

User's Manual for ASPIC: A Stock-Production Model  
Incorporating Covariates (ver. 5)  
And Auxiliary Programs



Michael H. Prager  
Population Dynamics Team  
Center for Coastal Fisheries and Habitat Research  
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration  
101 Pivers Island Road  
Beaufort, North Carolina 28516 USA



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## Preface

This user's manual describes Version 5.0 of ASPIC, a computer program to estimate parameters of a non-equilibrium surplus-production model from fisheries data. Several utility programs (ASPICP, FTEST, AGRAPH) are also described. Their purposes are making projections, comparing models, and quickly making graphs from ASPIC and ASPICP output files. The programs together are referred to here as the ASPIC Suite.

The major change from previous versions of ASPIC is the ability to fit the Pella-Tomlinson (generalized) production model, with the Fox exponential yield model included as a special case. The Schaefer (logistic) production model, the main component of earlier versions, is still part of ASPIC, and because many of its computations can be done analytically rather than numerically, it will be found quicker, and its solutions may be more stable.

The ASPIC Suite is not commercial software, and the programs are not warranted in any way, either by the author or by the U.S. government. The software was developed for use in the author's research, and it is used regularly. Distribution to fellow scientists is made in a cooperative spirit. *The software is intended as a set of research tools, and those who use them do so at their own risk.* ASPIC has been used on thousands of real and simulated data sets, and all supplied programs are believed to be substantially correct. The author appreciates receiving advice of suspected flaws, and he attempts to correct errors promptly.

By no means is ASPIC the final word in production modeling. It is intended as a reasonably flexible program that can serve as a basis for further innovation.

Formal description of the theory behind ASPIC is given in [Prager \(1994\)](#). Further references are given in the bibliography. The author requests that this manual and [Prager \(1994\)](#) be cited in any report or published article that uses ASPIC.

Those who have used version 3.x of ASPIC and who now are presented with version 5.x might ask what happened to version 4.x. The answer is simple: 4.x were test versions. It seemed more logical to release the new version as 5.0, rather than some number in the middle of the 4.x series.

Many colleagues have given valuable technical suggestions or assistance while ASPIC was being written and as it has been revised through the years. I

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This software is distributed to interested scientists free of charge. It is the property of the United States government. No individual or group is authorized to charge for it or distribute it as part of any commercial product.

## Typographical conventions

In this manual, user commands, file names, and items in input files are displayed in a monospaced font. Some important sections are marked by a symbol in the margin, as here; attention to such material is especially important to obtaining good results from ASPIC. Material new in this version of the program is marked by a different marginal symbol, as here.



Michael H. Prager  
Beaufort, North Carolina  
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# 1 Introduction

This user's manual describes Version 5.0 of ASPIC, a computer program to estimate parameters of a non-equilibrium surplus-production model from fisheries data. Several utility programs (ASPICP, FTEST, AGRAPH) are also described. Their purposes include making projections, comparing models, and quickly making graphs from ASPIC and ASPICP output files. The programs together are referred to here as the ASPIC Suite.

The surplus-production model has a long history in fishery science and has repeatedly proven useful in management of fish stocks. The appeal of production models is in large part due to their conceptual and computational simplicity. Despite that simplicity, production models incorporate an implicit recruitment function, and thus can be used for studies of sustainability. Production models have also been found especially useful in stock assessments when the age-structure of the catch cannot be estimated.

Many early treatments of surplus-production models assumed that the yield taken each year could be considered the equilibrium yield (e.g., Fox 1975). However using that "equilibrium assumption" tends to overestimate MSY when used to assess a declining stock, and it has been found problematic by several studies (Mohn 1980; Williams and Prager 2002). The assumption was a computational convenience that is no longer needed, and ASPIC does not use it.

✱ Earlier versions of ASPIC could fit only the logistic production model (Schaefer 1954, 1957; Pella 1967), in which the production curve (curve of surplus production vs. biomass) is symmetrical around MSY. Version 5.x also fits the generalized model of Pella and Tomlinson (1969) in the revised parameterization of Fletcher (1978).

ASPIC incorporates several extensions to classical stock-production models. One extension is that ASPIC can fit data from up to 10 data series. These may be catch-effort series (from different gears or different periods of time), catch-abundance-index series, biomass indices, or biomass estimates made independently of the production model. This feature is described in §4.4. A second major extension is the use of bootstrapping for bias correction and construction of approximate nonparametric confidence intervals. A third extension is that ASPIC can fit a model under the assumption that yield in each year is known more precisely than fishing effort or

relative abundance; in other words, fitting can be statistically conditioned on yield, rather than on fishing effort or relative abundance.

The theory behind ASPIC and several worked examples were first presented in working documents of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) by Prager (1992a,b). Those reference have been superseded by the more formal and complete treatment of Prager (1994). The model and its extensions are also described in Quinn and Deriso (1999) and Haddon (2001). The basic theory of production models is of course also described in many other texts, including Hilborn and Walters (1992), and is the subject of a recent FAO publication (Punt and Hilborn 1996).

The ASPIC computer program as described here has been used by several assessment groups and in many studies, including Prager et al. (1996), Prager and Goodyear (2001), Prager (2002), Shertzer and Prager (2002), and Williams and Prager (2002). In the course of those studies, the program has been exercised on over 100,000 sets of simulated data. The resulting experience has been used to improve the program's reliability.

## 2 New in ASPIC 5.0



This section gives an overview of changes introduced between ASPIC 3.x and ASPIC 5.x. Although this section will be of most interest to users of previous versions, new users should also review it briefly for information on running ASPIC 5.0 productively.

### 2.1 Major changes



*Generalized production model.* Earlier versions of ASPIC could fit only the logistic form of the production model (Graham 1935; Schaefer 1954, 1957; Pella 1967; Prager 1994). As well as that form, ASPIC 5.0 can fit the generalized production model (Pella and Tomlinson 1969; Fletcher 1978) in one of three ways: by direct optimization, by a grid of fits on the model shape, or with fixed model shape to implement the Fox (1970) model or other predetermined shape.

*Parameterization change.* The generalized model requires parameterization in terms of MSY and carrying capacity  $K$  rather than MSY and intrinsic rate of increase  $r$ . This occurs because when the exponent  $n$  in the generalized model is in the region  $n \leq 1$ ,

then  $r = \infty$ . As a result, ASPIC 5.0 requires a starting guess for  $K$ , not for  $r$ .

*Starting biomass parameterization.* A parameter estimated by ASPIC is the biomass in the first year of the analysis. In previous versions, this was expressed (both in the input file and in ASPIC reports) as a ratio to the biomass providing MSY; i.e., as  $B_1/B_{\text{MSY}}$ . In version 5.0, it is expressed as a ratio to the carrying capacity, i.e., as  $B_1/K$ . This change is required because in the generalized model,  $B_{\text{MSY}}$  is no longer a fixed proportion of  $K$ . The change reduces correlation between estimates of the starting biomass ratio and of  $B_{\text{MSY}}$ .

*Conditioning options.* Option names for conditioning on yield or effort have been revised to indicate conditioning, rather than residuals. The new specifications are given in §6.3.

*Fitting criteria.* An additional objective function, least absolute values (LAV), is available. It is recommended that this robust objective function be used only in conjunction with a regular least squares fit, because the optimizer has a more difficult task in finding the best minimum of LAV fits. Nonetheless, LAV can be valuable where one or more data observations are markedly disjoint from the rest. For guidelines on appropriate use of LAV, please consult the statistical literature.

*Bounds on catchability coefficient.* To improve convergence, estimates of  $q$  (catchability) are now bounded to a geometric range around the user's starting guess. The bounds are determined internally by ASPIC and are not under the user's control. If the starting guess for  $q$  is severely wrong, the estimate may hit a bound, and the ASPIC report will indicate whether the starting guess was too low or too high. If that happens, the user should revise the starting guess of  $q$  accordingly and rerun the analysis.

*Restarts during optimization.* Previous versions of ASPIC required the optimizer to return to the same solution 3 times in a row to indicate convergence. That worked well on most data sets, but was not always sufficient. The number of identical returns is now specified in the input file. The recommended default is 6. This can improve stability of the fit on some poor data sets. This is specified on line 8 of the input file; see §6.3 on page 15.

*Time steps.* The generalized model is implemented by numerical integration that approximates a continuous-time solution. The number of time steps per year is specified on line 9 of the input file; see §6.3 on page 15.

*Setting advanced options.* A new INI file in the working directory can contain values for some advanced options, described in §7 on page 19.

*Updated ASPICP.* An updated version of the projection program ASPICP is compatible with analyses from ASPIC 5.0. It is also backwardly compatible with ASPIC 3.x and 4.x.

