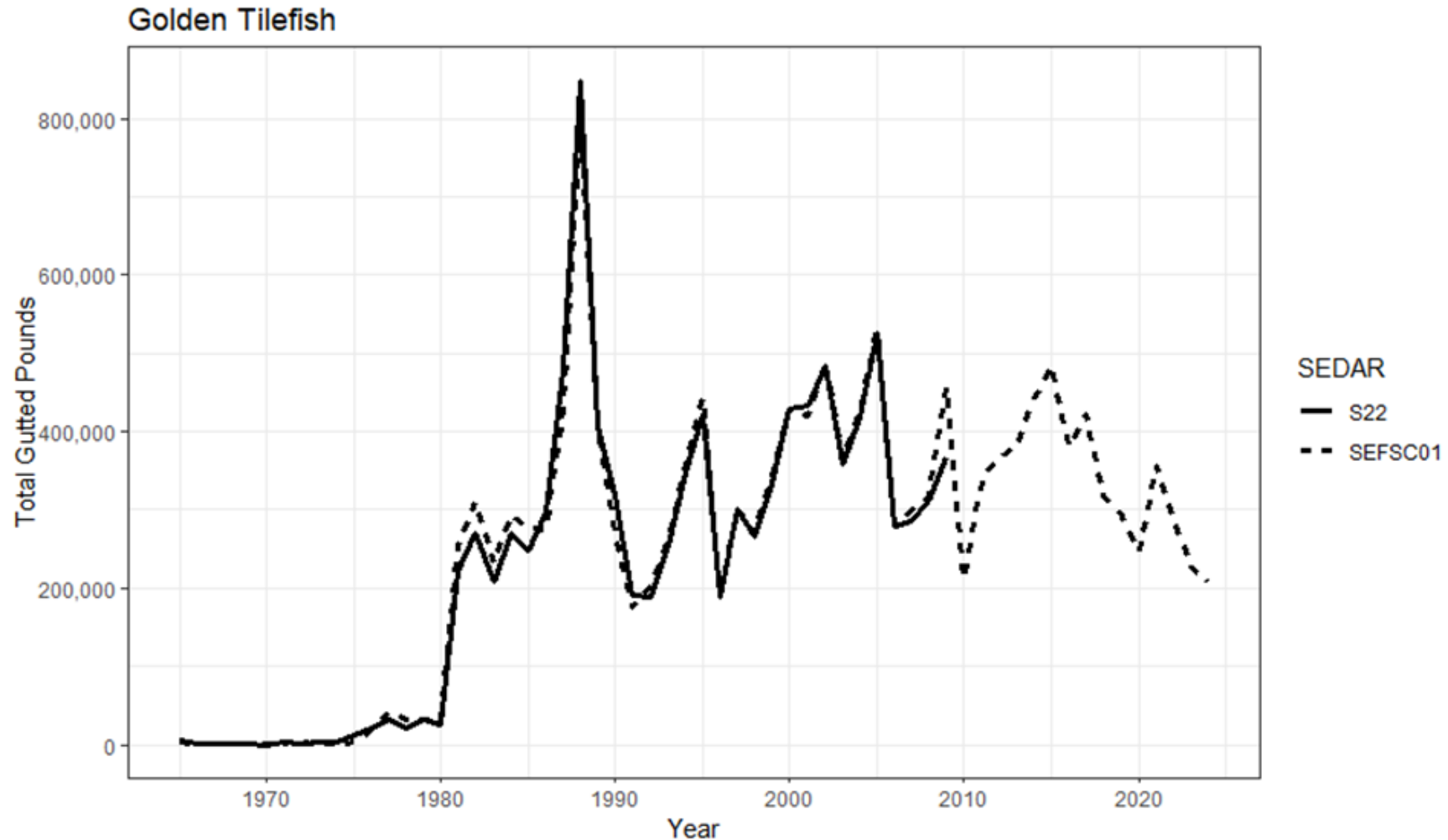


All others combined Blueline Tilefish, Goldface Tilefish, and Tilefishes – unspecified



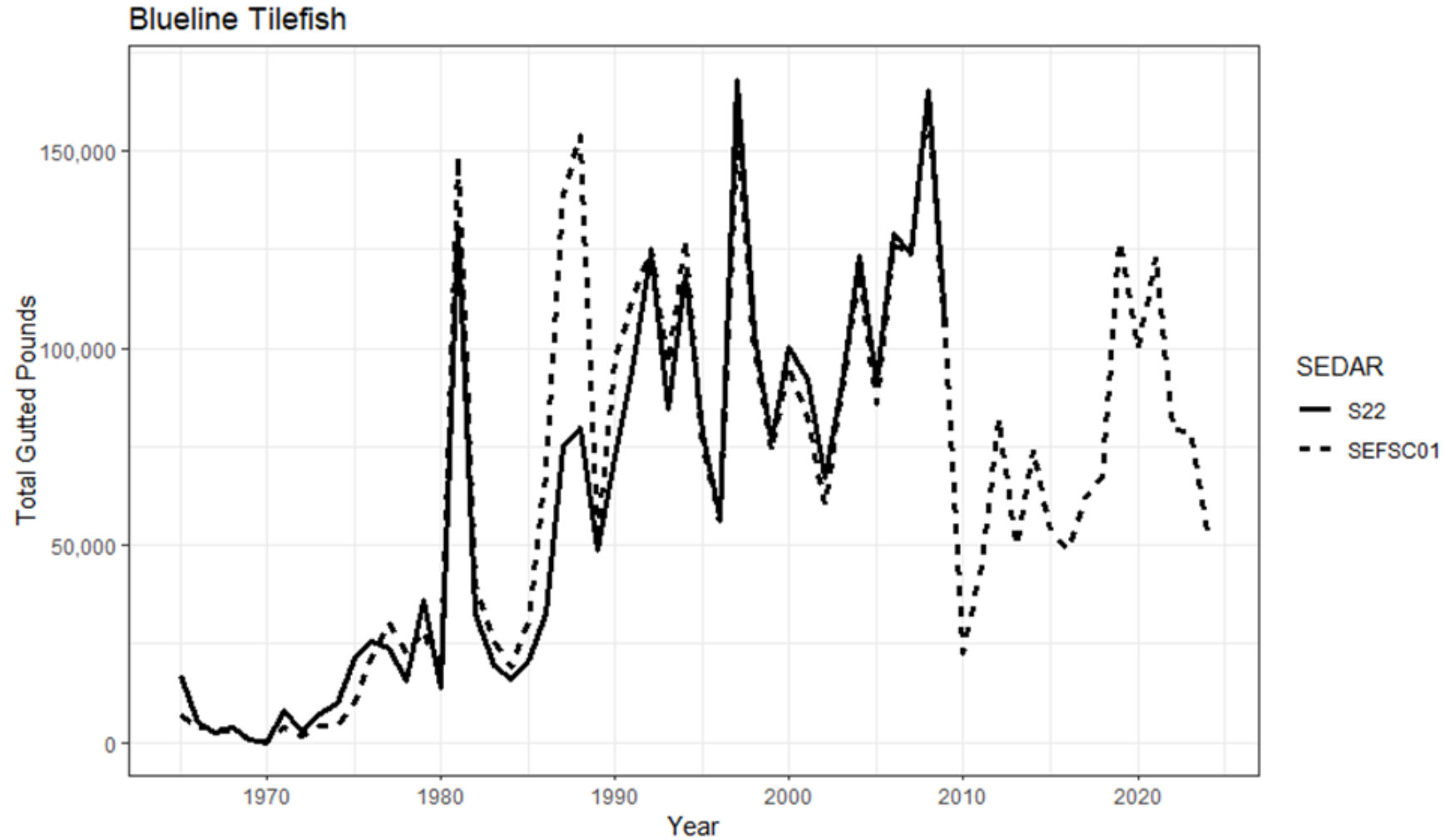
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Golden Tilefish - commercial



