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Committee

Report of the Working Group on Homarus Stocks

Bergen, Norway 3-6 May 1977

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Recommendation 2:37 of ICES CM 1976 Shellfish and Benthos Committee: the Working Group on Lobster Stocks should reconvene to consider and report on the significant progress in lobster research and development made since the first meeting in 1975 (ICES CM 1975/K:38).

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1. REVIEW OF LOBSTER FISHERIES

1.1. EUROPE

The catches of the european lobster Homarus gammarus (Table 1) have continued to decline in the traditional fisheries of Sweden, W Norway, E Scotland and Wales. In England and France catches have been maintained at recent levels, which are below average. Catch-per-unit-effort (cpue) is low and falling in many areas. Fishermen are attempting to compensate for falls in cpue by increasing the number of traps fished. Catches and cpue have increased in the

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inner Skagerrak in Norway, Ireland and W-Scotland, the latter partly as a result of French, English and Channel Island vessels fishing previously unexploited stocks. Part-time fishermen continue to increase in many areas. In Sweden it is estimated that only 40% of the total catch is landed by full-time fishermen. The value per kg of lobsters has increased considerably in all fisheries.

1.2. NORTH AMERICA

Landings of the American lobster (Homarus americanus) in recent years by Canada and the United States have been valued in excess of \$80 million, making this fishery one of the most valuable in the Northwest Atlantic. The USA currently (1975-76) lands about 13 000 tonnes annually (Table 2a). About 20% of the catch now comes from the offshore fishery. There has been a slow decline in landings and cpue while the fishing effort (number of traps) has more than doubled. Stocks appear to be fully utilised.

Landings in the Canadian fishery (Table 2b) over the last decade have fluctuated from year to year with a slight downward trend, to the present level of 16 000-17 000 tonnes per annum. Within the overall landing figures, trends have been evident from area to area along the Canadian Atlantic Coast. While Newfoundland and Quebec landings have increased over the last 3 years, there have been declines in Maritimes inshore catches. These declines have not been totally offset by an offshore trap fishery from South Nova Scotia to the Gulf of Maine, which began in 1972, and has made an increasing contribution to Maritime landings up to a plateau of 500-600 tonnes over the last few years. Other events in the fishery which have followed from the high fishing intensity in most areas, have been a limitation on numbers of traps per boat and numbers of licences in the fishery in the late 1960's; more recently, buy-back schemes are being introduced in some areas, as a first attempt to reduce existing effort levels. Another significant event has been the increasing use of large traps with wider entrance holes to exploit the small proportion of the population growing through the size range that can enter the 4-5 inch (10-13 cm) diameter entrance rings of the conventional inshore traps. Taken together with the generally low size limits (below the size at first female maturity in most areas), and the high exploitation rates, this development may have disturbing implications for future recruitment to the stocks.

2. RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT - 1975-76

2.1. EUROPE

England and Wales

Monitoring of population structure and catch and effort trends have continued in all the major fisheries. To estimate growth and mortality rates and migrations a tagging programme commenced in 1976 on the E and NE coasts of England. Biological studies have included work on larval recruitment, juvenile ecology and moult staging.

France

Studies have continued on the size composition and catch rates of lobster stocks resulting from the prohibition of fishing and release of juvenile lobsters into sanctuary areas. Comparisons are being made in the laboratory of the growth rates of H. gammarus and H. americanus and hybrids.

Ireland

Monitoring of size frequencies and catch and effort (boat-trap census) has continued with comparisons of the carapace length/total length ratio on the Atlantic and Irish Sea coasts. Branded lobsters were released in 1974. Only small movements of recaptures were recorded. Exploratory fishing in 40-70 fathoms (72-126 m) 50 miles (80 km) offshore proved unsuccessful.

Norway

Catch/effort and size composition data collected over a number of years has been analysed for a yield assessment. Tagged lobsters continue to be returned.

Scotland and Sweden

Monitoring of catch, effort and population structure continued.

2.2. NORTH AMERICA

Canada

Research effort is at present expanding. Size frequency, moult stages and fishing effort are sampled at key ports. Historical data is being prepared for analysis. The need for increased size limits is being considered. Escape gap studies have been completed on crabs (Cancer irroratus) and lobsters. Tagging studies to estimate growth, mortality rates, movements, standing stock, recruitment etc are continuing in a number of areas. First estimates of population parameters suggest that in addition to yield/recruit considerations, present fishing strategy may be adversely affecting recruitment potential.

Tagging studies in Canadian waters have so far shown few movements >10 miles although there appear to be seasonal vertical movements in some areas which may also result in horizontal displacements on a seasonal basis.

