

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

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DRAFT MEMORANDUM

April 17, 2009

To: Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Management Board
From: Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Technical Committee
RE: Mandatory Region Delineations for the Summer Flounder Recreational Fishery

The Board tasked the TC to develop mandatory region options in the summer flounder recreational fishery. The TC explored how to develop options that would be based on technical criteria.

State-specific length frequencies of the total catch (harvest and discards) were compiled from the NMFS MRFSS survey data, with supplemental data from several volunteer angler surveys (CT VAS, MD VAS, and the American Littoral Society), from 2006-2007. On average, the largest summer flounder were observed in MA, RI, NY, CT, and VA (Figure 1). In a very broad sense, larger fish tend to be caught north of NJ and smaller fish seem to be caught from NJ southward. However, the relatively larger average size of the VA catch, and the relatively smaller average size of the CT catch disrupts this trend (Figure 1). State-by-state length compositions are shown in Figure 2.

It is important to note that the discard data from MRFSS only represent the for-hire mode that is a relatively small component of any state's fishery. The volunteer angler surveys also may not reflect the average angler expertise of those in a fishery, but both sets of data do supply some general trend information (north to south) that can be used assess the possibilities for incorporating regional management units into the FMP.

The TC also examined the fishery independent NEAMAP survey data. These data provide size information that may be used to roughly describe the size distribution associated with state-specific fisheries (Figure 3). A similar size-frequency distribution was observed between NY and NJ in the spring but less in the fall with NJ have a larger portion of smaller fish. Seasonal differences in size, within states, were clearly evident between spring and fall surveys. As with, the volunteer survey data, and especially the for-hire data, the NEAMAP data can best be used to discern trends in a state's size frequency distribution. However, the NEAMAP collections are near-coastal, and only a few states have recreational summer flounder fisheries that consist of a moderate coastal harvest component.

A desired beneficial effect from grouping states, by similar length frequencies, would be to implement uniform regulations across a region to increase compliance and ease enforcement. However, the TC stressed that these observed length frequencies in each state are reflections of each state's recreational fisheries, as they are currently constituted. That is, the current fishing practices employed in each state are dictated by the current seasons and size limits in effect.

ASMFC Vision Statement: Healthy, self-sustaining populations for all Atlantic coast fish species or successful restoration well in progress by the year 2015.

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These regulations affect the timing and areas of harvest that affect the length distributions of the catch. For example, two adjacent states may have very different length distributions, but this variation may be caused by the regulations in effect, rather than reflecting the true availability of fish at size. Therefore, using observed size distributions by state as a principal basis for regional groupings, especially since the available data are only partially representative of the total catch in any state, may not be an adequate basis, for implementing uniform regional regulations.

Forming regions can help increase the precision of the MRFSS estimates, which can improve data for analysis of harvest and catch. However, impacts to states when regions are formed can be different depending on where most of the data comes from. Increased precision may not be an appropriate reason to form regions for management unless the data was poorer at the state level (which is not necessarily the case for all states fishing for summer flounder). Pooling the data will in most cases increase the overall precision but it does not help to show what a region should be relative to stock composition or how the fisheries operate within a region.

The TC concluded that **there is not enough information that is representative of the fisheries to identify options, for mandatory regions, based on technical criteria. Some observations can be made (similarities/differences), but are accompanied by many caveats that make it impossible for the TC to make specific region options for the Board to consider.**

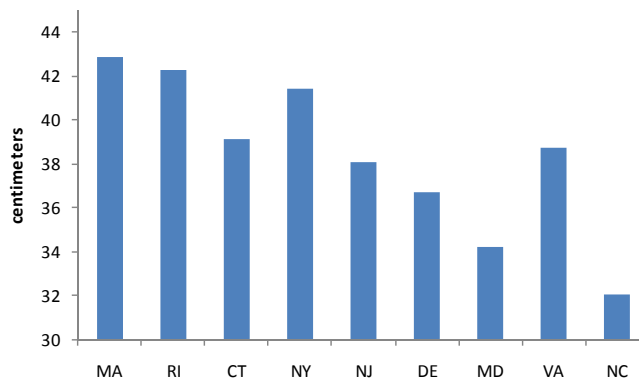


Figure 1. Average length of all summer flounder caught in each state from MA-NC in 2006-2007.