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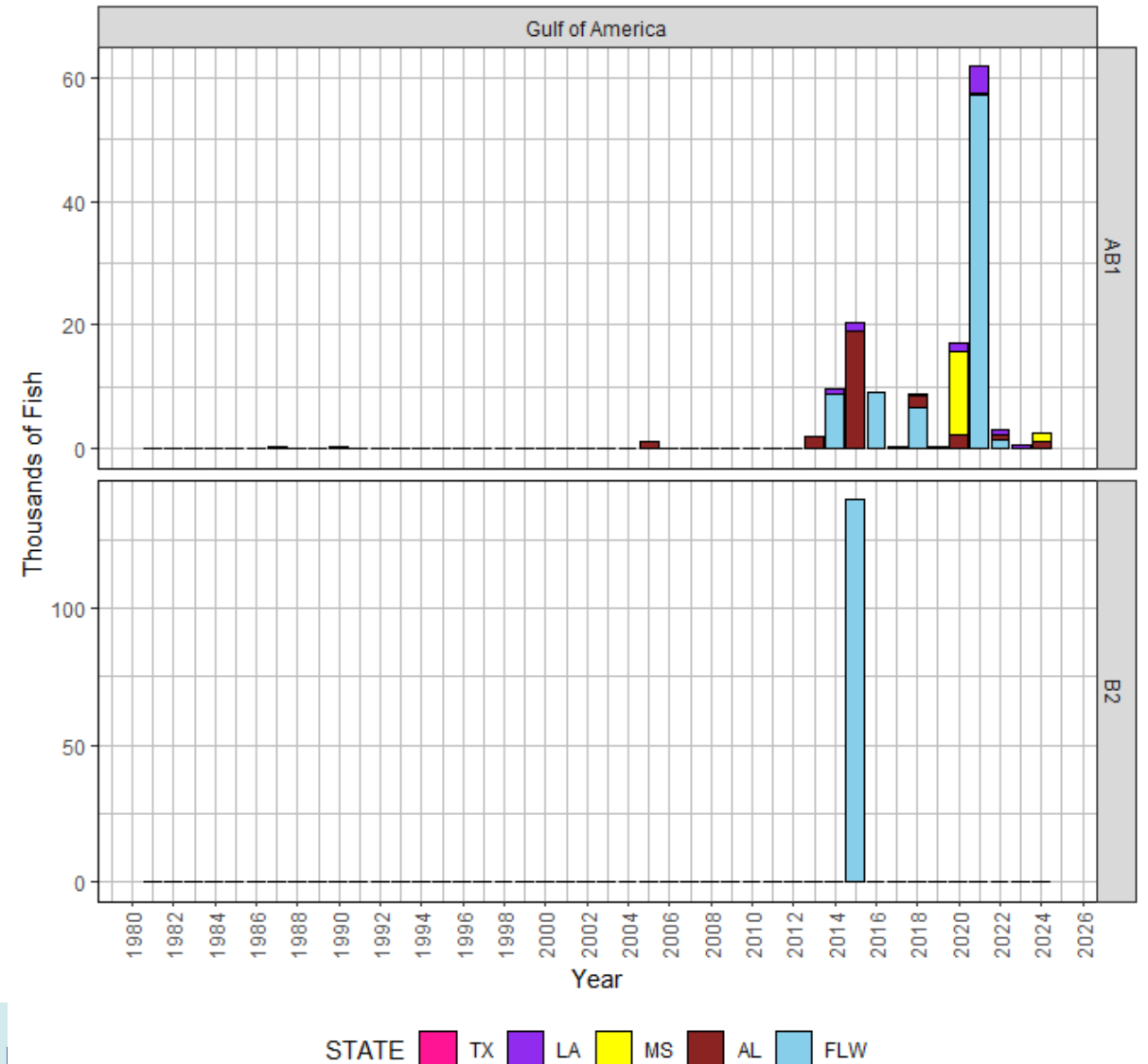
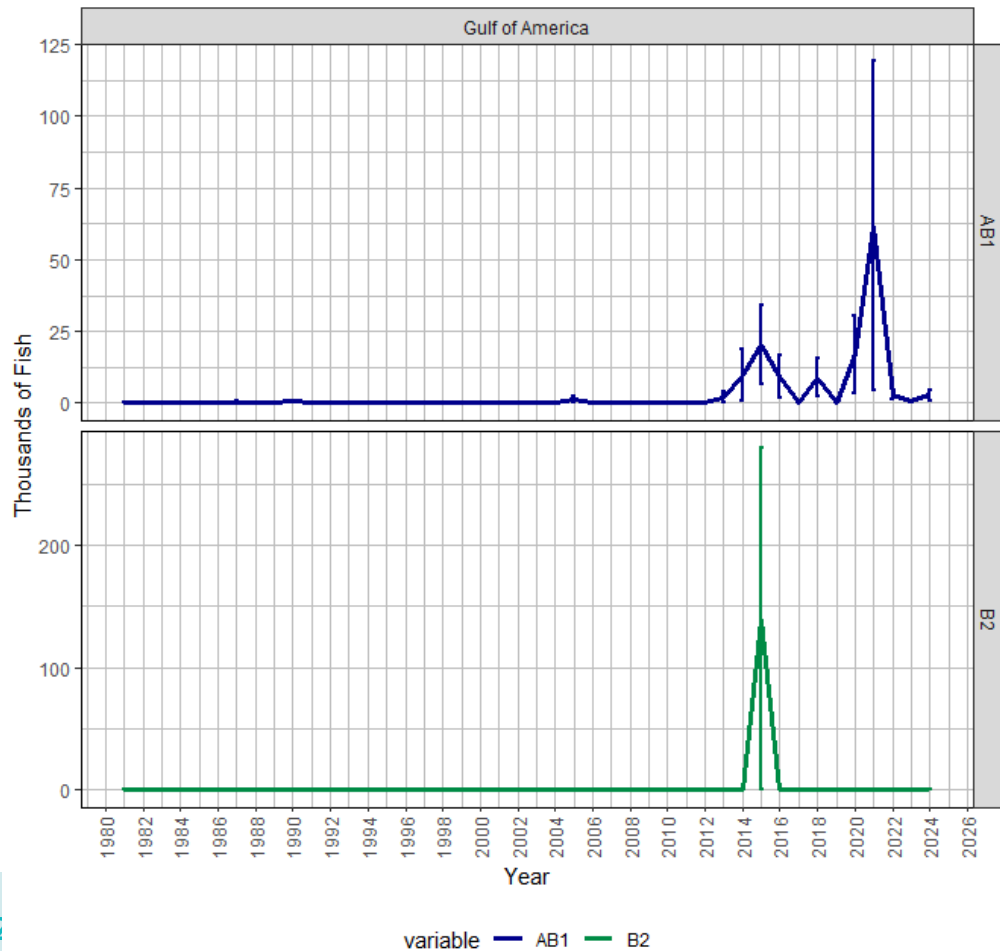
Blueline - commercial



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Golden recreational landings and discards

Annual **Golden Tilefish** landings (AB1) and discards (B2), in thousands of fish, by state from 1981 to 2024 from all data sources (MRIP, LACreel 2014+, TPWD). FLW excludes the Florida Keys



Investigating high uncertainty years

2021 Golden Tilefish landings estimate: 61,795 fish

- This year is not well-sampled for Golden Tilefish landings, only 4 positive intercepts.
- *Stratum: FL, Private, Wave 4, and Ocean > 10 miles*
- Intercept Records: a total of 1 angler trips that resulted in a landings estimate of 57,138 fish (92% of the total annual estimate) • One angler trip harvested 6 Golden Tilefish (seen by interviewer)
- All fish were seen by the dockside sampler, suggesting species identifications were not influenced by angler recall and the number of fish harvested were accurately recorded
- The site pressure for this location is elevated (WP_Catch = 9,523).



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Investigating high uncertainty years cont'd.

2015 Golden Tilefish discard estimate: 139,471 fish – This year is not well-sampled for Golden Tilefish discards, only 1 positive intercept.