*Windows installer.* This release is distributed as a self-installing binary file for Windows. Versions for other operating systems may be available on request.

*Drag-and-drop versions.* ASPIC has always been a non-interactive program that reads from and writes to ASCII files. This release includes alternative versions that accept drag-and-drop of input files and that display their output in scrolling windows. The original command-line versions are also supplied.

## 2.2 Using new features



When using the new features of ASPIC 5.0, please consider the following—

### 2.2.1 EXECUTION SPEED

Fitting the generalized model is done with a numerical solution of the catch equation and is thus slower than fitting the logistic model (which has an analytical solution). Execution will be especially slow in any the following cases:

1. Poor agreement between model and data
2. Analysis of more than one data series
3. Bootstrapping, especially in combination with #1 or #2
4. Extensive Monte Carlo trials in fitting

Program speed can be improved by reducing the number of time steps per year in the input file (see §6.3 on page 15). For the closest approximation to a continuous-time model, set this value to a large number; e.g., 80. For a fairly close approximation, use a number in the range 12–24 (recommended). For fastest operation set this to 2 steps per year.

### ❖ 2.2.2 DEVELOPMENTAL FEATURES

The following are believed to work correctly but have not been tested extensively:

- Generalized estimation (in all forms) with more than one data series.
  - Objective functions other than SSE.
  - Projections of generalized bootstraps with ASPICP.
  - The values of the AIC (Akaike Information Criterion) printed when fitting the generalized model.
  - The  $F$ -statistic printed for comparing the logistic and generalized models may be incorrect when more than one data series is analyzed. More importantly, simulations suggest that such tests are of little value (Prager 2002).
- ❖ It is wise to repeat estimation with several different random-number seeds. If results cannot be duplicated within a few percent (usually less), a fitting failure is indicated, and such results should not be considered valid estimates.
- ❖ The author will appreciate receiving reports of successful or unsuccessful use of the features itemized above. He will attempt to fix all bugs promptly.

## 3 Installation and Interaction

### 3.1 Compatibility

The ASPIC suite is compatible with personal computers running Microsoft Windows 9x (including Windows 95, 98 and Me) or Windows NT (including Windows NT 4.0, 2000, and XP).<sup>1</sup>

ASPIC is written in standard Fortran 95 and is portable to other operating systems. Please consult the author if you would like to use ASPIC under operating systems other than Windows.

<sup>1</sup>Use of tradenames does not imply endorsement by NMFS, NOAA, or the author.

### 3.2 Installation

This version of ASPIC is available as a self-installing executable file for Windows. The installer performs the following tasks:

- Installs binary files for ASPIC, ASPICP, FTEST and AGRAPH to a location specified by the user
- Installs this User's manual and a Quick Reference Card to the doc subdirectory of the installation location
- Installs sample input and output files to the samples subdirectory of the installation location
- Adds the installation location to the user's PATH specification so that ASPIC and related programs can be executed from a command window open to any directory
- Adds a GINO environment variable pointing to the installation location, as required by a graphics support library used in AGRAPH. If a GINO environment variable already exists on the system, it is not modified.
- Adds shortcuts to the Windows Start menu and Desktop, including a command window opening in a user-specified working directory
- Adds an uninstaller to the installation location and adds ASPIC to the system's "Remove Programs" list

The ASPIC uninstaller removes all of the above. However, any files added by the user are not removed.

This User's Manual is supplied with all distributions of ASPIC as an Adobe PDF file named ASPICMAN.PDF. It may be distributed freely.

### 3.3 Interface

#### 3.3.1 INTERFACE OF ASPIC AND ASPICP

The standard versions of ASPIC and ASPICP do not include graphical user interfaces. Instead, the programs are console-mode (character) programs that read all input from and write all output to ASCII (text) files. The screen is used only for status messages.

For added ease of use, the ASPIC 5.0 installation includes versions of ASPIC and ASPICP that support drag and drop. (The executable





files of the command-line versions are `aspic.exe` and `aspicp.exe`; of the drag-and-drop versions, `aspicw.exe` and `aspicpw.exe`.

### 3.3.2 INTERFACE OF AUXILIARY PROGRAMS

The auxiliary program FTEST has a text-mode user interface, is interactive, and does not require an input file. Output is written to the screen.

The graphics program AGRAPH incorporates a standard Windows GUI, with output available to any Windows printer or to a graphics file (WMF or EPS). It can be executed from the command line, by drag and drop, or by starting the program from its shortcut.

### 3.3.3 NMFS TOOLBOX

- ✱ The US National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has developed a “toolbox” of computer programs for stock assessment. The toolbox currently includes a graphical editor specifically for ASPIC input files and graphics that work with ASPIC output. It also includes many other stock-assessment and projection tools. For further information, contact Dr. Paul Rago at the NMFS laboratory in Woods Hole, Massachusetts.

## 4 Overview of ASPIC

### ❖ 4.1 Data requirements

Data needed by ASPIC are a series of observations on yield (catch in biomass) and one or more corresponding series of relative abundance. Data on fishing effort rate can be used instead of relative abundance, and when used are assumed to represent effective (standardized) effort. ASPIC assumes that the supplied abundance index is an unbiased index of the stock’s abundance in biomass. If data on fishing effort are provided, ASPIC assumes that effort divided by yield forms an unbiased index of the stock’s abundance.

In this User’s Guide, the terms “catch” and “yield” are used interchangeably to mean total removals in biomass. Similarly, CPUE is used to mean relative abundance. The presumption is that the CPUE has been standardized before being used for modeling.

- ✱ In addition to data, ASPIC requires starting guesses of its estimated parameters. Parameters directly estimated are  $K$ , the stock’s maximum biomass or carrying capacity;  $MSY$ , the maximum sustainable yield;  $B_1/K$ , the ratio of the biomass at the beginning of

the first year to  $K$ ; and for each data series  $i$ ,  $q_i$ , the catchability coefficient for that series. Description of the input file format, given in §6, includes suggestions for starting guesses.

### 4.2 Program limits

The array limits of ASPIC are as follows:

- Number of years of data: 90
- Number of data series: 10
- Number of bootstrap trials: 1,000

Any user with larger requirements is invited to contact the author.

### 4.3 Program modes

ASPIC has three modes of operation, here called “program modes.”

- In FIT program mode, ASPIC fits the model and computes estimates of parameters and other quantities of management interest, including time trajectories of fishing intensity and stock biomass. Execution time is relatively short.
- In BOT program mode, ASPIC fits the model and computes bootstrapped confidence intervals on estimated quantities. Because computations are extensive, execution time in BOT mode is considerably longer than in FIT mode. For example, a bootstrap with 500 trials might take 200–500 times as long as a single fit.
- In IRF program mode, ASPIC conducts an iteratively reweighted fit when two or more data series are analyzed. Iterative reweighting of the data series (inverse-variance weighting) provides, under many circumstances, a maximum-likelihood solution.

The modes BOT and IRF cannot be combined. In other words, ASPIC cannot run a bootstrap on an iteratively reweighted fit.

A typical analysis might begin with FIT mode, including several runs to explore different model structures. If questions about series weighting are to be addressed, IRF mode might be used, instead, in the initial analysis. After model and data structure have been decided, BOT mode can be used to estimate the uncertainty in assessment results. ASPIC



bootstrap runs do not incorporate iterative reweighting, and this will cause underestimation of variability when IRF mode has been used to develop a model structure.

IRF mode was developed in response to requests during assessment workshops, but it has not been much used by the author, and thus is less thoroughly tested than the other modes. Experience has shown that while series weights estimated in IRF mode may be statistically unbiased, they can be of high variance. (This is a characteristic of such weights generally, and is not specific to ASPIC.) For that reason, sensitivity to series weights should be examined whenever IRF program mode is used.

#### 4.4 Fitting more than one data series

ASPIC can fit data on up to 10 simultaneous or serial fisheries (or biomass estimate series or biomass index series). Data series may be of several types (Table 1), but at least one series must be type CE (effort and yield) or type CC (CPUE and yield). When more than one series is analyzed, common estimates of  $B_1/K$ , MSY, and  $K$  are made, along with an estimate of  $q_i$  for each series. The interpretation of  $q_i$  depends on the type of data series to which it pertains.

A statistical weight  $w_i$  for each fishery is specified by the user in the input file. In summing the objective function, each squared residual from fishery  $i$  is multiplied by  $w_i$ . If the series have equal error variances, using weights of unity for each series provides a maximum-likelihood solution under the lognormal error structure assumed by ASPIC.