United States

A State-Federal Scientific Committee, consisting of scientists from 11 coastal states (Maine to North Carolina) and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), has been established to organise and conduct the necessary research to allow the formulation of lobster management plans. Every lobster-producing state has now initiated or intensified its own lobster R & D. The Lobster Scientific Committee has conducted a preliminary assessment of lobster growth and mortality to determine levels of yield-per-recruit for various levels of minimum sizes and fishing mortality, and to identify research priorities.

3. RECENT OR IMMINENT CHANGES IN MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

3.1. EUROPE

England, Wales and Scotland in 1976 introduced carapace length for the measurement of minimum landing size at 80 mm, equivalent to the previous total length measurement of 9 inches (229 mm). France, Norway and Sweden still use total length. Sweden has recently extended the summer closed season in an attempt to reduce the fishing activity of part-time fishermen, and to protect moulting lobsters. Ireland is in the process of introducing a licensing system for lobster boats, sellers and buyers, designed to control fishing effort, particularly of part-time fishermen.

3.2. NORTH AMERICA

Efforts to develop a unified management programme in the United States resulted in the establishment of a Policy Committee, composed of state fishery administrators and the Regional Director of NMFS, which provides overall programme guidance and facilitates implementation of decisions through existing legal and institutional channels. It is intended to increase the present size limits of 3 1/16 in (78 mm), 3 1/8 in (79 mm) and 3 3/16 in (81 mm) to a uniform 3 1/2 in (89 mm) in the United States. Escape gaps are being introduced in various states.

Canada hopes to increase the size limits in some areas over the next few years. In an attempt to reduce fishing effort a licence buy-back scheme is being introduced. A closed season may be introduced for the offshore fishery. The

management strategy favours full-time fishermen.

4. GROWTH AND MORTALITY RATES

Discontinuous growth (made up of two components, moult increment and moult frequency), the apparent lack of ageing structures, the difficulty of distinguishing the modes of a size frequency distribution which might indicate year-classes or moult-classes, and the need for special tagging techniques which ensure that tags are not lost at ecdysis are the inherent problems associated with the estimation of annual growth rates of large decapod Crustacea, such as Homarus. The von Bertalanffy growth equation has been extensively used to describe the growth of fin-fish. While this equation is not ideally suited to the discontinuous growth pattern of lobsters it is a useful approximation which allows the use of the Beverton and Holt dynamic pool model for yield-per-recruit assessment. This is especially so when lobsters are moulting once each year over the size range considered for an assessment.

Analysis of polymodal size frequency data has provided some estimates of annual growth. The use of tagging data has provided good estimates of moult increments which have been coupled with sparse data on moult frequency. Von Bertalanffy growth equations from a number of Homarus stocks were examined (Table 3, Figure 1). It is readily apparent that there is considerable variation in the growth curves (Figure 1) with the slowest growth from Norway females (H. gammarus) and the fastest from southern New England, USA (H. americanus). K values ranged from 0.10 for the Norway females to 0.39 for Newfoundland males. There was also a wide range in L_{∞} from 105 mm CL for Newfoundland males to 267 mm CL for Maine, USA lobsters. Much of this variability in growth rates is due to variable moult frequencies - the parameter which is the most difficult to estimate accurately!

Fishing mortality (F) rates from various sources have been calculated from tag return data and/or size composition data. The values obtained (Table 3) range from $F = >0.67$ (last available estimate of 0.67 in 1971) for the American offshore fishery to $F = 2.30$ in the Maine fishery. Generally F values exceed 1.0 and are frequently as high as 2.0.

There are no direct estimates of natural mortality (M) and the best available estimates range from $M = 0.1$ to 0.25 with a general consensus from the Working Group that such a slow-growing long-lived animal has few predators and that therefore natural mortality can be expected to be low - say $M = <0.1$.

5. YIELD ASSESSMENT

At the present time it is obvious that some of the estimates for the parameter inputs for a yield assessment are not wholly reliable. However, the examination of the available data for a range of stocks from both Europe and North America does enable a preliminary assessment to be made utilising a range of probable values for growth, fishing and natural mortality rates. The choice of a suitable yield model is not critical at this stage. For convenience, the Beverton and Holt (1959) dynamic pool model was chosen. This model incorporates the von Bertalanffy growth equation, which as already discussed may not be an ideal description of the discontinuous growth of lobsters. (A yield-per-recruit analysis using a discontinuous growth curve was briefly examined at the meeting and found to give similar results to those obtained by the Working Group). Isometric growth is also assumed by the model and although male lobsters show allometric growth of the chelae this model is a suitable approximation. The dynamic pool model also assumes constant mortality rates for various ages: this assumption may not be valid but the available data on mortality rates is not comprehensive enough to reject this assumption. Despite these reservations, the Group felt that useful management advice could be obtained from a yield-per-recruit assessment using this dynamic pool model with the parameter inputs at present available.