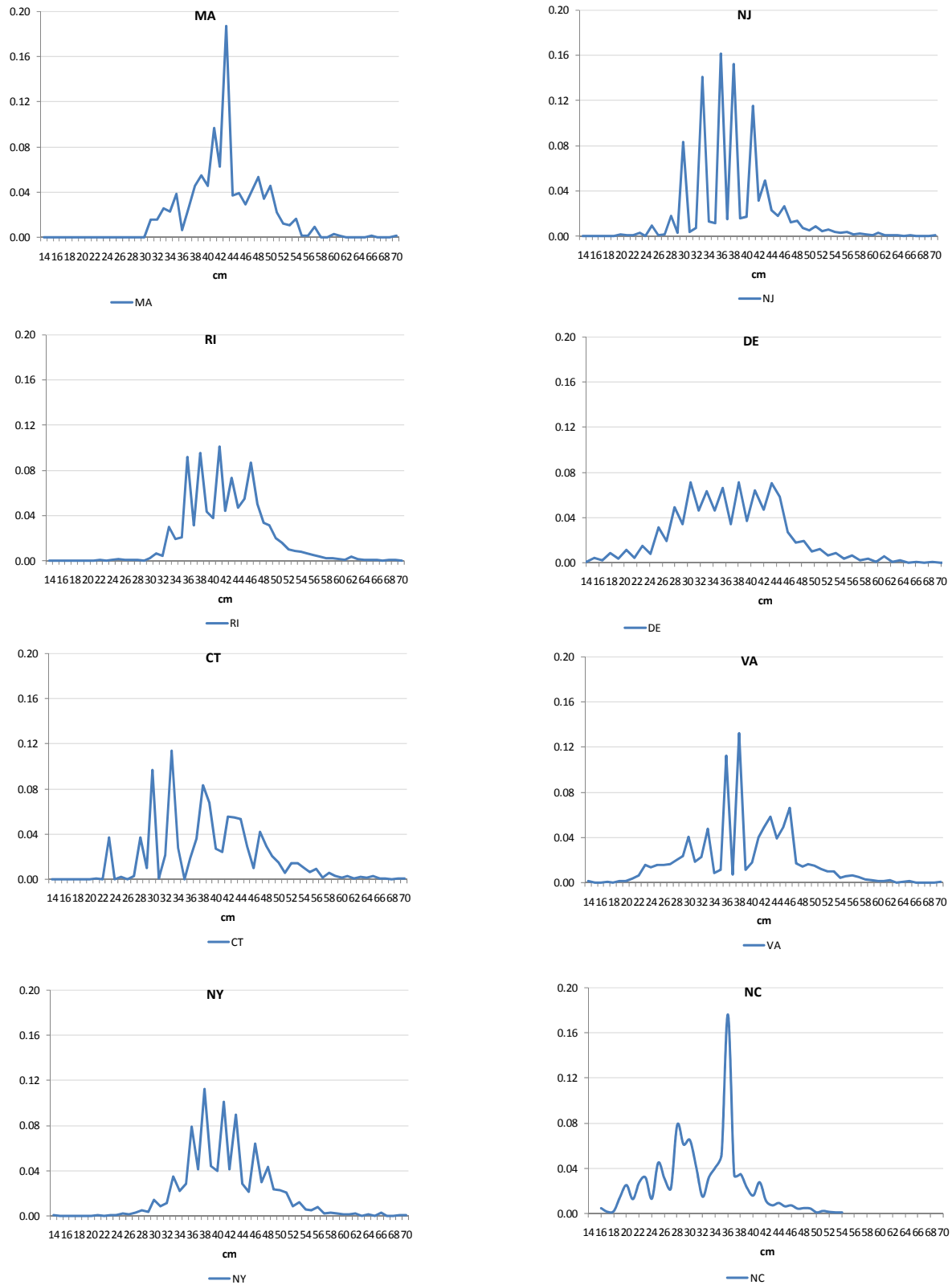
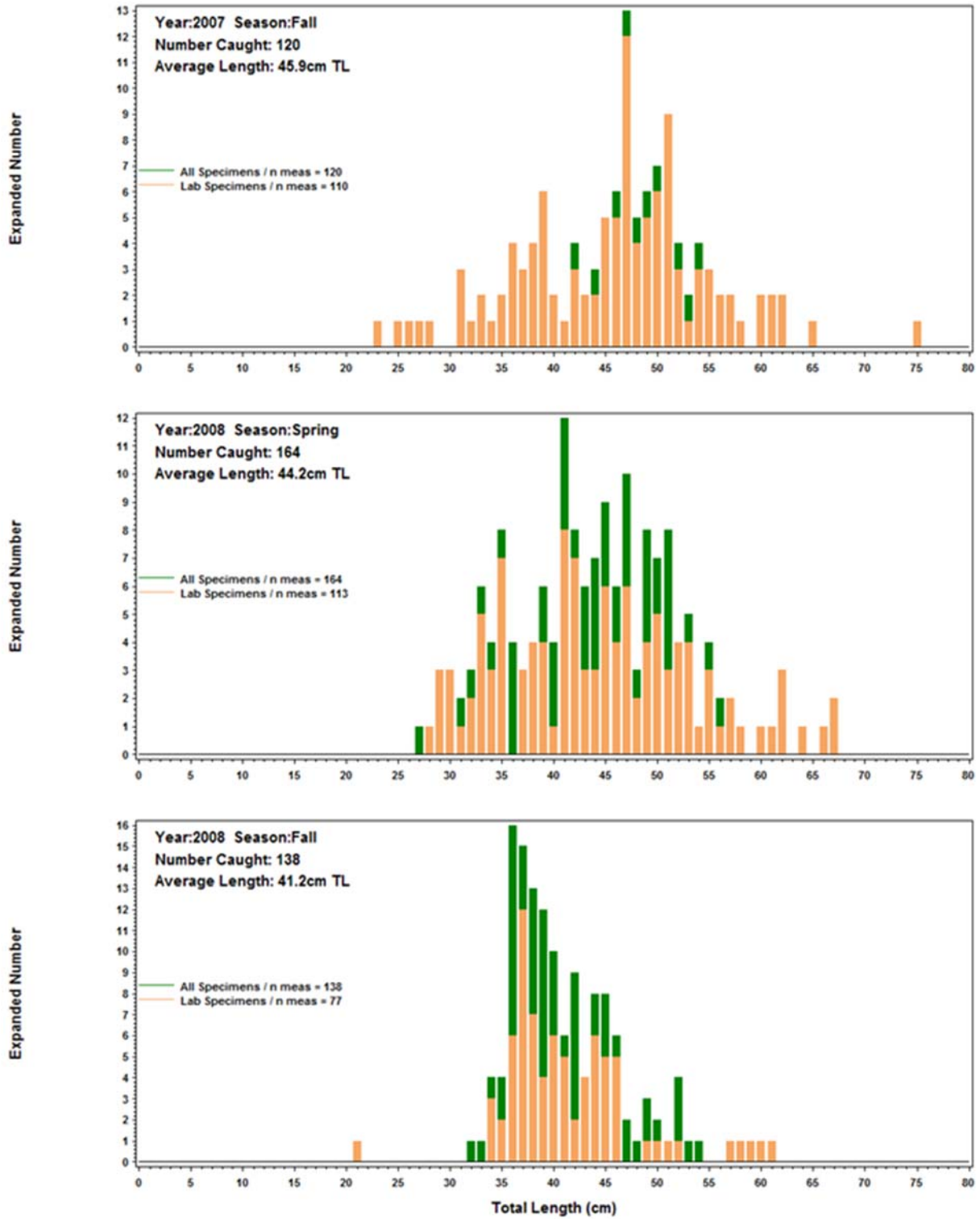