In FIT program mode, the program normalizes the user's  $w_i$  so that they sum to unity. In IRF mode, the program adjusts the weights iteratively to provide nearly equal estimated variances. Weights are also adjusted so they sum to unity.

The computer time needed to obtain estimates generally increases as more data series are added. The increase is due both to addition of data and increased difficulty of optimization.

#### 4.5 Objective function and penalty term

Parameters are estimated under the assumption that the errors in yield or effort are multiplicative with constant standard deviation. Thus the residuals are accumulated in logarithmic transform. The objective function  $\Omega$  minimized, then, is

$$\Omega = \sum_{i=1}^I \sum_{j=1}^N w_i \left( \ln \frac{Y_{ij}}{\hat{Y}_{ij}} \right)^2 \quad (1)$$

for residuals accumulated in yield (EFT optimization mode, §6.3), or a similar expression for residuals in effort (YLD optimization mode).

In equation (1),  $i$  indexes the data series,  $j$  the year,  $w$  is the series' statistical weight,  $Y_{ij}$  is the observed yield (or biomass index or estimates) from series  $i$  in year  $j$ , and  $\hat{Y}_{ij}$  is the corresponding predicted value.

##### 4.5.1 PENALTY FOR INITIAL BIOMASS

A penalty term can be added to the objective function to discourage estimates in which the first year's biomass  $B_1$  is greater than the carrying capacity  $K$ . This penalty can affect the estimates of other parameters, so when this term is used, the results should be compared to those obtained by setting the term to zero. The penalty term is described in more detail in [Prager \(1994\)](#), and its use is described in the section describing the input file format.

##### 4.5.2 CONDITIONING ON YIELD

ASPIC can consider yield known exactly and accumulate residuals in effort. Yield is usually observed more precisely than effort or the abundance index, and it is usually preferable on statistical grounds to compute residuals in the more imprecise quantity. Thus, conditioning on yield is recommended for most analyses. An additional advantage is that estimation of missing effort values is quite simple (and is included in this version of ASPIC). When conditioning on yield, an iterative solution of the catch equation is used, and computation is slower than when conditioning on effort.

#### 4.6 Bootstrapped confidence intervals

In BOT mode, ASPIC uses bootstrapping to estimate bias-corrected confidence intervals on many quantities of interest. In doing this, estimated yields (if conditioning on effort; estimated efforts, if conditioning on yield) and residuals from the original fit are saved. The residuals are then increased by an adjustment factor ([Stine 1990](#), p. 338), which is reported in the output file.

Bootstrapped data sets are then constructed by combining each saved predicted yield  $\hat{Y}_{ij}$  with a randomly-chosen adjusted residual to arrive at a pseudo-yield value  $\hat{Y}_{ij}^*$ . (This procedure assumes

Table 1. Codes for the eight types of data series allowed in ASPIC.

Code	Data type	When measured
CE	Fishing effort rate, catch (weight)	Effort rate: annual average Catch: annual total
CC	CPUE (weight-based), catch (weight)	CPUE: annual average Catch: annual total
B0	Estimate of biomass	Start of year
B1	Estimate of biomass	Annual average
B2	Estimate of biomass	End of year
I0	Index of biomass	Start of year
I1	Index of biomass	Annual average
I2	Index of biomass	End of year

that the statistical series weights  $w_i$  are correct.) The model is then refit, using the pseudo-yields in place of the original observed yields. The process is repeated (always using the original predicted values) up to 1,000 times.

From the bootstrap results, bias-corrected (BC) confidence intervals can be computed by standard methods (Efron and Gong 1983). The statistical literature recommends 1,000 bootstrap trials when computing 95% confidence intervals. ASPIC computes 80% confidence intervals, and should require fewer trials. The author recommends using at least 500 trials for bootstrap runs.

## 4.7 Input and output files

As noted, all ASPIC input and output files (Table 2 on p. 11) are in plain ASCII format. Sample files are provided with the ASPIC distribution.

### 4.7.1 INPUT FILE

An ASPIC input file contains all data and settings required for a single ASPIC run. It is recommended that when series of runs is made, that each input file be given a distinct name. This will ensure that the resulting output file names also are distinct.

The input file format is described in detail in §6 on page 12. The simplest way to generate an ASPIC input file is to run the command

```
aspic -help
```

from the command line, to generate the file `sample.inp`. That file can then be renamed and edited to the user's specifications. It may be useful to save an extra copy of the resulting file for use as a template.

### 4.7.2 EDITING INPUT FILES

To create and edit ASPIC input files and ASPIC control files, a text editor is best used. Windows Notepad is a simple example of such a program. (Text editors are sometimes known as programmer's editors or ASCII editors.) Many high-quality text editors are available as freeware, shareware, or commercial software.

An especially useful feature in an editor used for ASPIC input files is the ability to cut and paste rectangular blocks of text. A relatively simple editor having that feature is ConTEXT, which as of January, 2004, was available without charge and could be located through Web search engines such as Google. Other well known editors, such as xemacs, are also suited to this task.

### 4.7.3 OUTPUT FILES

Output from ASPIC includes parameter estimates; measures of goodness of fit; and estimates of population benchmarks, biomass levels, and exploitation levels. Simple character plots are also provided. In addition, the output from bootstrap runs includes bias-corrected confidence intervals on parameters and on other quantities of management interest.

The name used by ASPIC for its main output file depends on the mode of operation (Table 2). Suppose the data (input) file is named `sword.inp`. Then in FIT and IRF modes, the main output would be written to a file named `sword.fit`. In BOT mode, the main output would be written to file `sword.bot`, and detailed intermediate results of the bootstrap would be written to `sword.det` and `sword.bio`. The special output file, if written (see next paragraph) would be written to `sword.prn`.

Table 2. Files read (R) or written (W) by ASPIC and related programs.

File type	Action	Used by	File contents and description
INP	R	ASPIC	Input file with data, starting guesses, and run settings.
INI	R	ASPIC	Optional file to set certain advanced options.
FIT	W	ASPIC	Output file with estimates and graphs; written in FIT and IRF program modes.
BOT	W	ASPIC	Output file with estimates and graphs; written in BOT program mode.
BIO	W, R	ASPIC, ASPICP	Stores estimated $B$ and $F$ trajectory for each bootstrap trial; used by ASPICP to generate confidence intervals.
DET	W	ASPIC	Stores estimates from each bootstrap trial.
SUM	W	ASPIC	Stores summary estimates from all runs made in a directory. Set verbosity to 10 or above in INP file to write to a SUM file.
PRN	W	ASPIC	Has estimated trajectories in ASCII format; easily read for graphing by S-Plus, R, SAS, or spreadsheet.
GEN	W	ASPIC	S-compatible ASCII file with summary results from GEN-GRID mode.
GRD	W	ASPIC	S-compatible ASCII file with summary results from LOG-GRID mode.

Although the .FIT and .BOT files can be read into a spreadsheet or statistical package, they contain many headings that can be confusing. Thus, a special file designed to be compatible with computer programs including S-Plus and R, can be written if desired. This .PRN file contains input and estimated time series from an ASPIC BOT or FIT run. For information on enabling this file, see §6.3 on p 14 or §7 on p. 19.

To aid in simulation studies, a summary file (.SUM file) may also be written in the current directory. This is described in more detail in §6.3. The .SUM file can be written by S-Plus or R with S code like

```
read.table("aspic.sum", header=T)
```

The .BIO file is used by ASPICP (described below) for its computations after a bootstrap run. The .DET file provides information on the individual bootstrap trials. It is not used directly by any supplied program, but is provided in case needed for the user's convenience.

The main .FIT and .BOT output files, and all other ASPIC related files intended to be read by the user, and written with a maximum line length of 120 characters. The .BIO and .DET output files, which are intended to be read by computer programs, may have much longer lines.

#### 4.8 Starting ASPIC

First prepare an input file in the correct format (described in §6 on page 12). It's easiest to copy one of the sample input files provided to use as a template.

Then start the program, giving the input file name on the command line.<sup>2</sup> For example, the command

```
aspic sword.inp
```

or just

```
aspic sword
```

will cause the program to read an input file named sword.inp and produce corresponding estimates and output files. If only the command

```
aspic
```

is given, the program looks for the default input file, ASPIC.INP.

If the .SUM file has been enabled, summary output from each run in the directory will be written to it. The default name is aspic.sum. To use a different name for the .SUM file, give the name on the command line. For example, the command

<sup>2</sup>Most operations are also possible by dragging and dropping icons. The ASPIC Quick Reference, available from the ASPIC shortcuts folder installed on the user's Windows Desktop, includes more information on such use.

```
aspic sword mysum
```

will read the file `sword.inp` and create (or write to) the summary file `mysum.sum`, along with the usual ASPIC output file(s).