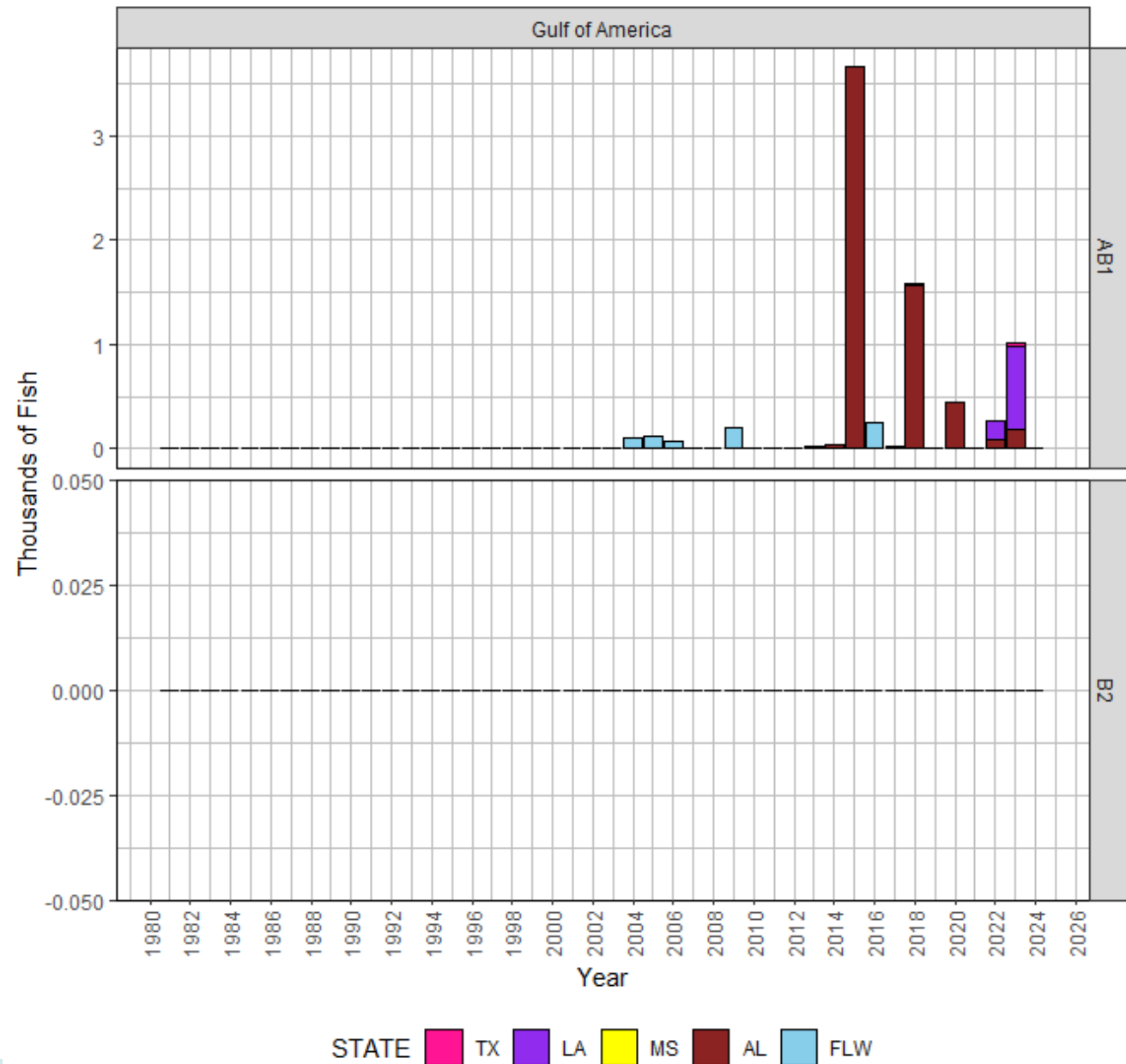
- *Stratum: FLW, Shore, Wave 6, and Ocean ≤ 10 miles*
- Intercept Records: a total of 1 angler trips that resulted in a discards estimate of 139,471 fish (100% of the total annual estimate)
 - One angler trip released 10 Golden Tilefish. The site pressure for this location is relatively high (WP_Catch = 13,947).



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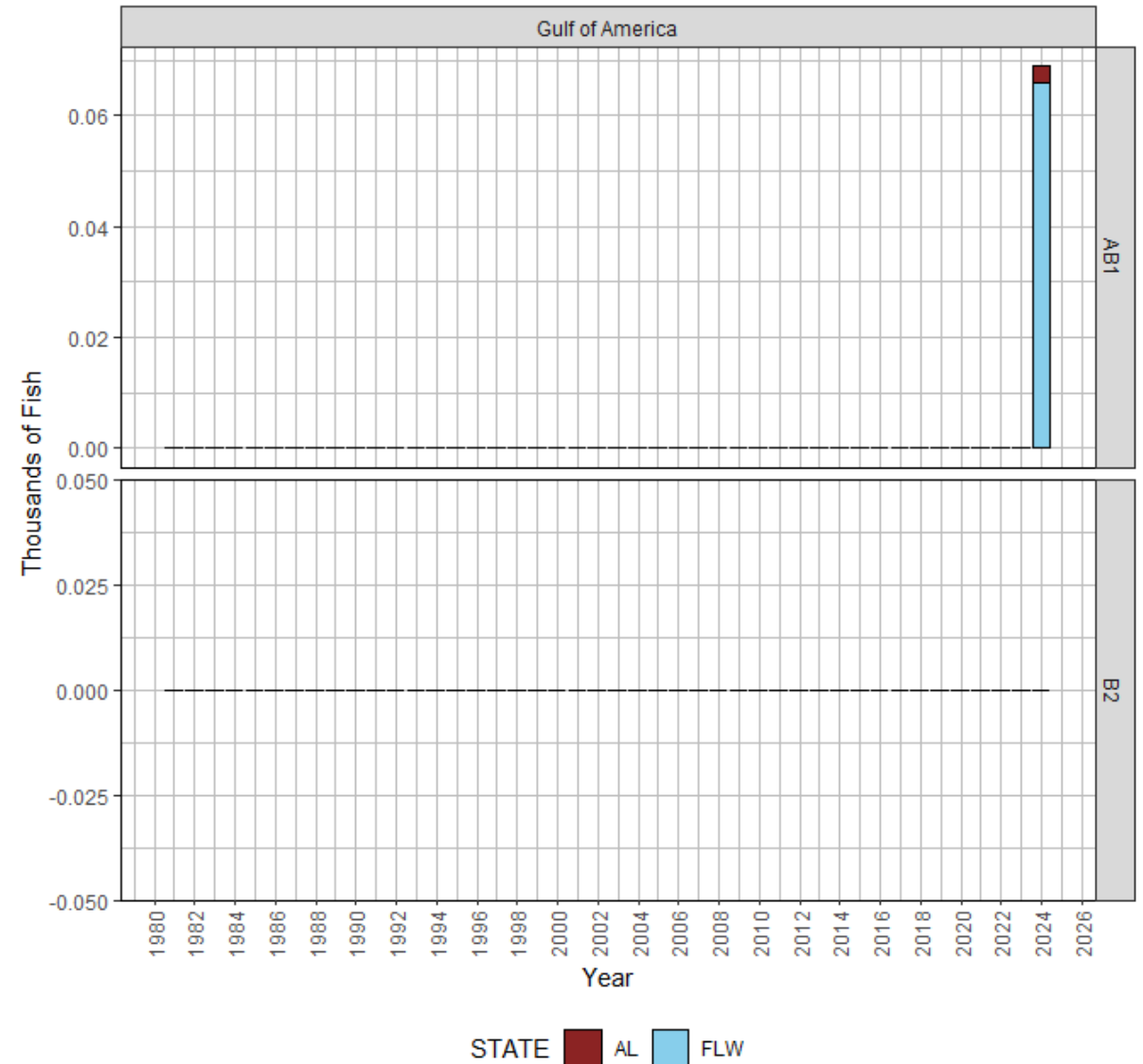
Blueline recreational landings and discards

Annual **Blueline Tilefish** landings (AB1) and discards (B2), in thousands of fish, by state from 1981 to 2024 from all data sources (MRIP, LACreel 2014+, TPWD). FLW excludes the Florida Keys.