Three stocks were chosen for yield-per-recruit assessment incorporating a range of K values from 0.10 to 0.39 (Table 4). Two values of M were chosen M = 0.1, thought to be the more realistic value, and M = 0.3 to observe the effect of incorporating a higher M value. Fishing mortality (F) ranged from 0.1 to 1.5 and age at first capture - assuming knife-edged selection - from 4 to 15 years (Table 4).

5.1. YIELD-PER-RECRUIT RESULTS

Newfoundland Males

The maximum yield in weight per recruit $(Y_W/R)_{\max}$ of 552 kg/1000 when M = 0.1 occurs at a high fishing mortality ($F_{\max} = 1.5$) and an age (size) at first capture $(t_c)_{\max}$ of 7 yr (96 mm CL) (Table 5, Figure 2). If M = 0.3 the $(Y_W/R)_{\max}$ is reduced to 372 kg/1000 at an $(F)_{\max}$ of 1.5 and a $(t_c)_{\max}$ of 4 yr (Table 5, Figure 2). Although the $(Y_W/R)_{\max}$ occurs at quite high values of $(F)_{\max}$ the low growth rates produce flat-topped yield-per-recruit curves in which, above fairly low levels of fishing mortality, further increases in F produce only small gains in yield-per-recruit. For example, if M = 0.1 and $t_c = 7$ yr, the Y_W/R at F = 0.5 is 519 kg/1000, only 6% less than the Y_W/R at $(F)_{\max} = 1.5$, at

$F = 0.3$ the Y_W/R is only 13% less than at $(F)_{\max}$.

Norway Males

If $M = 0.1$ the $(Y_W/R)_{\max}$ of 564 kg/1000 occurs at $(F)_{\max} = 1.5$ and $(t_c)_{\max}$ of 9 yr (106 mm CL) (Table 5, Figure 3). The $(Y_W/R)_{\max}$ is reduced to 277 kg/1000 at $(F)_{\max} = 1.5$ and $(t_c)_{\max} = 5$ yr if $M = 0.3$. As with the Newfoundland males, the yield-per-recruit curves are flat-topped. A reduction from $(F)_{\max} = 1.5$ to $F = 0.3$ at $t_c = 9$ and $M = 0.1$ results in only a 9% loss in Y_W/R . If $M = 0.3$ at $t_c = 5$ the loss is 20%.

Norway Females

Although the growth rate is low ($K = 0.1$, Table 4) the W_{∞} is higher (2.448 kg) than for the other two assessments. This results in quite high $(t_c)_{\max}$ values when $M = 0.1$, the $(Y_W/R)_{\max}$ of 371 kg/1000 occurs at $(F)_{\max} = 1.5$ and $(t_c)_{\max} = 14$ yr (Table 5, Figure 4). Of course if M is higher ($M = 0.3$) $(t_c)_{\max}$ is reduced to 7 yr, although $(F)_{\max}$ remains high at 1.5. As with the other assessments a considerable reduction in F has little effect on Y_W/R values. For example, if $M = 0.1$ and $t_c = 14$ a reduction from $(F)_{\max} = 1.5$ to $F = 0.3$ results in only a 19% drop in Y_W/R to 300 kg/1000.

6. MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. YIELD-PER-RECRUIT

The three assessments carried out have been used to show general conclusions regarding the relationships between Y_W/R and M , F and t_c . The model is obviously sensitive to M , the parameter which in most cases is estimated roughly. However, the general consensus is that M is low and probably less than 0.1. It is probably safe, therefore, to consider the assessments utilising $M = 0.1$ as closer to reality than those with $M = 0.3$. Although the $(F)_{\max}$ values were quite high ≈ 1.5 , it is clear that a considerable reduction in F would result in relatively small losses in Y_W/R . This would of course increase the economic efficiency of a fishery as cpue would be expected to increase (see 6.2 also). The present calculated or estimated values of F (Table 3) generally exceed $F = 1.0$. These yield-per-recruit assessments clearly show that F values of the order of 0.3 - 0.5 would be more suitable.

The present l_c values in most fisheries are around 80 mm CL, although in one area in Canada, the southern Gulf of St Lawrence, the l_c is as low as 64 mm CL. If $M = 0.1$ the $(l_c)_{\max}$ values at $(F)_{\max}$ range from 96 to 117 mm CL ($t_c = 7$ to 14 yr). At the suggested level of $F = 0.5$ the l_c values range from 91 to 108

mm CL ($t_c = 6$ to 12 yr) - still well above the present size (age) at first capture. An increase in l_c would increase the yield-per-recruit from all these fisheries.