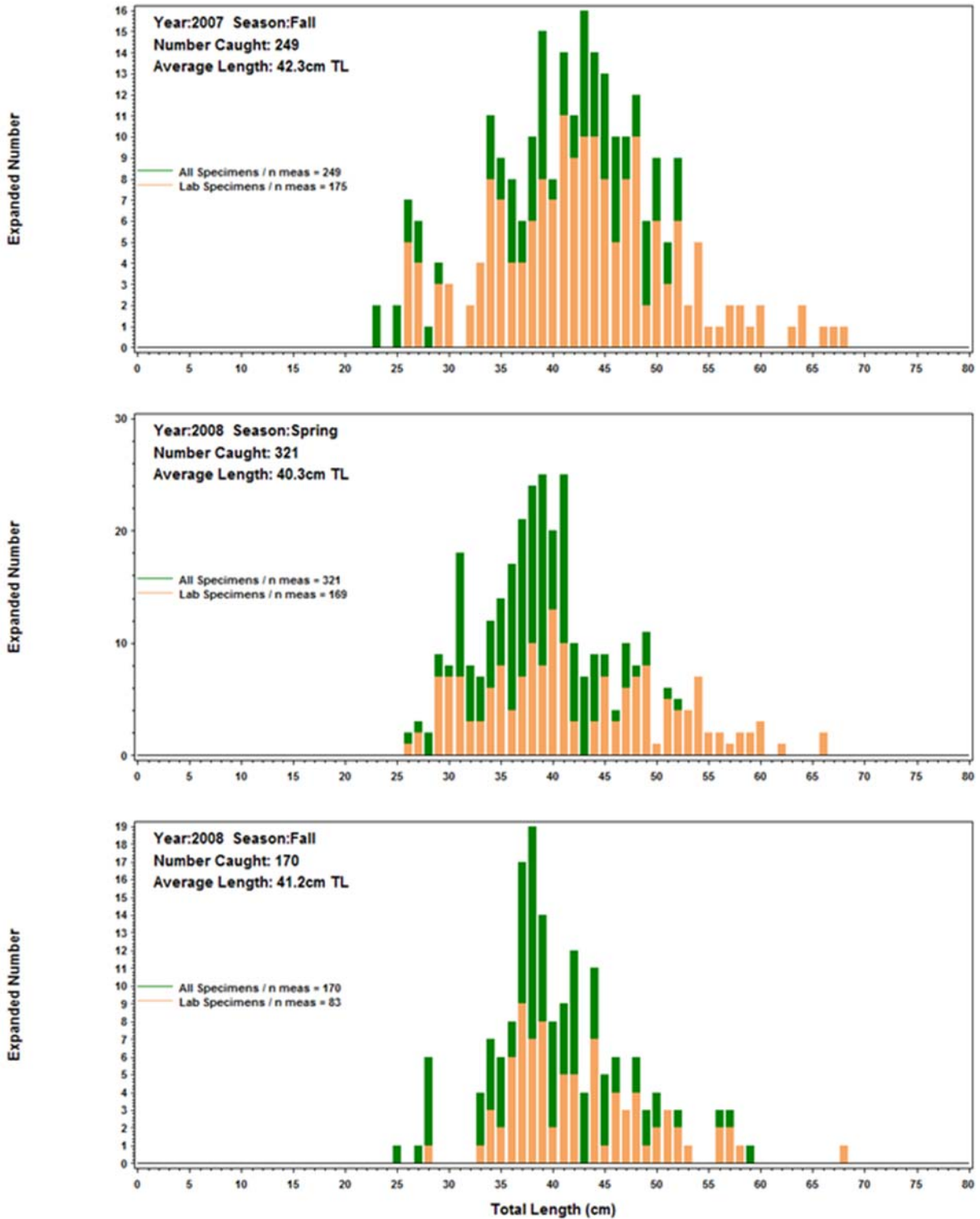


