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Report

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Integration of three structurally different stock assessment models in a Bayesian framework

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Uitgebreide Nederlandse samenvatting

Plaats binnen het F-project

In het F1-werkpakket van het F-project houden we ons bezig met verbetering van de bestandsschattingen van schol en tong. Problemen rond de onzekerheid en bias in de bestandsschattingen en de gegevens die daarvoor worden gebruikt, worden onderzocht in een serie van kleinere deelstudies, die elk een probleem bestuderen. In vier deelstudies, producten A10, A11, A12 en A14, benaderen we het probleem van de onzekerheid in de bestandsschattingen. Dit rapport betreft product A14, integratie in Bayesiaanse methodieken van bestandsschattingmodellen, die in A10 (Surplus productie model), A11 (Survey based model) en A12 (Catch at age model) onderzocht zijn.

Onzekerheid en Bayesiaanse statistiek

In bestandsschattingen zijn twee bronnen van onzekerheid te onderscheiden: onzekerheid ten gevolge van de gebruikte gegevens en onzekerheid ten gevolge van de aannames die gemaakt worden om het model te gebruiken. Door het toepassen van de Bayesiaanse methode krijgen we informatie over de onzekerheid die door de gegevens veroorzaakt wordt. In de Bayesiaanse statistiek wordt voor elke te schatten parameter (bijvoorbeeld visserijsterfte F) de waarschijnlijkheid berekend dat deze een bepaalde waarde heeft, gegeven de gebruikte gegevens. Er wordt dus niet een puntschatting van de parameter gegeven, maar een kansverdeling. Als men vooraf al een idee heeft rond welke waarde een bepaalde parameter zal zitten, bijvoorbeeld gebaseerd op andere studies, dan kan deze kennis meegenomen worden.

Resultaten

Voor dit product werd geëvalueerd in hoeverre het mogelijk was de drie modellen onderzocht in producten A10 (Surplus Production Model), A11 (Survey only model) en A12 (Catch at Age model) te integreren in een soort "supermodel". Hiervoor zouden de verschillende modellen een weging kunnen meekrijgen die hetzelfde is bij aanvang van de analyse voor elk model (bijvoorbeeld 0.333). Deze weging zou dan gedurende het rekenproces kunnen veranderen, afhankelijk van de waarschijnlijkheid van elk model. Deze waarschijnlijkheid zou afhankelijk kunnen zijn van de betrouwbaarheid van de gegevens.

De drie modellen gebruiken echter verschillende basisgegevens en het is niet duidelijk hoe een juiste weging, indien mogelijk, aan de modellen meegegeven moet worden. Het catch at age model gebruikt gegevens van vangsten per leeftijd en indices, terwijl het surplus production model geen gegevens met een leeftijdstructuur gebruikt. Het SURBA model gebruikt geen vangstgegevens. Een weging van de verschillende modellen zou een systematische afwijking (bias) kunnen geven. Het is echter niet duidelijk welke kant deze systematisch afwijking op zou gaan: zou een model met veel basisgegevens betere schattingen geven of juist slechtere, doordat de gegevens tegenstrijdige signalen laten zien?

We concluderen dat het momenteel niet mogelijk is om op een zinnige wijze de drie onderzochte modellen te integreren in een "supermodel". Daarvoor zijn de modellen, de gegevens en aannames voor de verschillende modellen te verschillend. Het is op zich niet moeilijk te bepalen welk model het beste past bij gegevens, maar wel moeilijk uitsluitel te geven over betrouwbaarheid van gegevens en in hoeverre het ene model betere schattingen geeft dan het andere model. Voor integratie van modellen zou in het vervolg gekeken kunnen worden naar modellen die overeenkomen in basisgegevens, maar die verschillen in structurele aannames.

1. Introduction

Bayesian statistics provide a method for expressing uncertainty of an unknown parameter value probabilistically (www.bayesian.org). Bayesian methods have been widely used in biological sciences, and recently in fisheries science applied to stock assessment. In our previous studies on Bayesian analysis for the F-project, we have explored three structurally different stock assessment models in a Bayesian framework. These models are not only different with respect to their data needs, they also represent different hypotheses about the stock dynamics.