The conclusion from these preliminary assessments is clear - the present levels of fishing mortality are too high and the size (age) at first capture too low.

6.2. RECRUITMENT

Little is known about the behaviour and ecology of larval and juvenile lobsters. The source of recruitment to many fisheries is not known and little is known of the stock-recruitment relationship. Despite these unknowns, it is clear that with the present situation where exploitation rates are high and the size (age) at first capture is often below the size (age) at first maturity, many of the lobster stocks on both sides of the Atlantic are heading for recruitment failure. The proposed reduction in fishing mortality and increases in size (age) at first capture would alleviate this situation. The reduced catch rates in recent years indicate a reduction in stock abundance. Although the stock-recruitment relationship is unknown, at some low level of spawning stock an increase in stock size (resulting from a reduction in F and increase in l_c) will certainly increase recruitment.

6.3. SUMMARY OF MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

To improve yield-per-recruit and to ensure an adequate breeding stock it is essential in most European and North American Homarus stocks to reduce fishing mortality significantly from the present level in excess of $F = 1.0$ to an optimum level within the range $F = 0.3 - 0.5$. At the same time the present size (age) at first capture (minimum landing size) is too low and should be raised, at least above the size (age) at first maturity for each stock.

If these management recommendations are not implemented in the near future recruitment failure in several Homarus fisheries can be expected and other stocks will continue to decline.

For obvious reasons, the considerable reductions in fishing mortality proposed and the immediate losses in catches resulting from increases in minimum landing sizes will be difficult to accept in socio-economic terms. The changes proposed will inevitably have to take place in measured steps. It is thus essential that the first steps in the right direction for the future management policy of

Homarus stocks to be taken immediately. Further delay only makes the inevitable proposed action more difficult to implement.

7. FUTURE RESEARCH

Although the preliminary assessments made by the Working Group used data which in many cases should be improved, clear management recommendations have been justifiably produced. Future research must concentrate on improving the parameter inputs for a yield assessment together with the additional information on the biology, particularly reproduction and recruitment, necessary to evaluate yield assessments and make valid management conclusions.

The Group felt that a considerable amount of data both published and unpublished existed which should be collated in such a way as to benefit those whose task it is to manage the Homarus stocks. In particular it was felt that a review of the growth data available and a consideration of the modelling of growth in homarids was essential. There is an obvious need to re-examine data and make better estimates of mortality parameters. Data on size and age at maturity together with information on recruitment is necessary, particularly in the light of the likelihood of recruitment failure in a number of stocks. The assessments in this report can only be regarded as preliminary. The Group believes that many of the necessary data are available for more accurate assessments to be made of many stocks other than those considered here.

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TABLE 1

EUROPEAN LOBSTER LANDINGS (tonnes) SOURCE: BULLEIN STATISTIQUE - ICES. (*Approximate or estimated as available)

	DENMARK	E & W	FRANCE	IRELAND	NORWAY	SCOTLAND	SPAIN	SWEDEN	ALL EUROPEAN COUNTRIES
1950	216	352*	304	170	969	784	19	215	3 074
51	157	346	368	139	862	643	29	252	2 833
52	186	331	449	164	712	635	32	210	2 751
53	145	403	485	200	848	635	37	216	3 006
54	124	450	499	189	648	597	34	188	2 765
55	108	506	497	253	632	662	34	167	2 889
56	101	492	537	308	708	688	32	178	3 074
57	74	528	568	270	655	728	53	148	3 059
58	75	495	625	300	714	704	68	164	3 174
59	72	489	401	347	684	819	57	160	4 159
1960	85	465	497	267	787	890	37	168	3 226
61	76	565	509	180	681	991	26	147	3 211
62	67	469	437	167	551	898	24	120	2 767
63	71	480	318	153	498	805	5	105	2 470
64	50	477	388	217	353	793	23	92	2 443
65	35	398	426	205	350	643	20	86	2 194
66	30	420	446	278	248	586	20	78	2 325
67	30	387	422	279	239	567	161	64	2 411
68	24	371	361	287	276	616	99	66	2 358
69	25	383	340	298	218	568	17	66	1 954
1970	22	491	324	277	202	602	47	71	2 108
71	15	451	310	285	133	678	20	50	1 952
72	16	429	373	221	161	585	16	43	1 893
73	13	457	420	258	150	545	13	42	1 898
74	11	377	400*	253	139	600	12	38	1 830*
75	14	342	400*	332	128	503	-	43	1 762*
76	12	348	400*	370	116	531	-	33	1 810*
Averages 1950-59	126	439	573	234	743	690	40	190	3 078
1960-69	49	442	414	233	420	736	43	99	2 536
1970-76	15	414	357*	285	147	578	22*	46*	1 893*

Table 2a. Lobster landings (tonnes) from the United States inshore and offshore (traps and trawls) fisheries for 1965-75.
*Includes scuba diving and fish pots.