Goldface recreational landings and discards

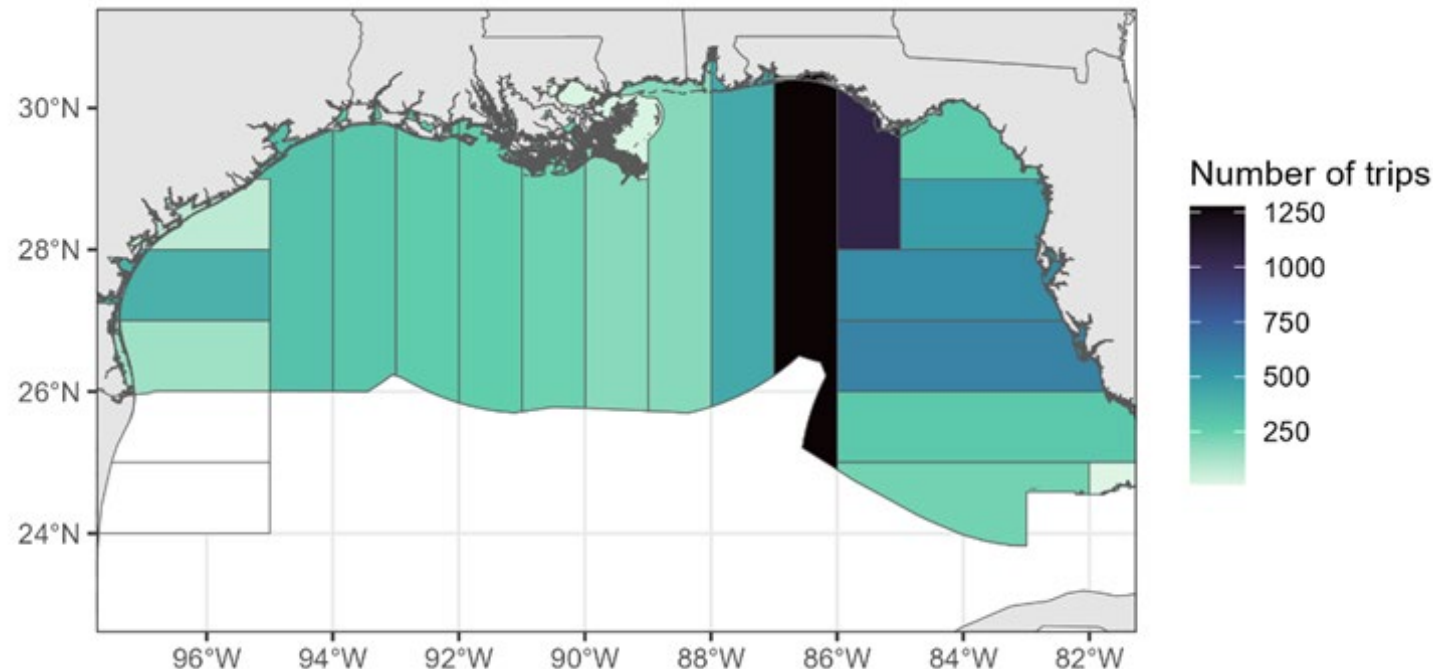
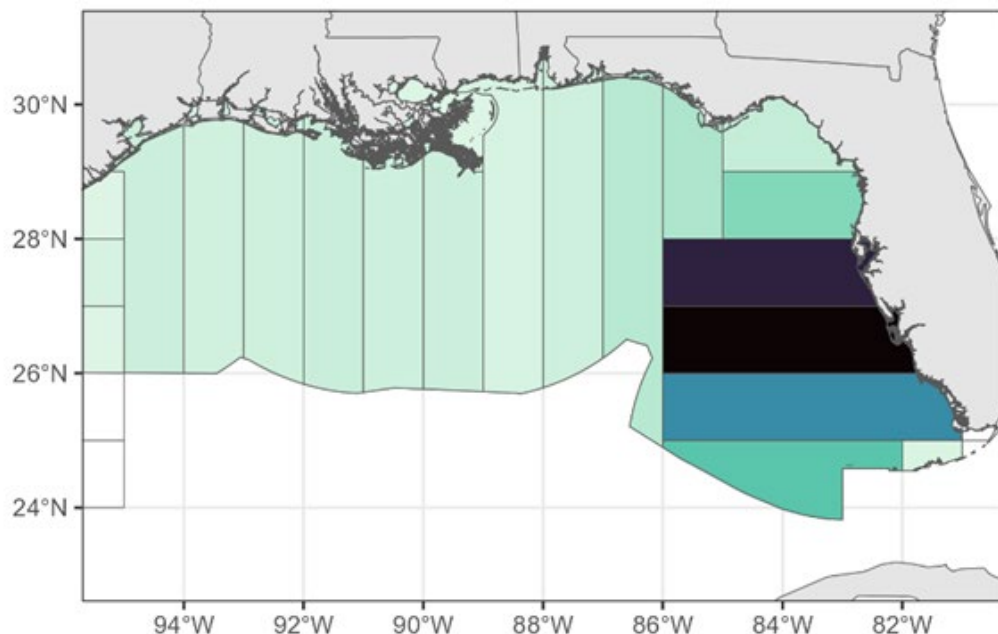
Annual Goldface Tilefish landings (AB1) and discards (B2), in thousands of fish, by state from 1981 to 2024 from all data sources (MRIP, LACreel 2014+, TPWD). FLW excludes the Florida Keys.



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Distribution of tilefish caught on commercial logbook trips