Figure 2. Length proportions of MRFSS estimated total catch by state (2006-2007). MD data not available at this time.

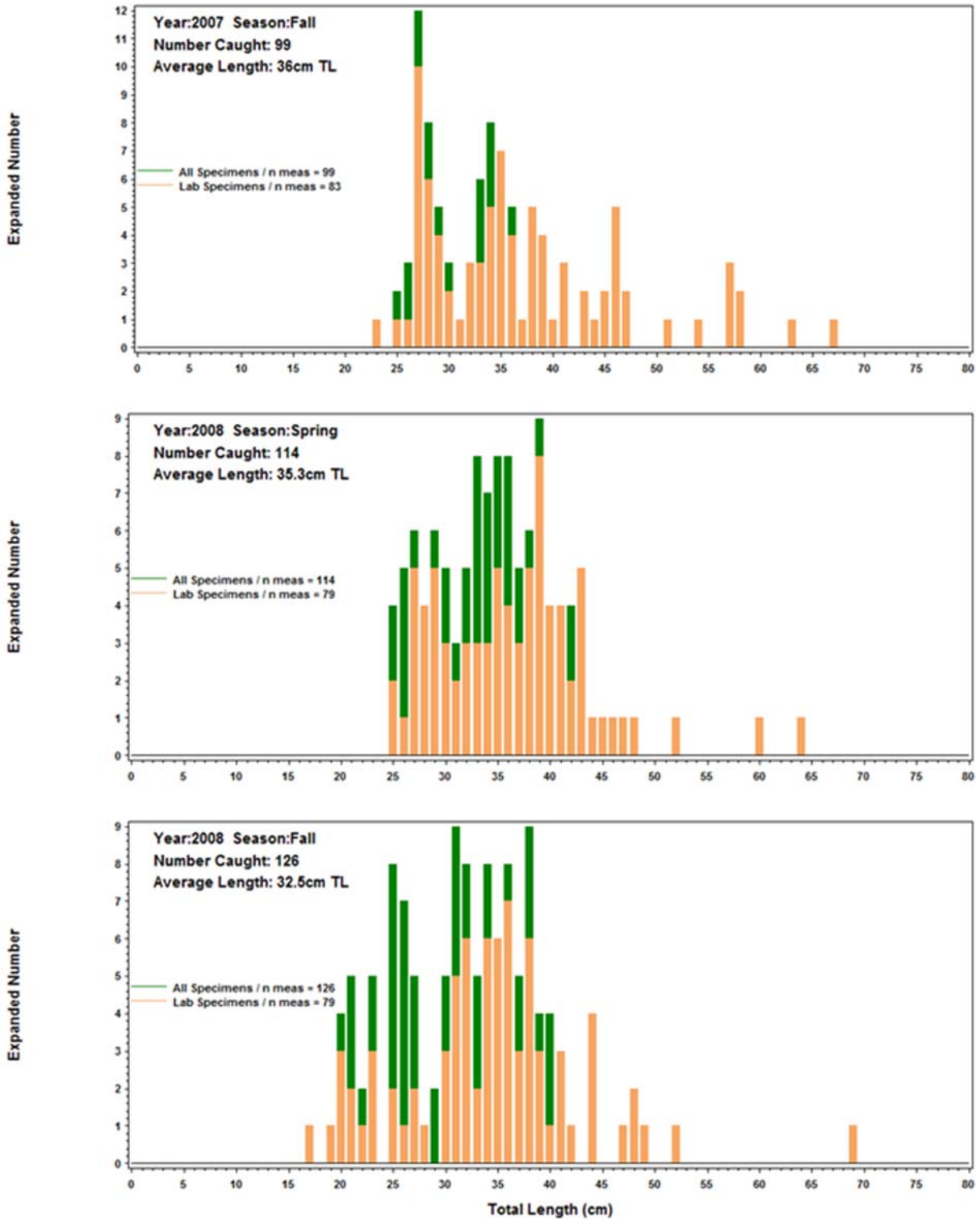
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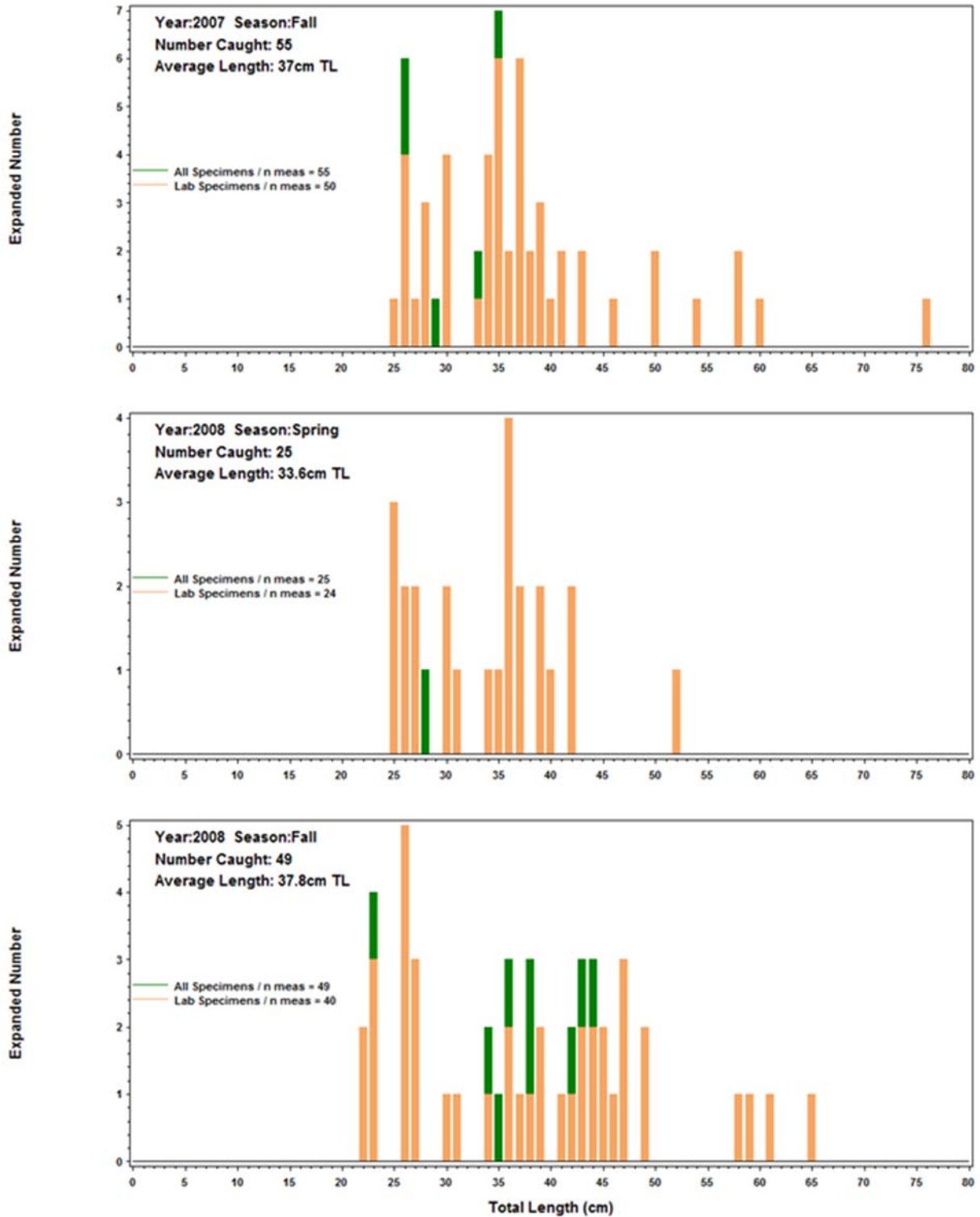
