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"Influence of environmental conditions at different time scale on feeding and early life history traits of an inshore notothenioid fish from the South Shetland Islands "

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ABSTRACT

Feeding plasticity and growth rate during the early ontogeny are key factors in unpredictable, highly seasonal and harsh environments such as the Antarctic inshore waters. We studied the bio-physical interactions in the early life stages of the Antarctic spiny plunderfish *Harpagifer antarcticus*, a common component of the littoral benthic fish community distributed along the southern Scotia Arc. In this study, we tested the hypothesis that variability of phyto- and microzooplankton abundance determined by meteorological and oceanographic forcing occurs at different time scale (tidal, weekly), affecting in turn feeding habits, selectivity and life history traits linked to growth. As a result, the early life history strategy of this species consists of a spring-summer hatching of small, faster growing larvae, which develop into a demersal juvenile stage before their first winter of life; in addition, larvae exhibit a striking feeding behaviour plasticity ensuring higher feeding rates after major changes triggered by meteorological conditions.

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