

Skate Staff Report

Annual Monitoring Report

Amendment 5 update

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Council staff

Council meeting
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Skate Annual Monitoring Report (for FY 2019)

Charge:

Per skate regulations, the PDT meets at least annually to review the status of the species in the skate complex. At a minimum, this review includes:

- Annual updates to survey indices, fishery landings and discards;
- Re-evaluation of stock status based on the updated survey indices and FMP's overfishing definitions;
- Determination of whether any accountability measures (AMs) specified under §648.323 were triggered (i.e., if a wing or bait TAL was exceeded by >5% or the ACL was exceeded); and
- Changes to other FMPs (e.g., Northeast Multispecies, Monkfish, Atlantic Scallops) that may impact skate stocks, and describe the anticipated impacts of those changes on the skate fishery.

Based on this review, the Skate PDT provides guidance to the Skate Committee and the Council on the need to adjust measures in the Skate FMP to better achieve the FMP's objectives.



Stock Status

Species	Survey Years	Average Survey Biomass Index	% Change From 2016-2018	Current Status
Clearnose (<i>Raja eglanteria</i>)	2018-2019	1.05 kg/tow	+73.1%	Not overfished, No overfishing
Little (<i>Leucoraja erinacea</i>)	2017-2019	5.32 kg/tow	+13.4%	Not overfished, No overfishing
Rosette (<i>Leucoraja garmani</i>)	2018-2019	0.05 kg/tow	+6.4%	Not overfished, No overfishing
Winter (<i>Leucoraja ocellata</i>)	2017-2019	8.61 kg/tow	+19.2%	Not overfished, No overfishing
Barndoor (<i>Dipturus laevis</i>)	2017-2019	2.02 kg/tow	+11.4%	Not overfished, No overfishing
Smooth (<i>Malacoraja senta</i>)	2017-2019	0.27 kg/tow	0%	Not overfished, No overfishing



Stock Status

Rebuilding Stock Status

Species	Survey Years	Average Survey Biomass Index	% Change from 2016-2018	Current Status
Thorny (<i>Amblyraja radiata</i>)	2017-2019	0.18 kg/tow	+11.4%	Overfished, No overfishing

- Thorny has remained overfished since first declared in 2000. Biomass is only 4.3% of B_{MSY} target. Rebuilding deadline is 2028.
- In June, the Council clarified the research priority “Investigate age, growth, maturity, and fecundity of managed skate species” by adding “(esp. thorny and rosette).”



FY 2019 In-Season Skate Monitoring

Disposition	Live Skate Landings		TAL		Percent of TAL Landed
	(lb)	(mt)	(lb)	(mt)	
Wing	19,038,306	8,636	23,146,333	10,499	82.3%
Bait	8,515,179	3,862	11,660,249	5,289	73.0%
Total	27,553,485	12,498	34,806,582	15,788	79.2%

Includes:

- Weekly, in-season quota monitoring report landings.
- Landings sold to a Federal dealer or reported solely via VTRs (incl. vessel-to-vessel transfers) by vessels with a Federal fishing permit on the day of landing.

Excludes:

- Commercial landings from vessels without a Federal fishing permit on the day of landing.
- Research landings.



FY2019 Year-End Annual Catch Limit Accounting

	Landed weight		Percent of ACL (31,327 mt)
	(lb)	(mt)	
Northeast skate commercial landings	29,869,783	13,549	43.2%
Northeast skate state-permitted only vessel landings	383,529	174	0.6%
Northeast skate estimated dead discards	13,144,115	5,962	19.0%
Northeast skate recreational catch (landings and dead discards from MRIP)	2,229,125	1,011	3.2%
Total Northeast skate catch	45,626,552	20,696	66.1%

- “commercial landings” - by vessels with a Federal permit any time during the fishing yr & research landings.
- “state-permitted only vessel landings” - sold to Federal dealer by vessels w/o a Federal permit at any time during the yr.
- “estimated dead discards” - differs from specifications setting, which uses the NEFSC method.
- “recreational catch” - private angler and party/charter catch.
- **Not included:**
 - Vessel-to-vessel skate transfers (reported via VTRs, 201 mt).
 - Skate for personal use/home consumption (not reported to a Federal dealer).
 - Skate landings by state-only permitted vessels not reported to the Federal database (unknown).



FY 2019 Dealer-Reported Landings, Revenue

Disposition	Live Skate Landings		Revenue	Average price/lb
	(lb)	(mt)		
Wing	19,593,641	8,888	\$5,273,210	\$0.56
Bait	9,048,036	4,104	\$1,348,609	\$0.15
Unknown	403,120	183	\$241,885	\$0.60
Personal use/No market/Packing, only	1,135	0.5	n/a	n/a
Total	29,045,932	13,176	\$6,863,704	n/a

- “Live Skate Landings” - from Federal dealer database only and **includes**:
 - Landings by Federal permitted vessels (i.e., any vessel that had a Federal permit any time during the FY).
 - State-only permitted landings either sold to a federal dealer and/or were batched landings grouped together sent by a state.
 - Research landings.
- “Bait Landings” - dealer-reported landings and **excludes**:
 - VTR bait/home consumption landings.
 - Vessel-to vessel transfers reported only via VTRs.