Most errors detected while ASPIC is reading the input file will cause the program to print a descriptive message and stop. If the message is not clear, comparing the input file to the samples provided may reveal format errors.

## 5 Overview of Auxiliary Programs

### 5.1 Overview of ASPICP

The auxiliary program ASPICP can be used following an ASPIC bootstrap run. It provides estimated time trajectories of population biomass and fishing mortality rate with bias-corrected confidence intervals. ASPICP is also used for making population projections beyond the observed data set. When making projections, the user can specify future harvests or effort levels, and the program projects biomass and fishing-mortality trajectories for up to 15 years past the original data. Printer plots of the trajectories are also provided.

ASPICP reads information recorded in the BIO file of the corresponding bootstrap run. The user controls the program with a simple control file, default `ASPICP.CTL`. Thus, the first step in using ASPICP is to create a proper control file with a text editor. Details of the file contents are given in §8, and sample ASPICP input files are included in the ASPIC distribution.

When starting ASPICP, the control file name is given on the command line; for example the command,

```
aspicp sword
```

or equivalently

```
aspicp sword.ct1
```

starts ASPICP as described in control file `sword.ct1`. All output from ASPICP is written to a file whose name is supplied by the user within the `.CTL` file.

### 5.2 Overview of FTEST

A small program named FTEST is provided to perform significance tests when comparing different ASPIC models of a stock. The program is designed for comparing pairs of models that differ only in complexity (number of parameters). The TEST program has a text user interface. To run, type

```
fctest
```

at a Windows command prompt and answer the program's prompts.

### 5.3 Overview of AGRAPH

The Windows program AGRAPH is intended to provide quick, good-quality graphics of ASPIC and ASPICP results. Preformatted time-series plots of relative benchmarks and of observed and fitted abundance indices are provided. Plots can be viewed on the screen, sent to a Windows printer, or saved as graphics files in several formats.

The AGRAPH program was not meant to meet all graphics needs of ASPIC users. Instead, it allows one to examine results quickly and to have graphics suitable for assessment reports. Operation of AGRAPH is similar to that of any Windows program. It can also be started from the command line. For example, to make graphs from results in file `sword.fit`, use the command

```
agraph sword.fit
```

## 6 ASPIC Input File Specification

ASPIC reads its input from a single file containing control parameters and data. The format of that file is described here.

### 6.1 Generating a sample input file

A new feature of ASPIC 5.0 is that a sample input file can be generated with the command

```
aspic -help
```

The sample file is useful as a template for making new input files. It could also be helpful to have it available when reading this section.

### 6.2 General format guidelines

The representation of values in the input file must follow certain rules, which follow from the use of Fortran list-directed read statements to read the data.

- The exact position of values on a line is not important. However, if a line contains more than one value, they must be in the correct order.

- When a line contains more than one value, they must be separated by spaces (blanks). *Using tab characters to separate values is not recommended.*

The remaining rules depend upon the type of the data item (integer, real, or character).

- Each *real number* should contain a decimal point, an exponent (marked by the letter d or e), or a decimal point and an exponent. Examples: 1.0, 2e3, 1.3d6. (Note that the notation 2e3 means  $2 \times 10^3$ .) An integer can be used in place of a whole real number.
- *Integers* must not contain decimal points or exponents. Examples: 0, 2, 94541.
- *Character strings* may be delimited by matched apostrophes or quotation marks. However, this is necessary only if the string contains embedded blanks or other special characters. Examples (each on a separate line):  
IRF  
'This is a valid string'  
"Another valid string"
- Each line must have the specified number of values, separated by spaces. Values may not be otherwise arranged among lines.
- After the specified number of values have been read from a line, the program does not read it further. Thus, the rest of the line may be used to contain comments. Comments are included in the sample input files, preceded by pound signs, **##**. The pound signs are used to make the comments stand out to the eye and do not themselves denote comments to ASPIC.
- After all data have been read from the file, as determined by the number of years of data and number of data series, any further contents of the file are ignored by ASPIC. Thus, additional comments may be appended to the file.

### 6.3 The ASPIC input file, line by line

#### LINE 1: PROGRAM MODE

This is a character string of length 3, with possible values FIT (fitting mode), BOT (bootstrap mode), or IRF (iteratively reweighted fit mode). Further explanation of program modes is found in §4.3.

#### LINE 2: TITLE OF ANALYSIS

This is a character string of length 110 characters or less. The title is written to the main output file to identify the particular analysis. The title will also appear on graphs made with AGRAPH and projections made with ASPICP.

Since the title almost always contains spaces, it should be surrounded by quotation marks.

If the first character in the title is an asterisk (\*), the main output file will contain control codes to activate the "lineprinter" font on many laser printers. This provides a simple method of neatly printing ASPIC output files, which are 120 characters wide.

Example: `"*Run 4 for Redfin Tuna, 1994"`

However, printer control codes so generated can be a nuisance when the files are *not* being printed in this way.

#### LINE 3: MODEL SHAPE AND OPTIMIZATION CONTROL

Note: In an effort to make ASPIC 5.0 as compatible as possible with earlier versions, the input file has the same general arrangement. However, additional control values are needed. Many of them appear on line 3, which make this section rather long.

Line 3 has a varying number of items.

☞ The *first value* on line 3 is a character string specifying the model shape (program shape mode).

Value	Meaning
LOGISTIC	Fit the logistic (Schaefer) model.
GENGRID	Fit the generalized model at grid of values <i>or at one specified value</i> .
FOX	Fit the Fox model (a special case of GENFIT, below).
GENFIT	Fit the generalized model and estimate its exponent directly.

☞ The *second value* on line 3 is a character string specifying the conditioning mode for the fit. For more information, see §4.5.2 on page 9.

Value	Meaning
YLD	Condition fitting on yield (recommended for most analyses).
EFT	Condition fitting on fishing-effort rate.


☞ The *third value* on line 3 is a character string specifying the objective function.





Value	Objective function
SSE	Sum of squared errors (recommended default).
LAV	Least absolute values (robust objective function).

Before setting values 4, 5, and 6 on line 3, define  $\phi$  as the decimal fraction defining model shape,  $\phi \equiv B_{\text{MSY}}/K$  (thus  $0 < \phi < 1$ ). Then define  $\Phi = \text{nint}(100\phi)$ , where “nint” is the nearest integer function, and thus  $0 < \Phi < 100$ ).

For example, in the logistic model,  $B_{\text{MSY}} = K/2$ , so  $\phi = 0.5$  and  $\Phi = 50$ . For the Fox model,  $\phi = \exp(-1) \approx 0.3679$  and  $\Phi = 37$ .


 The *fourth value* on line 3 is an integer, the lowest  $\Phi$  to consider in GENGRID and GENFIT shape modes. A reasonable default might be 25. If present, this value is ignored in LOGISTIC and FOX shape modes.

 The *fifth value* on line 3 is an integer, the highest  $\Phi$  to consider in GENGRID and GENFIT shape modes. A reasonable default might be 75. If present, this value is ignored in LOGISTIC and FOX shape modes.

 The *sixth value* on line 3 is an integer whose interpretation depends on the shape mode chosen:

Shape mode	Meaning of fifth value
GENGRID	Step size for grid of shape parameters examined.
GENFIT	Starting value for shape parameter.
LOGISTIC	Ignored.
FOX	Ignored.

In GENFIT shape mode, a reasonable default is often to use the logistic, i. e., to use 50.

 The *seventh value* on line 3 is a real number that sets bounds to constrain the generalized fit near the logistic. For example, a value of 8.0 means that MSY for the generalized fit must lie between  $1/8\times$  and  $8\times$  the MSY estimated in the logistic fit. This ad hoc method is used to increase stability in fitting. In simulation studies, the value 8.0 has proven a reasonable default. The parameter  $K$  is also constrained, but on much wider bounds.

To use a specified model shape, use GENGRID shape mode, set the fourth and fifth values equal to the specified shape, and set the sixth value (the step size) to zero.

#### EXAMPLES OF LINE 3

**Example 1.** Specify a grid-search for the shape parameter between  $\Phi = 40$  and  $\Phi = 60$  (a moderate range around the logistic,  $\Phi = 50$ ). Use a step size in  $\Phi$  of 5. Set bounds on MSY of  $1/8\times$  to  $8\times$  the logistic estimates. Use SSE (least squares) objective function (in log space), conditioned on (matching) the effort in the input file. Note that EFT here is the equivalent to the optimization mode CAT in ASPIC 3.x.