Year	Inshore Traps	Offshore Traps	Offshore Trawls	Other*	Total
1965	11 218	0	2 481	20	13 719
1966	11 609	0	1 776	15	13 400
1967	10 068	0	2 048	15	12 131
1968	12 253	0	2 490	25	14 768
1969	12 165	52	3 086	22	15 325
1970	11 604	666	3 199	23	15 492
1971	11 308	1 480	2 477	16	15 281
1972	10 626	2 890	1 093	17	14 626
1973	10 518	1 945	671	16	13 150
1974	10 398	1 749	940	-	13 087
1975	10 476	1 939	726	-	13 141
1976	11 708	1 914	598	-	14 220

Table 2b. Lobster landings (tonnes) in Canada.

Year	Maritimes			P.Q.	Nfld	Canada
	Inshore	Offshore (trap)	Total			
1965	15 193	-	15 193	1 494	1 695	18 382
1966	13 584	-	13 584	1 773	1 580	16 937
1967	12 926	-	12 926	1 501	1 414	15 841
1968	13 842	-	13 842	1 274	1 808	16 924
1969	15 406	-	15 406	1 083	1 730	18 219
1970	13 937	-	13 937	1 195	1 463	16 595
1971	14 720	100	14 820	1 108	1 381	17 309
1972	12 471	334	12 805	1 009	1 237	15 051
1973	13 422	481	13 903	981	1 263	16 147
1974	11 496	410	11 906	1 005	1 326	14 237
1975	14 040	547	14 587	1 204	1 697	17 488
1976	11 669	636	12 305	1 247	2 229	15 781

Table 3. Calculated or estimated von Bertalanffy growth constants, fishing and natural mortality, minimum landing size and size at maturity for a number of H. gammarus and H. americanus stocks.

COUNTRY	SEX	K	L _∞ (mm)	W _∞ (kg)	t ₀	F	M	Present L _c (mm)	Size at	
									1st Maturity	50% Maturity
<u>H. gammarus</u>										
ENGLAND	♂	0.12	196	6.55		1.17	0.25	80		
	♀	0.17	160	2.59		1.17	0.25	80	77	85+
IRELAND	♂	0.121	174		0.34	0.8	0.06	83	76 - 83	
NORWAY	♂	0.20	129	1.65	(0.34)	1.5	<0.1	78		
	♀	0.10	157	2.45	(0.34)	1.5	<0.1	78		
<u>H. americanus</u>										
CANADA	♂	0.390	105	0.99	0.796	1.77	0.11	81		
(Newfoundland)	♀	0.240	112	1.06	0.689	1.77	0.11	81	67	75
USA										
Maine	♀	0.048	267	12.2	-0.772	2.30	0.1-0.2	81		83
S New England	♂	0.115	253	11.2	-0.140	>0.67	0.1-0.2	81		

Table 4. Input parameters for the Beverton and Holt (1959) yield-per-recruit equation for the Newfoundland male, and Norway male and female Homarus stocks.

Input	Newfoundland σ	Norway σ	Norway φ
K	0.39	0.20	0.10
W_{∞} (kg)	0.992	1.654	2.448
(L_{∞} mm CL)	(105)	(129)	(157)
t_0 (yr)	0.8	0.34	0.34
t_{λ} (yr)	20	20	20
t_r (yr)	4	4	4
R	1000	1000	1000
M	0.1/0.3	0.1/0.3	0.1/0.3
F_{\min}	0.1	0.1	0.1
F_{\max}	1.5	1.5	1.5
F_{inc}	0.1	0.1	0.1
$t_{c \min}$ (yr)	4	4	4
$t_{c \max}$ (yr)	15	15	15
$t_{c \text{ inc}}$ (yr)	1	1	1

Table 5. Calculated age (size) at first capture (t_c) giving maximum yield ($(Y_W/R)_{\max}$) for selected values of M and F, and fishing mortality (F) giving ($(Y_W/R)_{\max}$) for selected values of M and t_c ($(L_c)_{\max}$) for three Homarus stocks.