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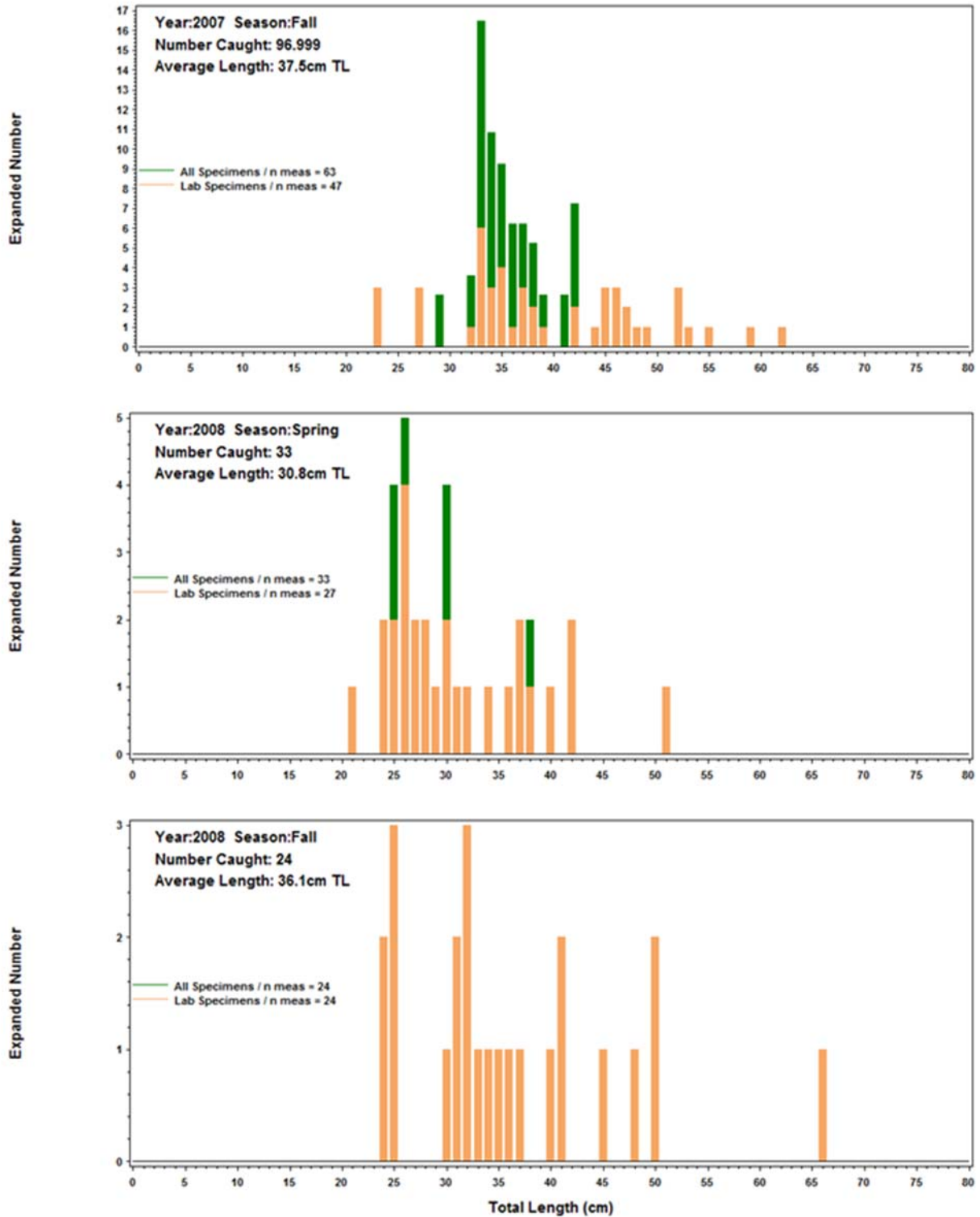
New Jersey