Blueline

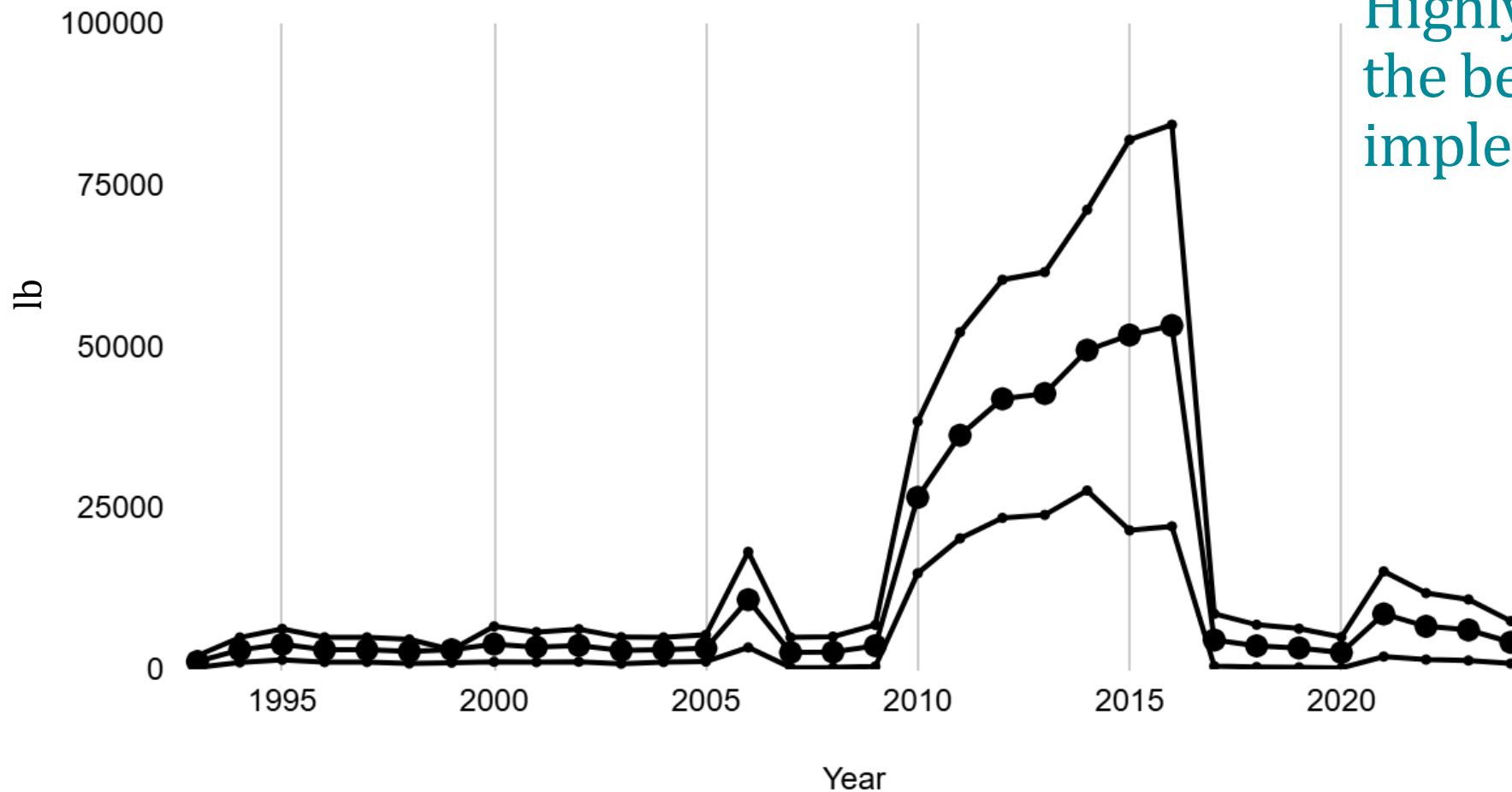


Golden



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Golden Commercial Discards

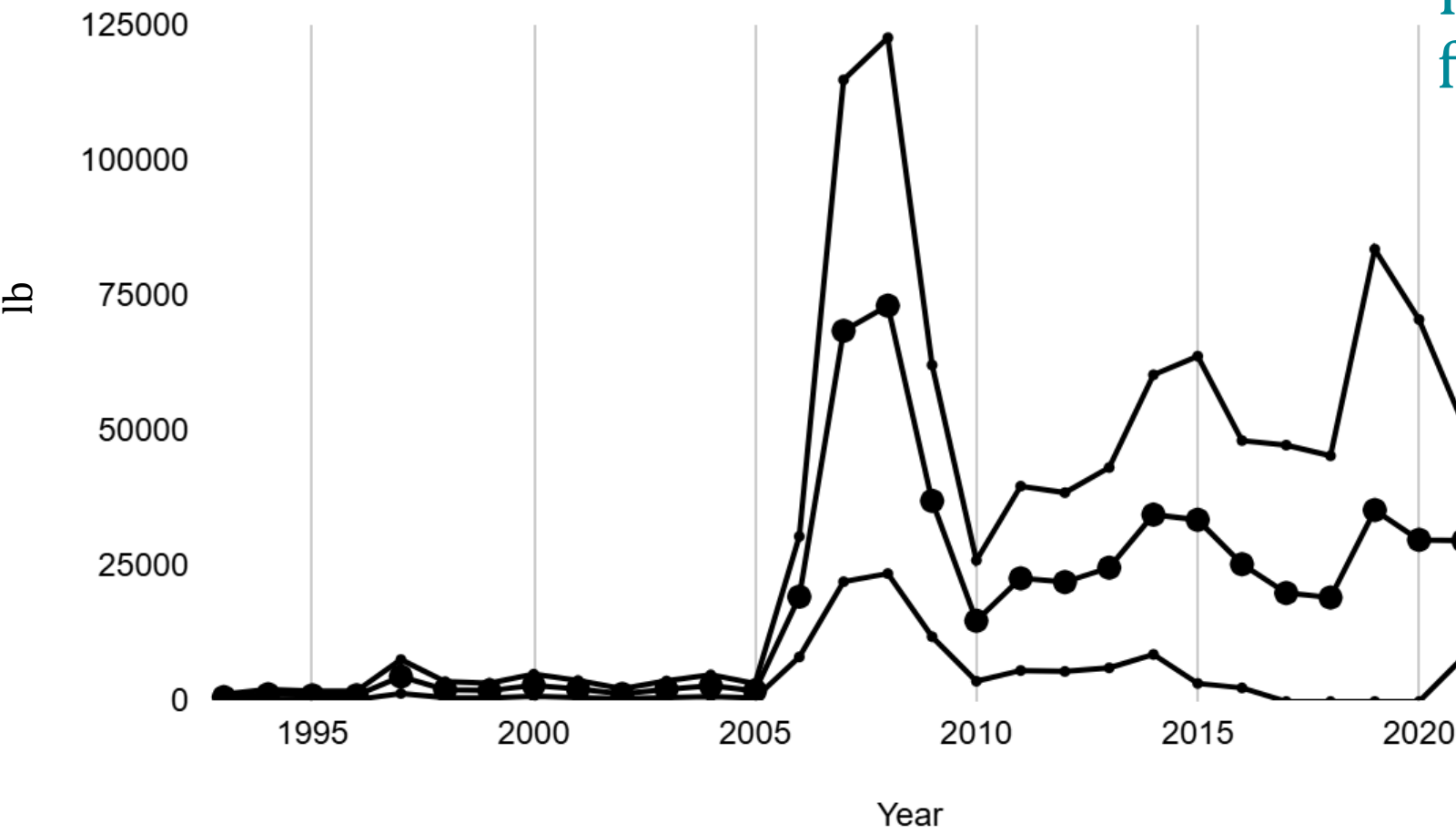


Highly uncertain discards at the beginning of the IFQ implementation



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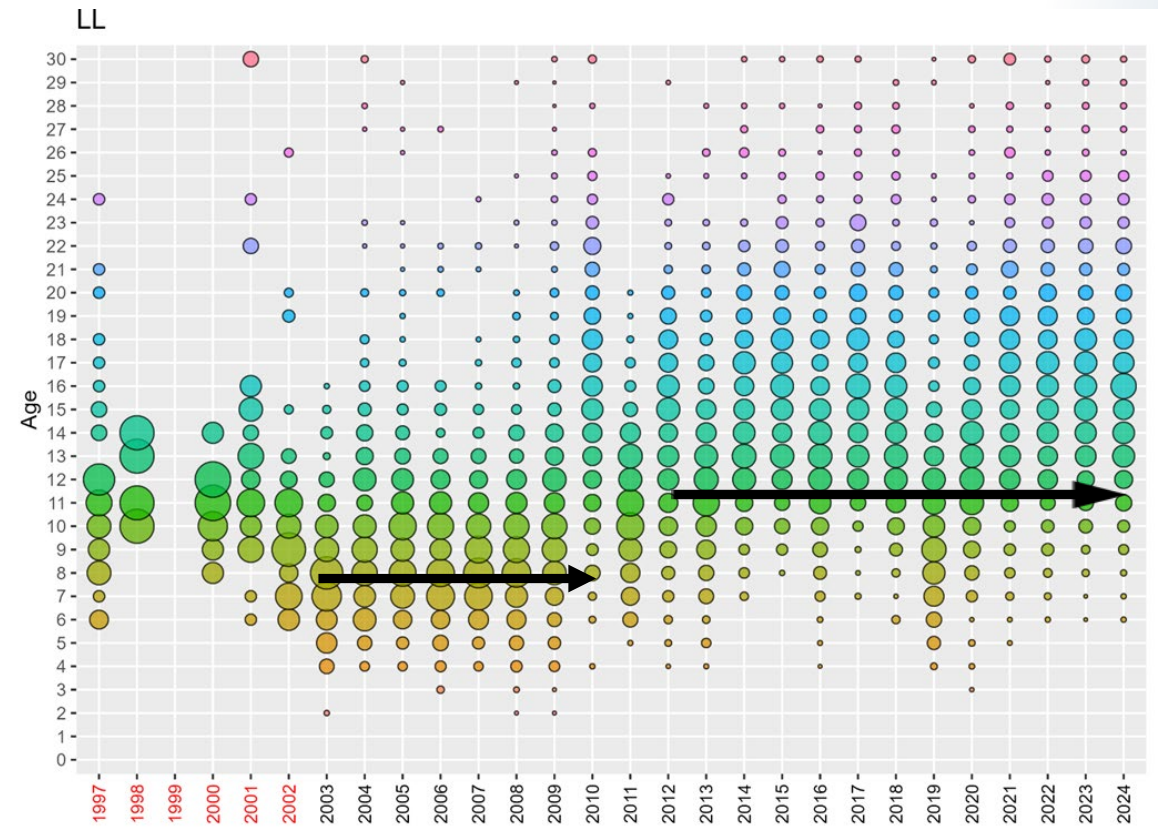