GENGRID EFT SSE 40 60 5 8.0

**Example 2.** Fit the generalized model conditioned on effort, with bounds of  $\Phi = [40, 70]$  and starting value  $\Phi = 50$ . Constrain the generalized estimate closer to the logistic than in Example 1.

GENFIT EFT SSE 40 70 50 5.0

**Example 3.** Use a fitting procedure that could be accomplished with ASPIC 3.x. Fit the logistic model, conditioned on yield. When fitting the logistic model, only the first three values on line 3 are required.

LOGISTIC YLD SSE

#### LINE 4: VERBOSITY & OUTPUT FILE CONTROL

This is a single integer value that controls the amount of output printed to the screen during execution (the “verbosity”) and whether the optional \*.SUM and \*.PRN files (§4.7) are generated. To generate those files, set this value in the range 10–14; to suppress the files, set the value in the range 0–4.

Note that the optional files can also be controlled by options in the .INI file (§7 on page 19). If the files are turned on *in either way*, they will be generated.

To control the amount of screen output, set the value within the ranges 0–4 or 10–14. In terms of screen output, 0 is equivalent to 10, 1 is equivalent to 11, and so on. A setting of 0 or 10 gives very little screen output; 4 or 14 are intended for debugging, and give too much for any practical purpose. The recommended value is 2 or 12 (moderate screen output).

#### LINE 5: NUMBER OF BOOTSTRAP TRIALS

An integer  $0 \leq n \leq 1000$ . A reasonable default is 500. Although this is used only in BOT program mode, in other program modes it still must be set to a valid integer, which will be ignored.

#### LINE 6: MONTE CARLO SEARCHING

This line contains two integers to control the optional Monte Carlo (MC) search during fitting.

☞ The *first value* on line 6 may be 0 to disable the Monte Carlo search during fitting; 1 to enable MC searching; or 2 for repeated searching. Turning MC on can help when a repeatable solution is otherwise difficult to find. Unfortunately, when strong local minima are present, the MC search can cause more problems than it solves. The author recommends leaving it off unless it is definitely needed.

☞ The *second value* on line 6 sets the initial number of Monte Carlo trials. When repeated searches are enabled, this number is reduced by the program in searches after the first. Even if the first number on this line is 0, the second number is needed as a placeholder.

As stated above, the recommended procedure is to leave searching off unless it is needed. If turned on, suggested parameters are: 1 50000. Monte Carlo searching, and particularly repeated searching, increases execution time considerably.

#### LINE 7: CONVERGENCE CRITERION FOR OPTIMIZER

This convergence criterion is a real number denoted  $\varepsilon_1$ . After each adjustment of the simplex, the objective function is computed for each vertex of the simplex. Convergence is defined to occur when the following condition is met:

$$\frac{2 |L_1 - L_0|}{L_1 + L_0} < \varepsilon_1.$$

where  $L_1$  is the highest objective-function value in the simplex and  $L_0$  is the lowest.

The recommended value is  $\varepsilon_1 = 1 \times 10^{-8}$ , which is written as 1d-8 in the input file. Using a different value is not recommended.

#### LINE 8: RESTART CONTROL

Randomized restarts are used by the ASPIC optimizer to avoid local minima. The two values (real, integer) on line 8 control this mechanism.

☞ The *first value* on line 8 is the tolerance  $\varepsilon_2$  for ending restarts. When objective function values from  $k$  restarts in a row agree to within this tolerance, the solution is accepted. The recommended value is  $\varepsilon_2 = 3 \times 10^{-8}$ , which is written as 3d-8 in the input file. Changing this value is not recommended.

☞ The *second value* on line 8 sets  $k$ , the minimum number of restarts required. The recommended default for this integer value is 6. Larger numbers can be used if needed to obtain a solution not overly sensitive to starting values. (The value used by ASPIC 3.x was  $k = 3$ , increased in version 3.89 to  $k = 6$ .)

#### LINE 9: CONTROL OF ITERATIVE COMPUTATIONS

Iterative computations are used by ASPIC in several places. The two values (real, integer) on line 9 control two important sets of iterative computations.

☞ The *first value* on line 9 is the tolerance  $\varepsilon_3$  for computing the annual fishing mortality rate ( $F$ ). When conditioning on yield, an iterative method must be used to estimate  $F$ ; it continues until successive estimates are within  $\varepsilon_3$ . The recommended value is  $\varepsilon_3 = 1 \times 10^{-4}$ , which is written as 1d-4 in the input file. Changing this value is not recommended.

In EFT optimization mode,  $\varepsilon_3$  must be present in the input file, but it is ignored.

☞ The *second value* on line 9 is the number of time steps used per year for the generalized model, range 2-100. A reasonable default is between 12 and 24 steps. The choice affects execution speed (§2.2.1).

When fitting the logistic (Schaefer) model, this number is not required. If present, it is ignored.

#### LINE 10: MAXIMUM ESTIMATED $F$

This line contains a real number specifying the maximum allowable estimate of  $F$ . This maximum (used when conditioning on yield) serves to aid the optimizer. The recommended default is 8d0, which works well in most cases.



LINE 11: STATISTICAL WEIGHT FOR  $B_1$  PENALTY IN OBJECTIVE FUNCTION

This line contains a real number that controls the influence of the penalty term on  $B_1 > K$  (see §4.5.1). To omit the penalty term, set this to 0d0. To use the penalty term, enter a positive real number (usually 1d0). The penalty is useful in analyses showing a sharp decline in relative abundance in the initial years; such data sets can otherwise result in an extremely high estimate of  $B_1$ .

The recommended default is no penalty. If the resulting estimate of  $B_1/K$  is too high, the analyst can try either the penalty term or fixing  $B_1/K$  rather than estimating it. Either approach can affect estimates of management quantities; sensitivity analyses are useful to examine this. The penalty term is described in [Prager \(1994\)](#); fixing  $B_1$ , in [Punt \(1990\)](#).

LINE 12: NUMBER OF DATA SERIES

This line has a single integer from 1 to 10 that indicates how many data series are to be analyzed. The types of allowable data series are summarized in Table 1 on page 10.

LINE 13: SERIES-SPECIFIC STATISTICAL WEIGHTS

The program reads as many real numbers from this line as series were specified on the preceding line. The statistical weight  $w_i$  for series  $i$  is multiplied by each squared residual for that series when the objective function is computed. When IRF program mode is used to analyze more than one data series, the  $w_i$  are adjusted to implement inverse-variance weighting. They can all be set to unity, best written 1d0 in the input file, unless there is reason to set them otherwise.

LINE 14: STARTING GUESS FOR  $B_1/K$

This line contains a single real number between zero and one. Set this value based on your belief about the stock's condition at the start of the data set. In the absence of other information, a reasonable default is 0.5.

LINE 15: STARTING GUESS FOR MSY

In the absence of other information, half the largest yield can be used as a starting guess. This should be entered as a real number.

LINE 16: STARTING GUESS FOR  $K$

In the absence of other information, a reasonable guess is 2 to 20 times the largest recorded yield. This should be entered as a real number.

LINE 17: STARTING GUESS(ES) FOR  $q$

The program reads as many real numbers from this line as there are data series specified on line 12. The meaning of  $q$  depends on the data type that it refers to. When it refers to an effort-yield data series (code CE in Table 1),  $q$  is the catchability coefficient. When it refers to a biomass index data series (codes I0, I1, or I2, Table 1),  $q$  is the constant relating the index data to the internal ASPIC estimates of biomass; e.g., if  $q = 2.0$ , the index data are divided by 2.0 before being compared to the estimated biomass. When it refers to a biomass estimate series (codes B0, B1, or B2, Table 1, the user's value of  $q$  is ignored, but a number must be present as a placeholder.

For technical reasons, optimization is more difficult when  $q$  is large. Thus, a successful result is most often obtained when the catch and index data are scaled so that all  $q_i < 0.01$ . This, of course, does not apply to Bn data series, for which by definition  $q_i = 1$ .

LINE 18: FLAGS TO ESTIMATE (OR FIX) INDIVIDUAL PARAMETERS

If line 12 specifies  $I$  data series, the program reads  $I + 3$  integer values ("flags") from this line. The flags refer, in order, to  $B_1/K$ , MSY,  $K$ , and  $q_i, i = \{1, 2, \dots, I\}$ . Set the flag to 1 to estimate the corresponding parameter, or 0 to keep the parameter constant at the starting guess. No flag should be set to any value other than 0 or 1. Although  $q_i$  is not estimated for some series types,  $I + 3$  flags are always required.

LINE 19: BOUNDS ON MSY

This line contains maximum and minimum bounds on the estimate of MSY. These two real numbers are used to limit the solution to reasonable values. The user defines what is reasonable by setting these values. If final estimates are at either constraint, an error message is printed on screen and in the output file. Bootstrap trials falling outside these bounds are discarded.