A10: Surplus production model.

This model is using time series of total landings and effort as input data. It models the population dynamics by stating that the stock biomass in one year equals the biomass of the previous year, plus the biomass growth minus the landings, and a process error term. Moreover, it states that observed LpUE (Landings per Unit of Effort) equals the biomass of the exploitable part of the stock multiplied with catchability, including an observation error term.

A11: Survey-based model (SURBA)

This model is using an abundance index from a research vessel survey as input. It models the abundance (in numbers) at age as the abundance at the recruiting age multiplied by the exponential of the sum of the mortality rates in the intervening years, where the fishing mortality is separable and consists of an age effect and a temporal trend. Furthermore, it models the abundance index as equal to abundance at age multiplied with catchability. The model is then fitted to survey index data.

A12: Statistical catch at age model

This model is using catch numbers at age as well as survey indices. It models the catches as being taken through a separable fishing mortality with an age effect and a temporal trend. At the same time it models abundance indices as equal to abundance at age times catchability. The model is then fitted to the catch data and the survey index data.

Each of the models may differ in how accurate representations they are of the real unknown world with its real and unknown processes. If we look at all the data that have been used in the three models, it should be possible to determine, within a Bayesian framework, the relative credibility of each of the models, given the data. The catch at age model uses most information, and is most frequently used in stock assessment. The first two models are usually only considered when information is not available or not reliable. More specifically, the surplus production model is used when age structured catch data are lacking, and SURBA is used when fishery-dependent information is considered to be biased, e.g. because of misreporting.

2. Combining models

The aim of this product was to *investigate the possibility to integrate the three models into one “supermodel” in a Bayesian framework* (see revised F-project proposal 2005). Starting this project, it was thought that in this “supermodel” each of the three models from A10-A12 could get a prior probability of for example 0.333. The relevant parameters (i.e. the historic values of fishing mortality (F_{bar}), spawning stock biomass (SSB) and recruitment (R)) would then be calculated as weighted averages of the three model outputs. The weighting factors are equal to the posterior probabilities of the models given the data. This way, the relative credibility of each of these models given the data would be calculated, as well as the posterior probabilities of the relevant stock parameters given the structural model uncertainty and the data. The uncertainty in stock status is then carried over into the forecasts and the decision table.

The data used as input for the “supermodel” could be the commercial catch numbers at age and the abundance indices at age. However, whereas the catch at age model would use the complete data set, the surplus production model would leave out the age information and use the data aggregated over the ages. At the same time, the SURBA model would only use the indices at age from fisheries independent surveys. The outcome of the “supermodel” may become biased because the models differ in the data they use. It is not clear in which direction the bias would go: Would the data-rich model give more certain estimates and therefore be more credible? Or would the data-rich model give a worse fit because of conflicting signals and therefore be less credible? Can a Bayesian “supermodel” as the one under consideration, where the models use different subsets of the data, be constructed and give meaningful results?

The reason for using SURBA models usually is that commercial catch data are thought to be unreliable, e.g. biased because of misreporting. The surplus production and catch at age models are fitted to the data under the assumption that the catch data may contain error but are not biased. It is not immediately clear how a bias in the commercial catch data can be modeled. It seems that on this issue we cannot use the supermodel to decide which model is more accurate. In other words, we cannot “ask the data to decide” whether the catch data are biased when they are assumed to be *un*biased in some models and not used in others.

3. Conclusion

We conclude from the above considerations that it is not possible to integrate these particular three models into a “supermodel” in a Bayesian framework in a meaningful way. The models, their assumptions and their data needs are too dissimilar.

It may be possible to integrate more similar models into one “supermodel”, e.g. models that use the same data but yet differ in some structural assumptions on stock dynamics. The more promising road is to separately develop the SURBA and catch at age models further, and perhaps incorporate priors on structural assumptions within these models, such as the assumption of having only one separable period versus two (or more), which has been explored in the paper on the SURBA model. However it still is difficult to assess which of the models reflect reality best and should therefore have more weighting.

Justification

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has been produced with great care. The scientific quality has been peer-reviewed and assessed by or on behalf of the Scientific Board of Wageningen IMARES.

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