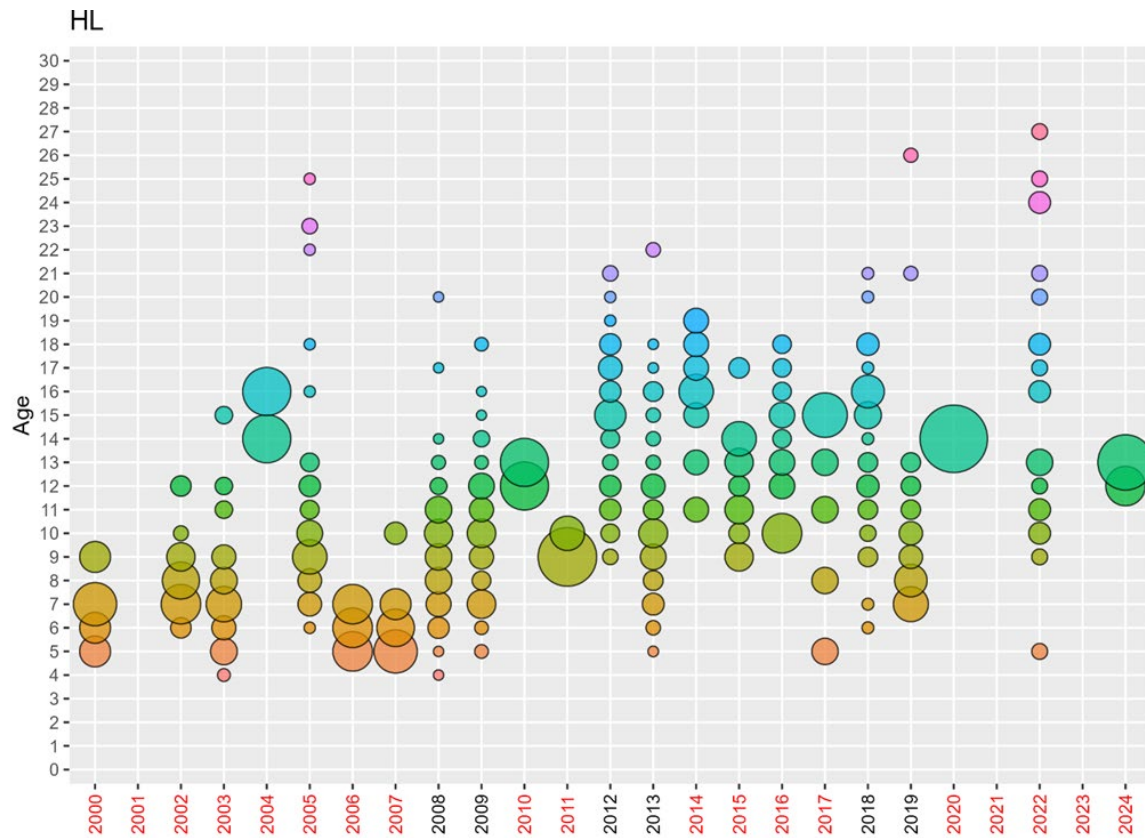
BlueLine Commercial Discards



Highly uncertain discards from 2006 onwards



Age compositions by fleet

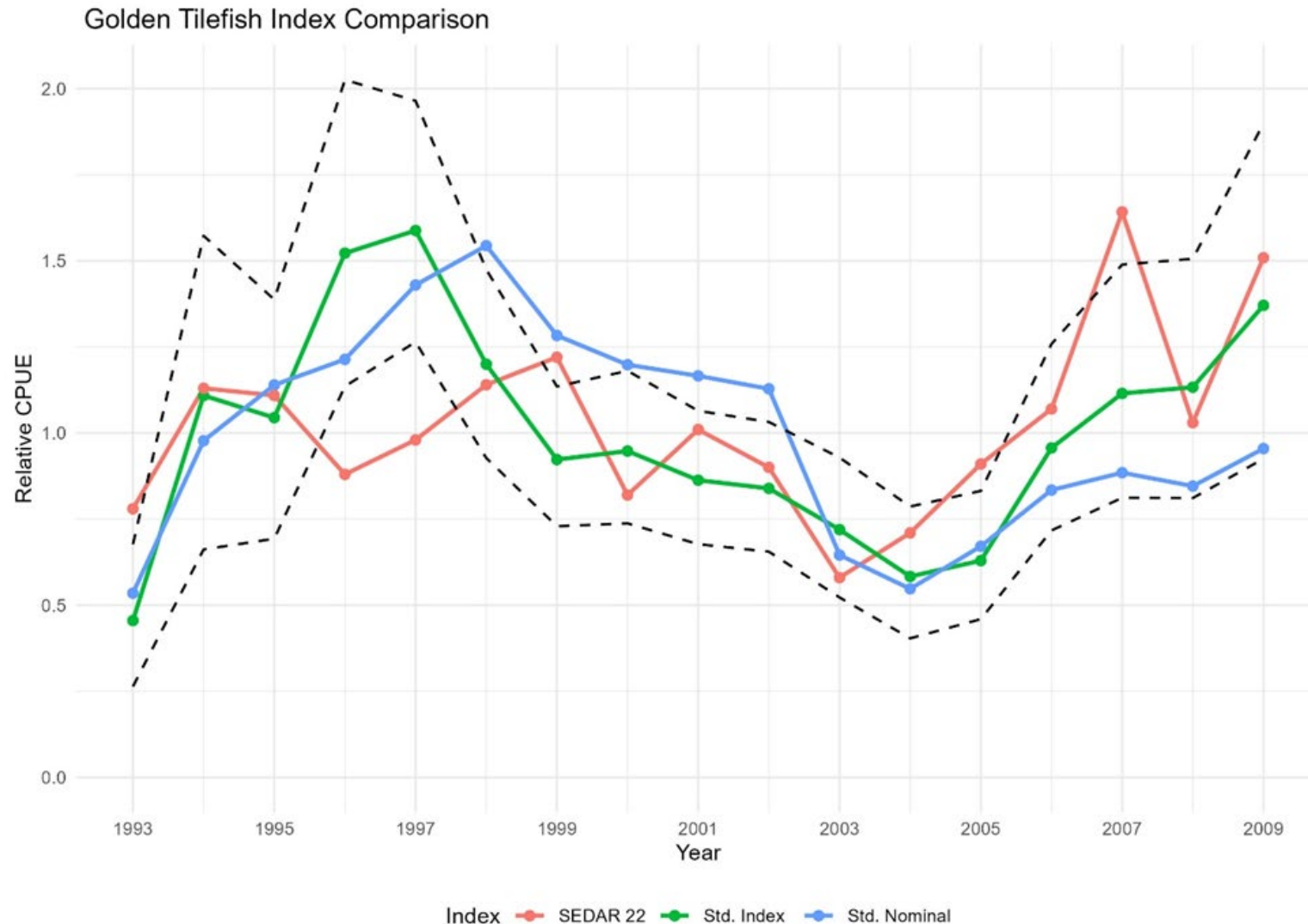


Red indicates years with too few trips for the data to be representative



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Commercial longline index (pre-IFQ)