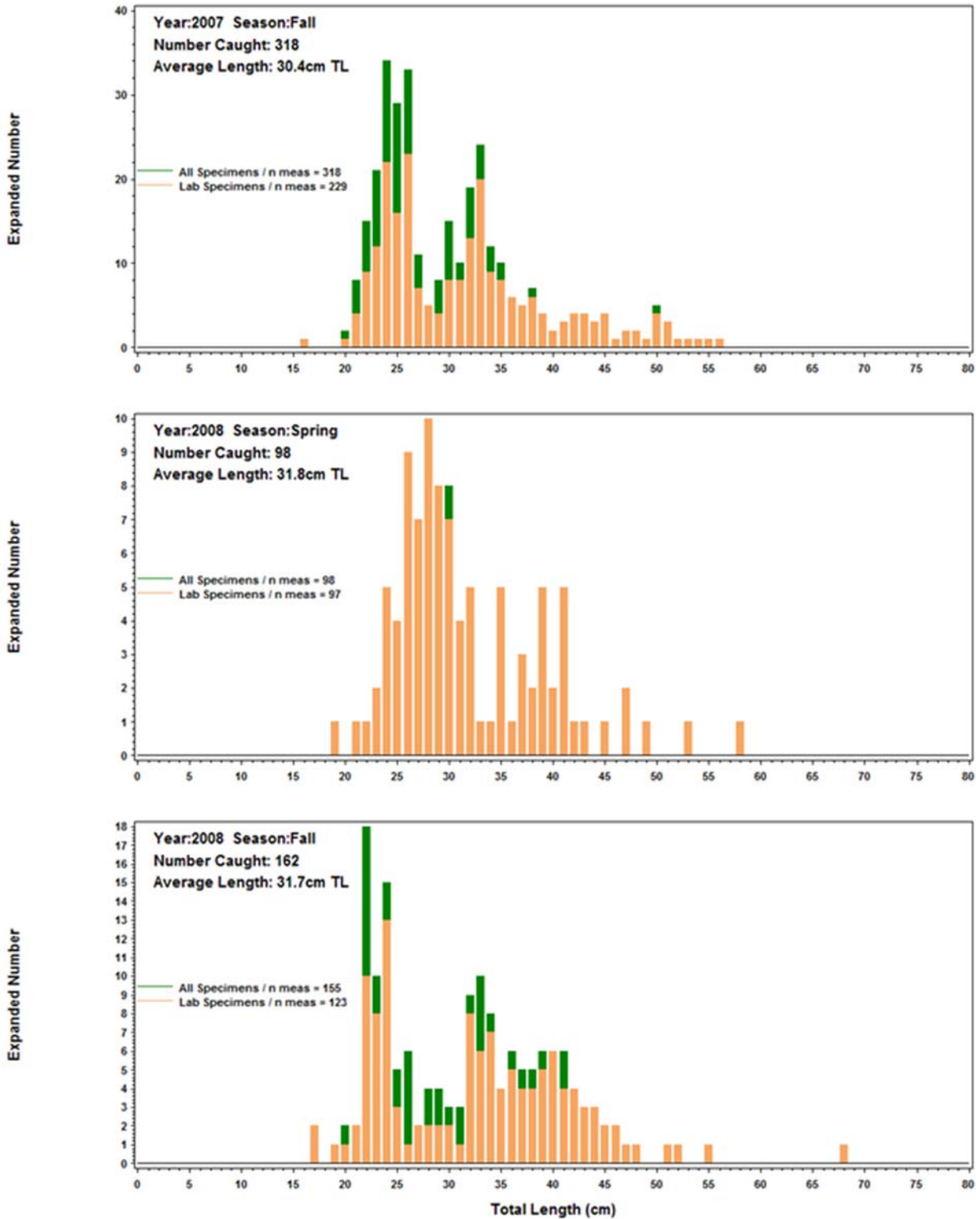
Delaware



Maryland



Virginia



North Carolina