COUNTRY	SEX	M	F	$(t_c)_{\max}$	$(L_c)_{\max}$	$(Y_W/R)_{\max}$	t_c	L_c	$(F)_{\max}$	$(Y_W/R)_{\max}$
Newfoundland	♂	0.1	0.2	5	85	458	4	75	0.4	480
			0.5	6	91	529	5	84	0.6	520
			1.5	7	96	552	6	91	>1.0	545
Newfoundland	♂	0.3	0.2	4	75	>240	4	75	>1.4	>372
			0.5	4	75	>333	5	85	>1.5	>365
			1.5	4	75	>372	6	91	>1.5	>322
Norway	♂	0.1	0.2	7	93	481	5	78	0.3	469
			0.5	8	101	547	6	87	0.4	505
			1.5	9	106	564	7	93	0.6	533
Norway	♂	0.3	0.2	4	60	>201	5	78	>1.5	>277
			0.5	4	60	253	6	87	>1.5	>272
			1.5	<5	<78	277	7	93	>1.5	>249
Norway	♀	0.1	0.2	10	97	306	7	76	0.3	290
			0.5	12	108	359	10	97	0.5	346
			1.5	14	117	371	12	108	1.0	366
Norway	♀	0.3	0.2	5	58	87	7	76	>1.5	>113
			0.5	6	68	106	10	97	>1.5	>88
			1.5	7	76	113	12	108	>1.5	>65

Figure 1. Lobster growth curves (von Bertalanffy) for various stocks of H. gammarus and H. americanus.

Figure 2. Yield-per-recruit (kg/1000) isopleths for a range of fishing mortalities (F) and age at first capture (t_c) for Newfoundland, Canada, male H. americanus: (top) natural mortality (M) = 0.3, (bottom) $M = 0.1$.

Figure 3. Yield-per-recruit (kg/1000) isopleths for a range of fishing mortalities (F) and age at first capture (t_c) for Norwegian male H. gammarus: (top) natural mortality (M) = 0.3, (bottom) $M = 0.1$.

Figure 4. Yield-per-recruit (kg/1000) isopleths for a range of fishing mortalities (F) and age at first capture (t_c) for Norwegian female H. gammarus: (top) natural mortality (M) = 0.3, (bottom) $M = 0.1$.

FIGURE 1.