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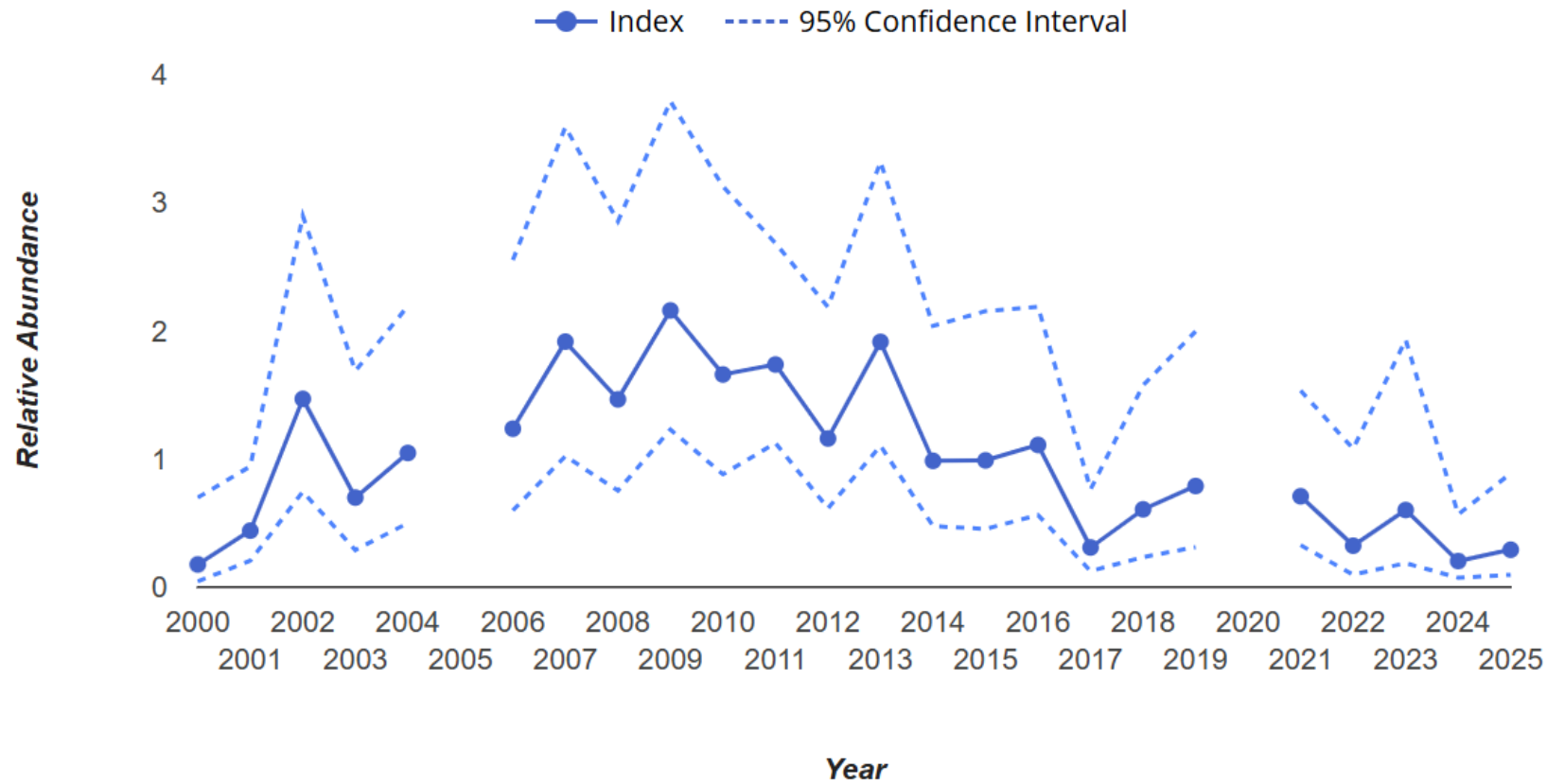
Commercial longline index (pre-IFQ)



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Golden Tilefish NMFS Bottom Logline

- Golden only occur in the deepest depth zone of the survey, which receives only 10% of the survey effort



<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/data-tools/southeast-abundance-fish-and-shrimp-data-visualizer>



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NMFS BLL

- Only recent index for Golden
- High CVs in several years due to low sample sizes
- Decent proportion positives
- Updates yearly on the SeaFISH Visualizer tool

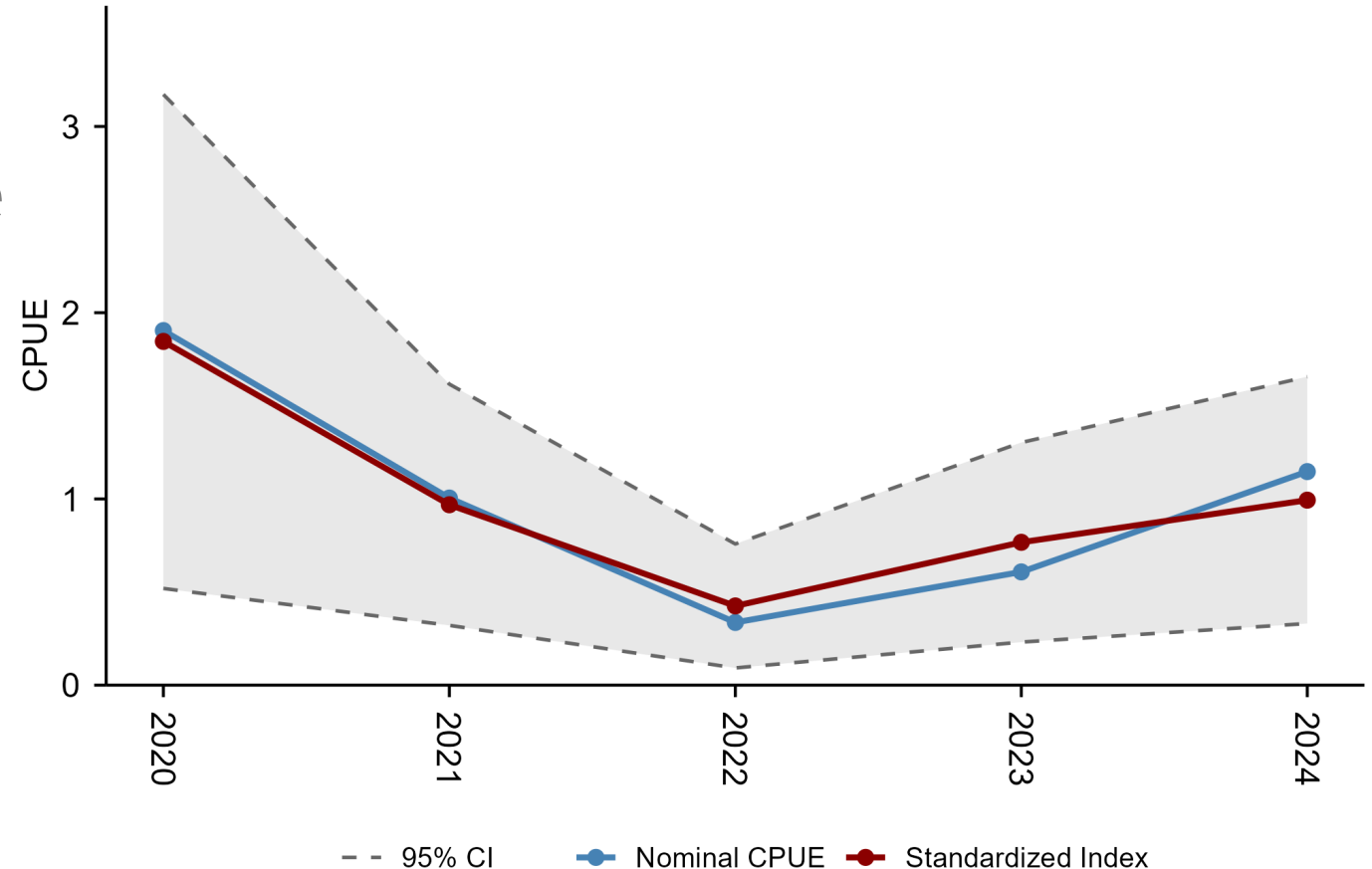
Year_f	N	Nominal PPOS	obcpos	CV_Index
2000	26	0.115	0.21	0.776
2001	46	0.283	0.853	0.394
2002	36	0.333	1.232	0.35
2003	45	0.178	0.485	0.463
2004	47	0.234	0.804	0.383
2005				
2006	32	0.312	0.942	0.375
2007	39	0.359	1.502	0.322
2008	20	0.55	1.482	0.343
2009	33	0.394	1.422	0.287
2010	31	0.419	1.534	0.325
2011	71	0.451	1.913	0.22
2012	32	0.406	1.274	0.325
2013	35	0.429	1.701	0.281
2014	22	0.409	1.117	0.376
2015	35	0.314	1.198	0.405
2016	30	0.4	0.869	0.35
2017	29	0.276	0.381	0.475
2018	33	0.242	0.73	0.505
2019	24	0.333	1.228	0.49
2020				
2021	25	0.36	0.548	0.401
2022	31	0.129	0.366	0.663
2023	26	0.192	0.974	0.636
2024	29	0.241	0.371	0.549
2025	31	0.161	0.379	0.602

Blueline and Goldface - GFISHER

- Combined the data for Blueline and Goldface Tilefish, truncated the time series to just the combined GFISHER program years (2020-2024), and restricted the depth to sites ≥ 30 m

YEAR	N_SITES	N_Sites_Pres	N_Fish
2020	417	24	44
2021	862	40	48
2022	804	13	15
2023	831	25	28
2024	834	40	53

Caulolatilus spp
GOA Wide: 2020-2024



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How to move forward?