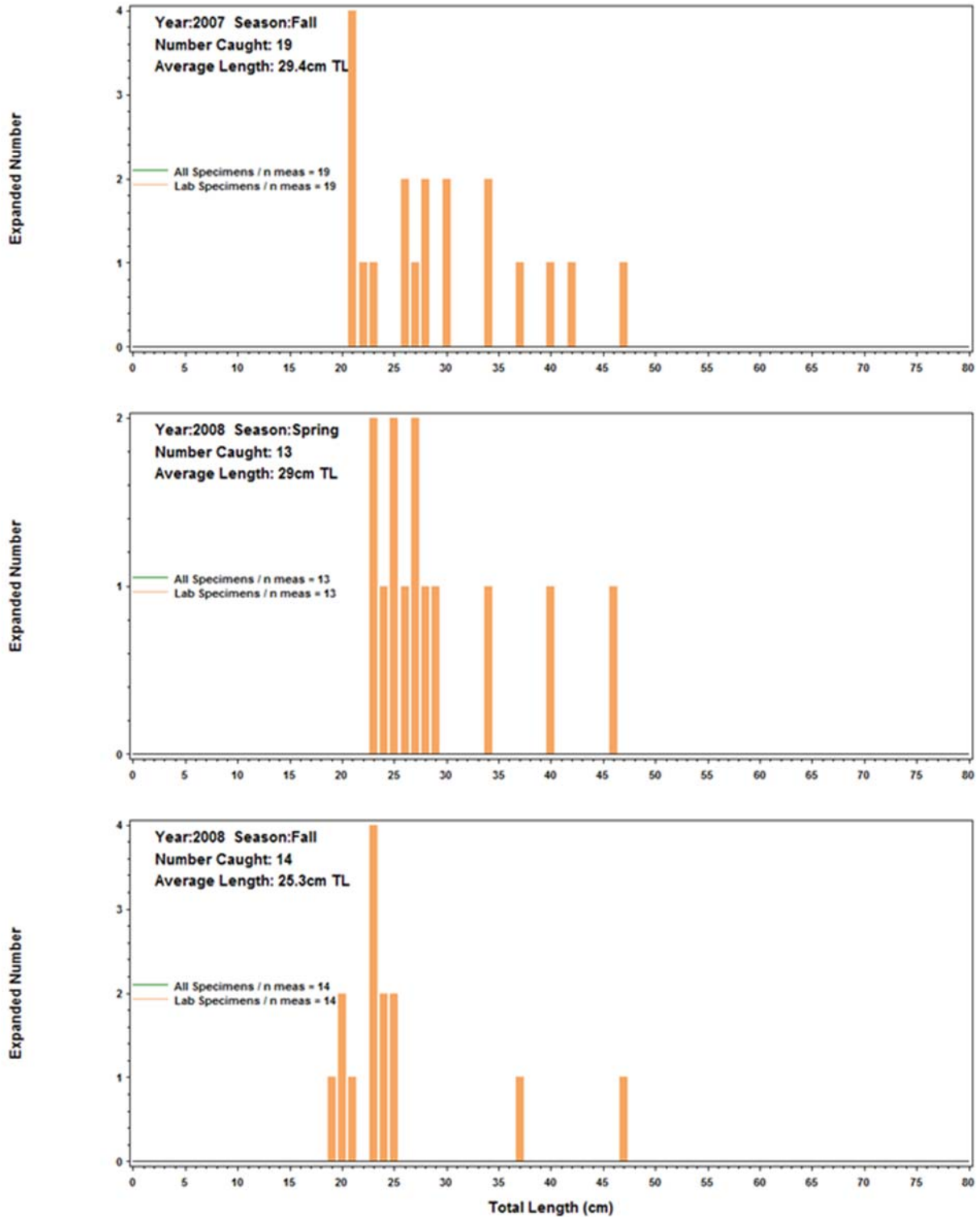


Figure 3. Lengths of summer flounder from the NEAMAP Survey by State (2007-2008).