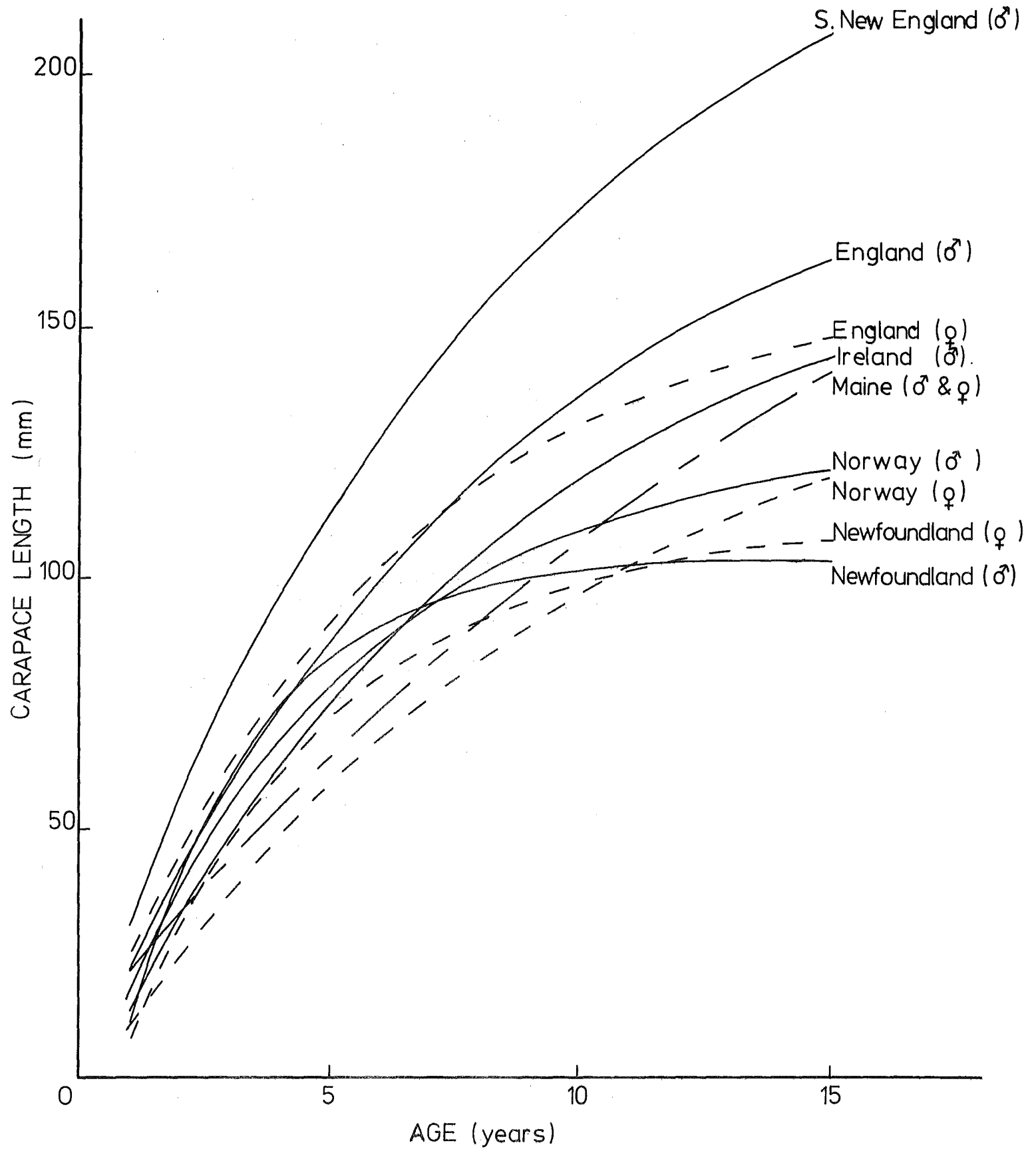


FIGURE 2.