#### LINE 20: BOUNDS ON $K$

This line contains maximum and minimum bounds on the estimate of  $K$ . They are used in the same way as the bounds on  $MSY$ .

#### LINE 21: RANDOM NUMBER SEED

Use a large (7-digit) positive integer. Different numbers result in different random number sequences. Using the same seed allows duplication of a previous run.

Using a different seed should result in the same answer (within expected computation errors); if results are substantially different, at least one of the solutions was a local minimum. The user can attempt to remove sensitivity to random number seed by increasing the number of restarts required (second number on line 8).

#### LINE 22: NUMBER OF YEARS IN DATA SET

The total number  $y$  of years described by the input file, including any years with missing values. Within the file, each data series must be of length  $y$  and describe the same specific years. Nonoverlapping series can be accommodated by padding each series with missing values or zeroes as appropriate.

#### FOLLOWING LINES: INDIVIDUAL DATA SERIES

There must be one data block (group of lines) for each data series. Each block should include data for all  $y$  years; thus, each data block must be the same length  $y$ . The composition of each block is as follows —

- (a) On the first line of the block, a series title (character string, length  $\leq 40$ , in quotes). Example: "Spring survey & total landings"
- (b) On the second line of the block, a character string of length 2 with the type code for the series. Type codes are listed in Table 1 (p. 10).
- (c) Starting on the third line of the block, one data line for each year, with the following data on each line, separated by blanks —
  - (c1) *First number* — the year or other ID number. These are consecutive integers and must be identical from block (data series) to block. Numbers greater than 9999 will not print correctly.
  - (c2) *Second number* — a real number whose meaning depends on the series type. For type CE, it is the fishing-effort rate  $f$  for the year. For type CC, it is the average relative abundance (usually based on CPUE). For types B0, B1, or B2, it is a stock-biomass estimate. For types I0, I1, or I2, it is a relative abundance value.
  - (c3) *Third number* — a real number, required for CE or CC series only, giving the total yield (catch in biomass) from the fishery for that year. For other types of series (Bn or In), the third number is not needed and if present, it is ignored.

Although yield-effort data series are designated type CE, effort is entered before yield on these lines. Similarly, in series type CC, the relative abundance appears before the yield. ❖

As noted in §6.3, it is recommended (although not absolutely necessary) to scale the catch and index data so that all  $q_i < 0.01$ . This does not apply to Bn data series, for which by definition  $q_i = 1$ .

## 6.4 Common questions about data series

### 6.4.1 MISSING VALUES AND ZEROES

Missing or zero data values are allowed in an ASPIC input file in some cases, depending on the conditioning mode and type of data series. All possible cases are described in Table 3, along with the action taken by ASPIC. A data line with a missing value or with  $f = 0$  does not contribute to the objective function; however, the information present on the line is used in the analysis and does influence the estimates.

Any negative data item in the input file is considered a missing value by ASPIC. Thus a value can be set missing by inserting a minus sign in front of it, and the value can be restored in a later analysis by removing the minus sign. When a missing value appears in the ASPIC input file, an estimate of the underlying value appears in the output file.

Missing values are always distinct from true zero values. Zero should never be used to indicate a missing value, and a negative number should never be used for an observed zero.

Zero values of the abundance measure (CPUE) are never permitted, because it is assumed that the resource is not extinct during the analysis period. If an abundance index calculated prior to using ASPIC is

Table 3. Actions taken by ASPIC when data series include data record(s) with missing value(s) or zero(es). Dash (—) indicates normal data (neither missing nor zero). M indicates a record with missing datum; Z, with zero datum. Series type Index includes I0, I1, I2, B0, B1, and B2 series.

Cond. mode	Series type	CPUE or effort	Yield	Action by ASPIC
YLD	CC	M	—	Fit; estimate missing CPUE.
YLD	CC	—	M	Stop: missing yield not allowed when conditioning on yield.
YLD	CC	M	M	Stop: missing yield not allowed when conditioning on yield.
YLD	CC	M	Z	Fit with $F = Y = 0$ (no fishing).
YLD	CC	Z	M	Stop: missing yield not allowed when conditioning on yield.
YLD	CC	Z	—	Stop: zero CPUE never allowed.
YLD	CC	—	Z	Fit with $F = Y = 0$ (no fishing).
YLD	CC	Z	Z	Stop: zero CPUE never allowed.
YLD	CE	M	—	Fit; estimate missing CPUE.
YLD	CE	—	M	Stop: missing yield not allowed when conditioning on yield.
YLD	CE	M	M	Stop: missing yield not allowed when conditioning on yield.
YLD	CE	M	Z	Fit with $F = Y = 0$ (no fishing).
YLD	CE	Z	M	Stop: missing yield not allowed when conditioning on yield.
YLD	CE	Z	—	Stop for error: when $F = 0$ , $Y$ must be 0.
YLD	CE	—	Z	Stop: zero CPUE never allowed.
YLD	CE	Z	Z	Fit with $F = Y = 0$ (no fishing).
YLD	Index	M	—	Fit; estimate missing CPUE.
YLD	Index	Z	—	Stop: zero CPUE never allowed.
EFT	CC	M	—	Stop: missing CPUE not allowed when conditioning on effort.
EFT	CC	—	M	Stop: missing yield not estimable in this case.
EFT	CC	M	M	Stop: missing effort not allowed when conditioning on effort.
EFT	CC	M	Z	Stop: missing effort not allowed when conditioning on effort.
EFT	CC	Z	M	Stop: zero CPUE never allowed.
EFT	CC	Z	—	Stop: zero CPUE never allowed.
EFT	CC	—	Z	Fit with $F = Y = 0$ (no fishing).
EFT	CC	Z	Z	Stop: zero CPUE never allowed.
EFT	CE	M	—	Stop: missing effort not allowed when conditioning on effort.
EFT	CE	—	M	Fit; estimate missing catch
EFT	CE	M	M	Stop: missing effort not allowed when conditioning on effort.
EFT	CE	M	Z	Stop: missing effort not allowed when conditioning on effort.
EFT	CE	Z	M	Estimate with $F = Y = 0$ (no fishing).
EFT	CE	Z	—	Stop; if $F = 0$ , $Y$ must be 0.
EFT	CE	—	Z	Stop: zero CPUE never allowed.
EFT	CE	Z	Z	Estimate with $F = Y = 0$ (no fishing).
EFT	Index	M	—	Fit; estimate missing effort.
EFT	Index	Z	—	Stop: zero CPUE never allowed.

zero in a given year, one could try using a small number (e. g., 20% to 50% of the lowest nonzero value) in its place. Use of an *extremely* small number (e. g., 1% of the lowest nonzero value) will usually result in a large residual during the ASPIC analysis; such

a residual can influence the results strongly. Thus, converting zeroes to very small numbers is not recommended.

#### 6.4.2 ALLOCATION OF YIELD AMONG SERIES

When analyzing more than one data series, it is not always possible — or desirable — to associate a yield with each measure of fishing effort rate or relative abundance. A common example is having several abundance indices for a stock, but only the total annual yield. This section aims to describe how ASPIC assumes yield is allocated among data series.

Yield is entered in both CE and CC series. Because ASPIC derives an abundance index from each CE series, it is important that the yield in a CE series correspond to the fishing-effort rate in the same series.

In contrast, it is not necessary for the abundance index in a CC series to correspond to the yield in the same series. For example, a valid CC series might have an abundance index computed from one fishery on a stock, paired with the total catch from all fisheries on that stock.

Despite the above, it is important that yield, summed across series, represent a constant proportion (usually assumed 1.0) of total removals. Changes in that proportion, whether due to reporting changes or changes in discarding practices, violate a fundamental assumption of ASPIC (and of most other assessment models). The consequences of that violation will depend on its severity.

#### ❖ 6.4.3 CAUTION ON ZEROS, MISSING VALUES

The author has attempted to ensure that results of computations including missing and zero values are correct under all combinations of data series type, conditioning mode, and model shape. To that end, a simple test has been done of every combination shown in Table 3. Still, some cases occur infrequently in real data and so have not been tested repeatedly. Users are urged to examine results critically when missing and zero values are used and to advise the author if any problems should arise.

## 7 Advanced Options for ASPIC

Several advanced options for ASPIC are available if the file ASPIC.INI is found in the directory where the program is run (usually the directory containing the data files). ASPIC.INI is a simple ASCII file. It should have on each line an option name, an = sign, and a value. Depending on the option, the value should be a number or a binary indicator. If binary, the values 1 or T turn the option on; values 0 or F turn it off. Comments may be included in

ASPIC.INI as lines beginning with the hash character #.

