Explaining the catch efficiency of different cod pots using underwater video to observe cod entry and exit behaviour

Cod pots are considered seal-safe fishing gear and are proposed as a solution to mitigate the ongoing seal-fisheries conflict in the Baltic Sea. This study examined various factors which could affect the entry and exit behaviour of cod in relation to cod pots. Statistical modelling was used to determine which of these factors most affected the pots’ catch per unit effort (CPUE). Two fishing trials were conducted off the coast of Bornholm, Denmark, using six pot types with different design features, equipped with underwater camera systems to record the behaviour of the cod in relation to the pots. Four pot types were floating pots with one entrance and two were bottom standing with three entrances. Different pot types showed significantly different CPUEs and the pot type was an explanatory factor for entry and exit rates for both trials. In trial 1 artificial light was used for filming and results showed an increase in entry rates during the night time, suggesting that lights attract fish to the pot when the dark surroundings make the effect of the light more noticeable. Exit rates in trial 1 increased with an increasing number of fish in the pot while they decreased with soak time. In trial 2, when no artificial light was used, a saturation effect was found in that the probability of cod entering the pot lessened as the number of cod already in the pot increased. However, the exit rates in trial 2 also decreased with increasing number of fish in the pot. The study offers greater depth to the understanding of CPUE results by examining fish behaviour around the pots and not just the raw catch data. This in turn contributes to the ongoing search for the most favourable pot designs.

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