Does copepod size determine food consumption of particulate feeding fish?

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The climate-induced reduction in the mean copepod size, mainly driven by a decrease in the abundance of the large Calanus finmarchicus around 1987, has been linked to the low survival of fish larvae in the North Sea. However, to what extent this sort of reduction in copepod size has any influence on adult particulate feeding fish is unknown. In the present study, we investigated the hypothesis that the availability of the large copepods determines food consumption and growth conditions of lesser sandeel (Ammodytes marinus) in the North Sea. Analysis of stomach content suggested that food consumption is higher for fish feeding on large copepods, and additional calculations revealed how handling time limitation may provide part of the explanation for this relationship. Comparing stomach data and zooplankton samples indicated that lesser sandeel actively target large copepods when these are available. Finally, we observed that the length of lesser sandeel began to decrease in the late 1980s, simultaneously with the C. finmarchicus decline.

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