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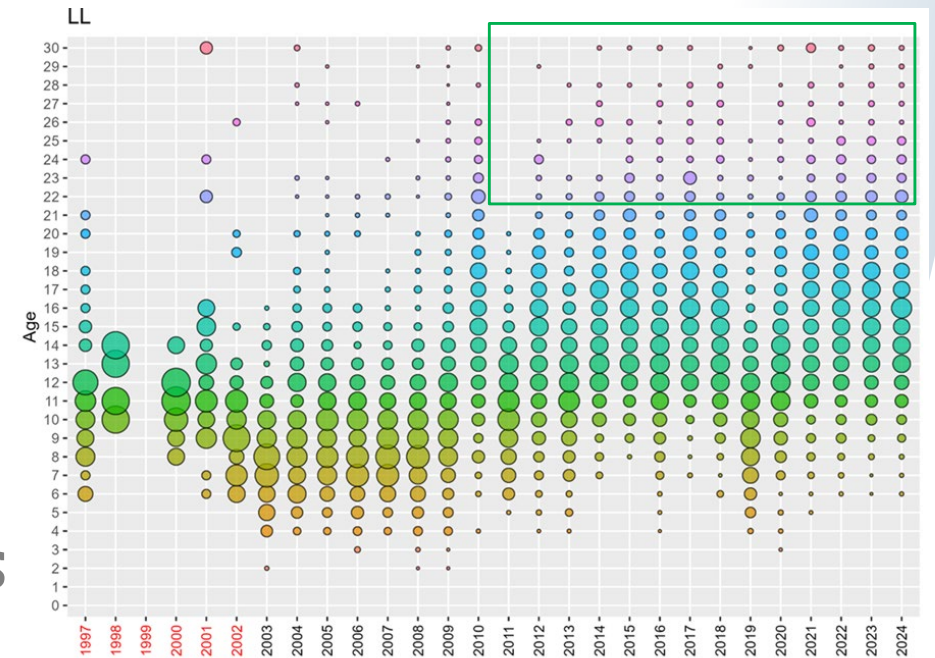
Not enough data for each species to do separate assessment

- May be difficult for managers to use a Golden-only model
 - If a Golden model is carried out, how would it be applied to the complex except through weighting by landings?
 - Average landings were used post-SEDAR 22 to come up with a catch limit for the IFQs



No indication that immediate action is necessary to prevent overfishing

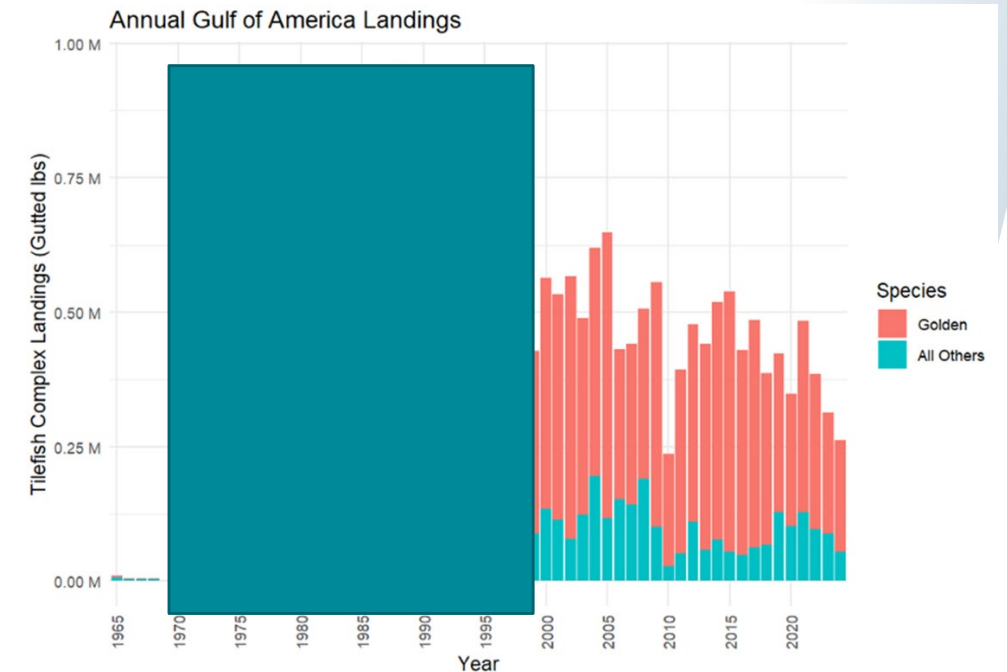
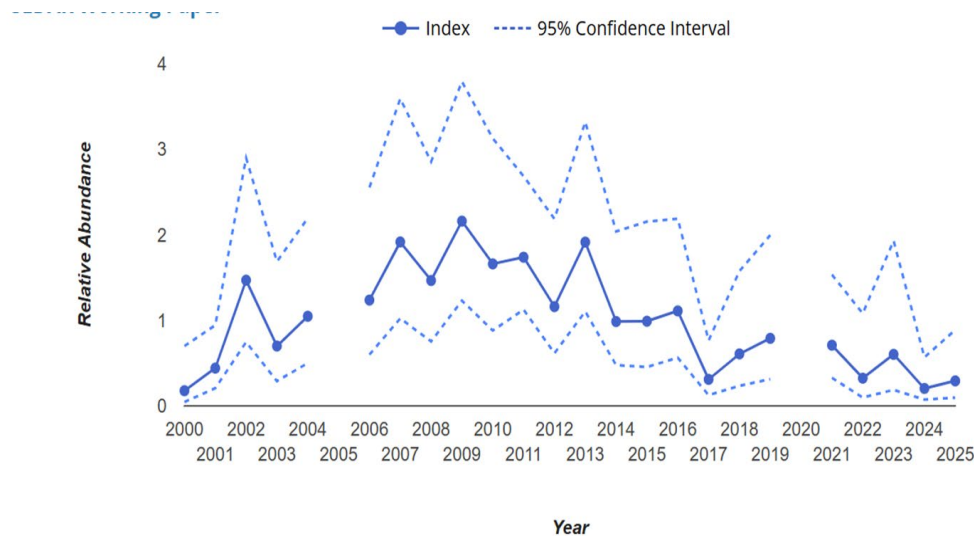
- Capturing a similar number (if not slightly increasing number) of older fish in the commercial compositions
- The Golden index is not decreasing in the last years (with some caveats)
 - Proportion positives are lower in the recent years, and CVs are large.
- Though the catch limit is not regularly exceeded, we are not hearing concerns from fisherman about tilefish.



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Attempted SPMs have had trouble moving away from priors

- We attempted some preliminary surplus production modeling, and the model is heavily reliant on the priors to converge.



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Recommendations

- Maintain current catch limits and provide index updates annually from the NMFSS BLL and GFISHER to keep track of the whole complex.
 - The capacity is an issue if we are to do more complex modeling work.
 - JABBA models can be produced, but it will require more time, potentially a restructuring of species priority, and some SSC weigh-in to determine the grid of surplus production model priors that should be tested.



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Questions?



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