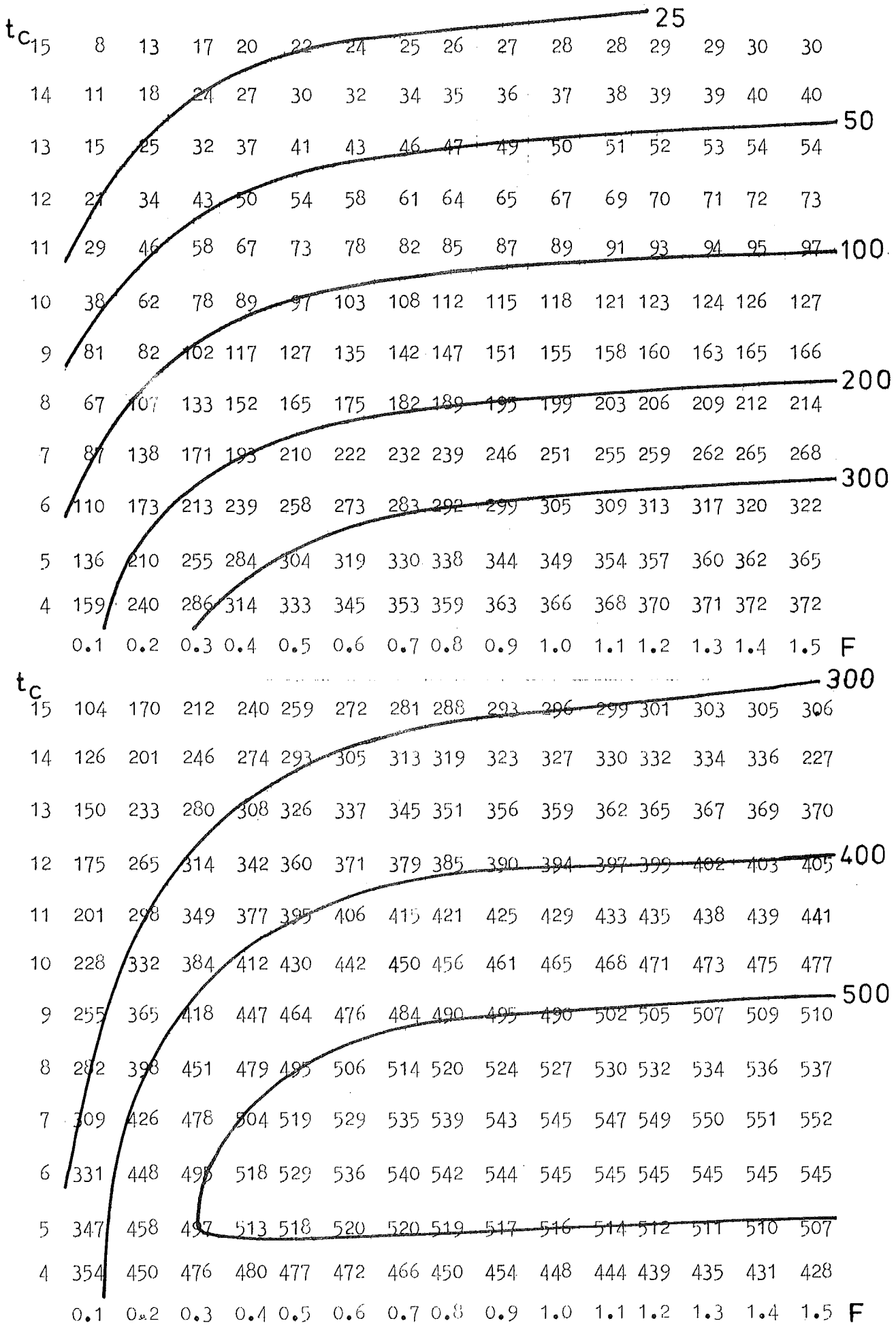


FIGURE 3 .

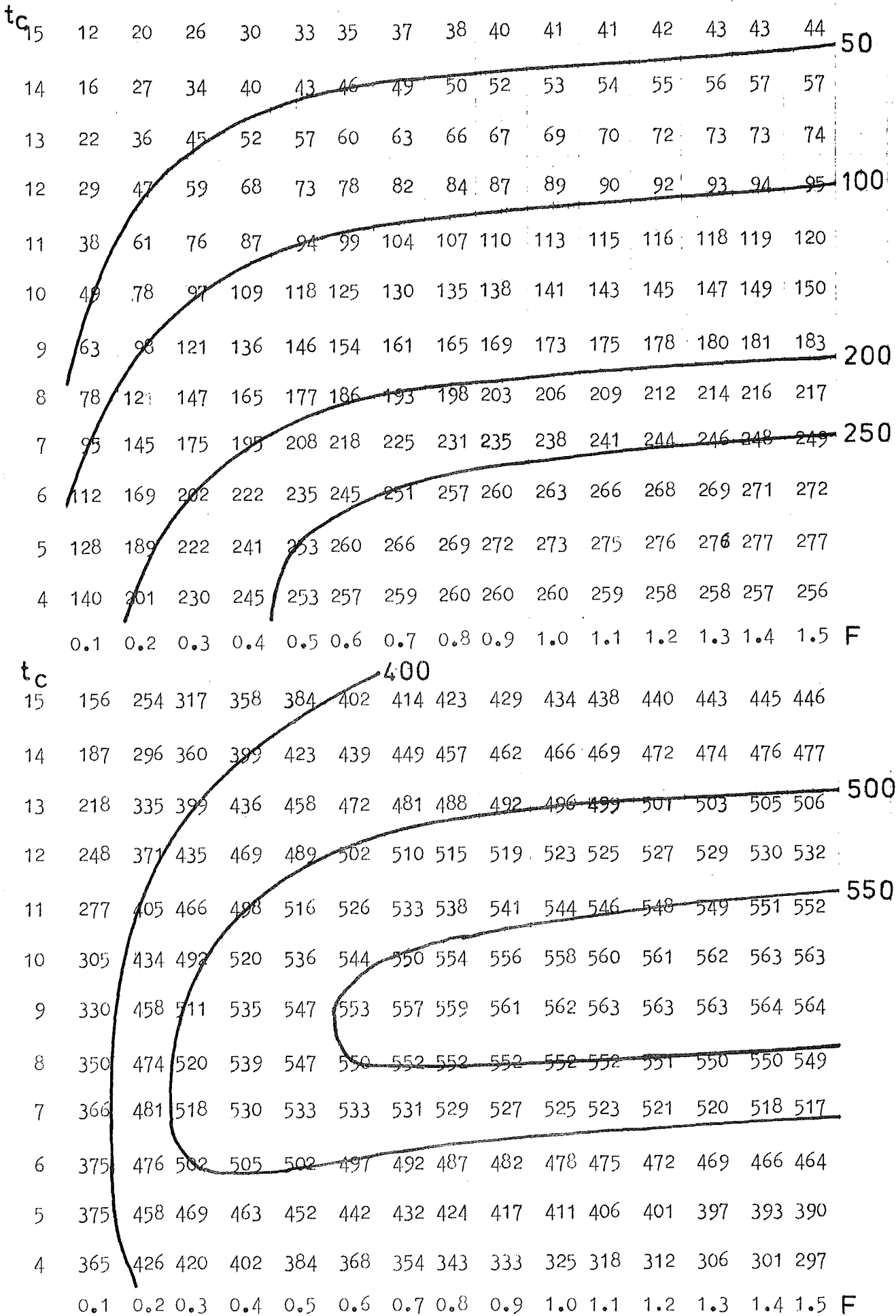


FIGURE 4.