The options are listed here with their meanings—

- **sfile**—If this is turned on, ASPIC writes an extra output file (extension .PRN) in an ASCII format readable by S-Plus or R with a command like `read.table("sword.prn", header=T)`

The file can also be imported by spreadsheet programs, as it has fixed column widths delimited by spaces. After importing the file, it may be necessary to use search-and-replace to change the text 'NA' (the missing-value indicator in the .PRN file) to the spreadsheet's missing-value indicator.

The .PRN file has the observed and estimated CPUE series and estimated series of  $F/F_{MSY}$  and  $B/B_{MSY}$ . It is intended mainly to facilitate making time-series plots.

- **sumfile**—If turned on, this option causes ASPIC to write in the current directory a summary file (file extension .SUM) with summary parameter estimates for each run made in that directory. The SUM file also can be read easily by S-language packages. It is intended mainly for use in simulation studies.
- **ci**—This option, if set to an integer  $n$ ,  $50 < n < 100$ , adjusts the intervals calculated and printed in bootstrap mode. ASPIC prints two sets of confidence intervals. The defaults are 80% and 50% intervals. With this option the 50% intervals can be replaced by another value.
- **ljcode**—If turned on, this causes the main output file to be begun with an escape code that turns on the “lineprinter” font of most laser printers. This is a small font that allows ASPIC output files (which are 120 characters wide) to be printed without line breaks. (The same effect can be achieved by beginning the run title in the input file with an asterisk.)

Of the preceding options, only the option **ci** cannot be controlled by other means.

## 8 ASPICP Input File Specification

The control file for ASPICP is relatively short; it should have the file extension .CTL. For the correct way to represent different data types in the file,

see §6.2. A sample file is provided with the ASPIC distribution.

## 8.1 Line by line

### LINE 1: PROJECTION TITLE

This is a character string, length  $\leq 70$ . The title usually contains blanks and should be delimited by quotation marks. The ASPICP output file will also include the title of the original ASPIC run.

### LINE 2: NAME OF BIO FILE

A character string specifying the name of a BIO file from an ASPIC bootstrap run. Results from ASPICP will be based on the data in that file.

### LINE 3: NAME OF OUTPUT FILE

A character string with the name of the ASPICP output file. If the file already exists, it will be overwritten. For compatibility with AGRAPH, use the file extension .PRJ.

### LINE 4: ANY REAL NUMBER

A real number, not used at present, must be put here as a placeholder. It is best to use zero (represented 0d0), in case this option is implemented later.

### LINE 5: NUMBER OF YEARS TO SKIP AT START OF PLOTS

An integer with recommended values 0 to 3. The first few years of biomass and mortality estimates are especially imprecise. Also, analysis of certain data sets can give in very high estimated biomasses in the first few years. Thus, omitting the first few years from the plots can be useful.

### LINE 6: NUMBER OF YEARS OF PROJECTIONS

Integer between 0 and 15. The longer projections extend, the more speculative they are. For that reason, early versions of ASPICP limited projections to only 10 years, but some users found that overly restrictive. Projections are theoretical constructs and are most useful when comparing management strategies, rather than as forecasts of the future.

FOLLOWING LINES: MANAGEMENT REGIME TO PROJECT

Each following line has data for one projection year; the number of lines should equal the number of years specified on line 6. On each line, enter a real number followed by a single character. The real number represents the yield or relative fishing mortality rate to be applied that year, and the character tells which type of value the number is. For example, line 7 of the .CTL file might read

1.456d3 Y

to indicate that in the first projection year, a yield of 1,456 units will be taken. Thus, lines ending in Y are used for making projections conditioned on quota (TAC) management measures.

As another example, line 8 of the .CTL file might read

0.85d0 F

to indicate that in the second projection year, the fishing effort rate will be 85% of the rate in the final year of the original data. Thus, lines ending in F are used for making projections based on proportional reductions in fishing mortality rate. This use of relative values allows F-based projections to be made with reasonable confidence even when the estimated fishing mortality in absolute terms is quite imprecise.

F lines and Y lines can be mixed in the .CTL file. That might be done, e.g., when yield in the first projection year is already known, and management in subsequent years is to be by control of fishing effort.

## 8.2 Sample ASPICP input file

---

```
"Case with Y02=Y01; F03 to F07 = F(MSY)"
test.bio
test.prj
0d0
0
6
1200 Y
0.55 F
0.55 F
0.55 F
0.55 F
0.55 F
```

---

## 9 Interpretation of ASPIC Results

- ❖ This section explains some features of ASPIC estimates, and reviews considerations important when using ASPIC. Prager (1994) and Prager et al. (1996) contain additional discussion.

### 9.1 Precision of parameter estimates

Production models tend to estimate some quantities considerably more precisely than others. Among the quantities more precisely estimated are maximum sustainable yield (MSY), optimum effort ( $f_{\text{MSY}}$ ), and relative levels of stock biomass and fishing mortality rate. Here, relative levels means the biomass level relative to the level at which MSY is attained or the level of fishing mortality relative to that at which MSY is attained.

To provide more precise estimates, then, it is often useful to divide the stock-size estimates provided by ASPIC by the corresponding estimate of stock size at MSY ( $B_{\text{MSY}}$ ). Similarly, the estimates of fishing mortality rate  $F$  are divided by  $F_{\text{MSY}}$  to obtain relative estimates. In its output files, ASPIC provides such relative estimates. The relative estimates present a more precise picture of the condition of the stock, because in normalization, the estimate of  $q$  — which is usually imprecise — cancels out.

In contrast, absolute levels of stock biomass (and related quantities), which include uncertainty in the estimate of  $q$ , are usually estimated much less precisely. One cannot place nearly as much credence in the absolute estimates of stock size,  $F$ , or any quantities that depend upon them. Absolute estimates of  $B_t$  and  $F_t$  from ASPIC are provided for the modeler's information and are not intended for use as management guidelines.

When two or more data series are analyzed, estimated ratios of catchabilities are typically estimated more precise than estimates of each  $q$ . Also,  $K$  may be estimated imprecisely or inaccurately even when MSY and  $f_{\text{MSY}}$  are estimated well. Again, this reflects the difficulty of translating relative biomass changes to an absolute scale.

The starting biomass, estimated as  $B_1/K$ , may be considered a nuisance parameter, and its estimate is often imprecise. Punt (1990) recommended fixing  $B_1/K = 1.0$  (rather than estimating it) for the Cape hake stock off southern Africa, but it is not clear that that approach is appropriate for every stock. A

similar approach is taken in using the penalty term described in §4.5.1.

To stabilize estimates from a particular data set, it can be useful to fit the model with  $B_1/K$  fixed at a range of values. Although the resulting estimates of the biomass trajectory will of course diverge at the beginning, they may provide sufficiently consistent estimates of present stock status for management purposes.

### 9.2 Estimating several catchability coefficients

ASPIC can use more than one data series in estimation. The analyst should be aware that the underlying assumption is that each abundance measure reflects the entire stock, except for random error. Thus, using this feature is similar to deriving an abundance index from each series and averaging them together.

It is not recommended to use abundance indices that are uncorrelated or negatively correlated with one another, unless their overlap is short. When abundance indices present different pictures, CPUE might instead be standardized with a model to remove effects of vessel type, area, gear, season, etc., before fitting an assessment model. The resulting index of yearly abundance can then be used as a 'CC' series with the total catch. This provides quicker and more reliable estimation from ASPIC, but more importantly, it removes explainable variation from the data, which would otherwise become noise.

#### 9.2.1 CATCHABILITY OVER TIME

The user can estimate separate catchability coefficients for different periods of time. This is accomplished in practice by putting the periods of time in separate data series, each padded with zeroes or missing values as appropriate. This procedure can be used to examine hypotheses about changing catchability with time, perhaps as a result of changing fishing gear or changing environmental conditions. In interpreting such models, there are several considerations.

One concern is estimating whether the improvement in fit obtained from a more complex model is statistically significant. An ASPIC model with time-varying catchability can be tested against the base model (i.e., the simpler model with constant catchability) with an  $F$ -ratio test. Here  $F$  is the  $F$  distribution of statistics, not fishing mortality rate. The test statistic is



$$F^* = \frac{(SSE_s - SSE_c)/\nu_1}{SSE_c/\nu_2}, \quad (2)$$

where  $SSE_s$  and  $SSE_c$  are the error sums of squares of the simple and complex models, respectively;  $\nu_1$  is the difference in number of estimated parameters between the two models; and  $\nu_2$  is the number of data points less the total number of estimated parameters. The significance probability of  $F^*$  can be obtained from standard tables of the  $F$ -distribution with  $\nu_1$  and  $\nu_2$  degrees of freedom.

A small program called FTEST is supplied with ASPIC to facilitate making certain such tests. This program assumes that the same data are used for both models, but are divided into different periods with different estimates of  $q$ . The weighting for the penalty term (line 11 in the ASPIC input file) should be set to zero for this  $F$ -ratio test to be theoretically correct. The FTEST program is interactive, and takes all input from the screen.

Three often-repeated caveats apply when using the  $F$ -ratio test for this purpose. First, hypothesis tests are invalid when suggested by examination of the data. Instead, the test should be suggested by external information, such as changes in gear. Second, the significance of a series of tests is less than that of a single test. For information on this point, consult a reference on multiple comparisons (e.g., [Klockars and Sax 1986](#)). Third, hypothesis tests generally assume correct specification of the model. Thus, significance probabilities of tests on assessment models are always approximate. This caveat is especially important when there is evidence that the model does not fit well.

A nonparametric test of the null hypothesis  $q_1 = q_2$  can be conducted from the fitting results. This test is constructed by examining the bootstrap estimates of the ratio of the two catchability coefficients. As an example, assume that the alternative hypothesis is that  $q_1 \neq q_2$ . Then the null would be rejected at  $P < 0.05$  if a bias-corrected 95% confidence interval on  $q_1/q_2$  did not include the value 1.0. Like the  $F$  test, this test is approximate because of the possibility of specification error. In addition, bootstrapping residuals may underestimate the true variability present in a time series ([Freedman and Peters 1984](#)). This has been addressed to some degree in the current version of ASPIC by the adjustment made to the residuals before bootstrapping is begun.

### 9.3 Estimation difficulties

The information in this section is central to obtaining correct results. Please read it thoroughly. ❖

The optimization method used in ASPIC ([Nelder and Mead 1965](#)) is quite robust, but in unmodified form frequently stops at local minima (these represent sub-optimal solutions). This has been addressed in ASPIC with a restarting algorithm that requires the same solution to be found several times in a row before it is accepted. In the author's experience, the resulting optimizer is reasonably effective at avoiding local minima.

Nonetheless, ASPIC, like other programs that attempt complex nonlinear optimization, occasionally finds local, rather than global, minima. Two features of the program—beyond the restarting algorithm already mentioned—are available to detect and remedy this problem. First, solutions obtained at local minima are often not reasonable, and this will often cause one of the parameters to be estimated at either its minimum or maximum bound. In such a case, a warning message is printed, both on screen and in the output file.

A second feature that can help avoid local minima is an optional Monte Carlo phase of estimation. When enabled, this tries to improve the initial fit by randomly searching for a better one in the neighborhood of the initial fit. If multiple searches are enabled, a shorter Monte Carlo search takes place periodically during fitting. Although such searches considerably increase the time required to find a solution, they can be helpful in avoiding local minima. If a solution is difficult to find, it can be helpful to enable the Monte Carlo searches.

When fitting difficult data sets, it can be useful to make several runs with different random number seeds. Agreement among a number of runs suggests that the solution is stable.

Occasionally ASPIC fails to converge to a minimum at all. This often indicates that the data do not fit the model very well, which can sometimes be verified by examining the results with AGRAPH. When there is no fit, the input file should be checked for errors (e.g., reversed catch and effort values). Rarely, changing the maximum value of  $F$  allowed (line 10 of the ASPIC input file) can improve convergence, if the problem occurs in EFF optimization mode. If the objective function appears (from the screen output) to have been near convergence, simply trying a second ASPIC run that uses the first run's results as starting



guesses can sometimes provide a good solution. If the model includes several data sets (fisheries), it can be useful to eliminate one or more of them, at least temporarily, to see if convergence can be achieved.

If none of these suggestions is successful, estimates can often be made with the following strategy. Set one parameter (usually  $B_1/K$ ) to a fixed value by setting the corresponding estimation flag (line 18 of the ASPIC input file) to zero. A solution might be possible conditional upon that value of  $B_1/K$ . If this technique leads to a solution, a range of fixed values of  $B_1/K$  can be tried and the solutions examined. Similar values of the objective function among solutions indicate that the solutions are nearly equivalent in terms of fit. Although the solutions will differ somewhat, they still may be useful, especially as confirmatory information or if little other information is available for management.

Although ASPIC has been tested on thousands of simulated and real data sets and is believed to operate correctly, errors can exist in any computer programs. Any user experiencing bugs or suspected bugs is asked to send the author copies of the input and output files by email: Mike.Prager@noaa.gov. The author attempts to correct all errors promptly.

## 10 Program change history

### Changes in Version 3.33

Between version 2.8 and version 3.33, major changes were as follows:

- Addition of EFF mode (conditioning on yield) and estimation of missing effort
- Bias corrections of confidence intervals on parameters and population projections (using bootstrap)
- ASPIC-P program for computing bias corrected trajectories and projections with approximate nonparametric confidence intervals
- Character plots added to the program output
- The starting guess and estimate of  $B_1$  specified as ratios to  $B_{MSY}$
- Optional Monte Carlo phase to increase resistance to local minima
- Added iterative reweighting (IRF mode) when analyzing several series

- User-specified limits on MSY and  $K$
- Management benchmarks  $f_{0.1}$  and  $Y_{0.1}$  computed
- User-specified random number seed
- Added detailed messages for errors in the input file

### Changes in Version 3.55

Between version 3.33 and version 3.55, major changes were as follows:

- Added more statistics on stock status in final year
- Replaced  $K$  with MSY in parameterization
- Added CC series type to avoid manually converting CPUE to effort.
- Added CPUE plots to output
- Added correlation matrix among indices to output
- Revised IRF mode so that the sum of weights remains equal to the number of data points
- Added residual adjustment factor for bootstrapping
- Added "coverage" and "nearness" statistics
- Improved Monte Carlo search algorithm

### Changes in Version 3.82

Between version 3.55 and version 3.82, major changes were as follows:

- Several improvements to Monte Carlo search routine
- Fixed bug in plotting index (I0, I1, I2) series and improved plot layouts
- Increased maximum number of years in data from 60 to 90
- Fixed a bug that didn't replace bad bootstrap trials
- Added LaserJet code option for output files
- Changed output for CE data series from observed and estimated effort to observed and estimated CPUE

- Fixed a crash when the number of bootstraps was set to 1
- Added printout of Monte Carlo setting to output file
- Allowed user to specify input file name on command line

### Changes in Version 5.00

Version numbers in the 4.xx series were used for test releases of what is now designated version 5.00. Between version 3.82 and 5.00, the following additions and corrections were made:

- Added generalized model conditioned on effort and on catch.
- Added user-specified number of restarts for convergence.
- Renamed conditioning modes to YLD and EFT for conditioning on yield and effort, respectively.
- Added an optional basic, S-compatible output file (.PRN file).
- Added .SUM output file for simulation studies. File name can be passed as second command-line argument.
- Fixed a bug in which residuals  $r > 4$  (in log space) weren't plotted.
- Made changes to the .BIO output file for compatibility of the generalized model with the new version of ASPICP.
- Changed negative correlation action from program stop to issuing a warning.
- Add FOX model shape as a special case of the generalized model.
- Revised format of the .DET output file for better compatibility with S-Plus and R.
- Made changes to unambiguously handle zero CPUE in a CC series as a missing value.
- Version 4.12: Added estimate of  $Y.(F_{MSY})$  to output file at suggestion of A. D. MacCall.
- Corrected handling of the rare case of a year (1) conditioning on yield, (2) abundance index present, (3) yield is zero. A residual is now computed based on estimated and observed abundance indices.
- Added a penalty when  $MSY > K$  during fitting.
- Printed AIC on GENFIT and GENGRID output.
- Added internal constraints on  $q$ .
- A sample input file (sample.inp) can be generated by `aspic -help` on the command line.

## 11 Source Code

The Fortran source code for this software uses certain proprietary routines from the book *Numerical Recipes* by Press et al., and for that reason can not be freely distributed. Numerical Recipes Software has kindly granted their permission (ID number V95038) for the author to supply the source code to users upon specific request. However, any source code so supplied must not then be redistributed to others.

The author also wishes to be aware of all distribution of the source code, so that any useful modifications or error corrections can be made in the master copy of the software to benefit all users.

If you require a copy of the Fortran source code for this software, please request it from the author. In your letter or email, please include the following:

1. Your true name, institutional affiliation, physical address, and email address or telephone number
2. Your agreement that you will not redistribute the source code to others.
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