Changes to Other FMPs Impacting Skate

Northeast Multispecies	FW 59	ACLs increased, skate catch could increase
	A23 (ongoing)	Improved data quality, some trips may be exempt
Scallop	FW32	ACLs decreased, skate catch could decrease
	A21 (ongoing)	Negligible to low positive skate impacts likely
Monkfish	FW12	TALs increase in N, decrease in S, likely not increase skate catch
	Discard Methodology Review	Negligible impact to skate
Herring	FW8	Likely negligible skate impacts
Spiny dogfish	2019-2021 Specs.	Specs. decrease, skate discards could increase
Longfin (Loligo) Squid	A20	Latent effort reduced; negative skate impacts likely
Summer Flounder, Scup, Black Sea Bass	Commercial/Rec. Allocation Amendment	Commercial and sector re-allocation, negative skate impacts likely
Habitat	Clam Dredge FW	Low positive skate impacts likely

Skate Research – focus on thorny

- Recently-completed projects
 - Evaluation of post-release discard mortality in Gulf of Maine
 - Assessment of horizontal movements and habitat use of thorny skate in GOM
 - Projection of the effects of climate change on thorny skate in NE US shelf
 - Identification of thorny skate bycatch hotspots in GOM
- Ongoing project
 - Use of high-resolution genomics to explore spatial pop. structure of thorny skate



PDT Recommendations

- Comparing performance relative to FMP objectives is difficult, because several are outdated (e.g., Barndoor is no longer overfished).
- There is a need for clearer skate quota monitoring and catch accounting.
 - Need improved communication - the report this year details the in-season quota monitoring and year-end catch accounting methods.
 - There are a few catch components not included in year-end ACL accounting.
 - While small, they contribute to mortality.
 - Could be included in specifications (e.g., in management uncertainty).
 - The 2021 skate assessment will reexamine methods for ensuring that all catch components are included in the assessment.
- Should consider management measures, beyond the continuing possession prohibition such as addressing thorny skate discards, that will foster rebuilding.



Discussions

- **AP (no quorum):** Little comment on FY 2019. During pandemic, skate wing demand remained strong. Bait prices dropped but are getting back to normal.
- **Committee:** Would like effort data added to the report. Concern about how survey gaps will affect specifications.
- **Future of AMRs:**
 - PDT input: AMR is largely redundant in years with a Council action; with new assessment schedule, annual updates to stock status are less necessary; NMFS (not PDT) determines the need for accountability measures and does year-end catch accounting (though not posted to website).
 - Committee: Don't do-away with the report; annual look is helpful; streamlining may be possible; add effort data.

Questions?



Amendment 5 - Council tasking

December 2019:

- *“Define a clear problem statement, goals, and objectives for this action.”*

June 2020:

- Motion to accept the Committee’s problem statement failed unanimously.
- Motion to cease work on Amendment 5 also failed.
- Council agreed by consensus *“To remand this problem statement and goals and objectives back to the Skate Committee.”*

From May 29 PDT memo (and earlier input):

Goal = A desired result or outcome that would solve a problem. A goal is typically broad and long-term in scope.

Objective = A specific, measurable action that would help achieve a goal.



Fishery data - briefly

- Landings relative to TALs. In FY 2016 and 2017, when the incidental limits were triggered, the Wing and Bait TALs were 23% lower than FY 2014 and 2015. Landings were also lower, but not by as much.
- Active permits. Active permits have been declining, total and % (30% to 16%). Most active permits landed wing, combo permits increasing recently.
- Entry and exit. Annual vessel activity in the skate fishery varies; the number of new active permits has generally been <10 annually since FY 2012 (1-6%); each year, there have been 77-278 “permanent” exiters (Table 14).
- Revenue dependence. A small number of vessels are highly dependent. For most, skates adds to the mix of landings. Landings primarily from gillnets; 99% of bait revenue from trawls.



Committee Work Recap

August 6

- Problem statement - Roundtable of Committee input on current issues and which are most important to resolve. Developed problem statement (2 motions).
- Goals - Roundtable of Committee input on what problem resolution would look like and which resolutions are most important to see achieved. Developed goals (1 motion).
- Objectives - Roundtable of Committee input on approaches to achieve goals and which approaches have the greatest potential to achieve the goals. Started developing objectives (tabled motion).

September 10

- Considered PDT and AP input and developed objectives (1 motion).



August 6 Committee motions

Problem Statement (emphases added)

1. There are two modes of the skate fishery, directed and non-directed fisheries. The incidental limit has been triggered two times in the last ten years, and when it gets triggered, there are negative impacts on the directed skate fishery and on the other fisheries that incidentally harvest skate. There is a need to improve the reliability and accountability of catch reporting in the skate fishery (and other fisheries that catch skate) to ensure there is precise and accurate representation of catch (landings and discards). Accurate catch data are necessary to ensure that catch limits are set at levels that prevent overfishing and to determine when catch limits are exceeded. **(6/0/0/0)**
2. Current and potential access to the skate resource make it difficult to achieve long term sustainable management in the skate fishery. It is more difficult to prevent overfishing and predict outcomes of management when participants in a fishery cannot be defined. **(5/2/0/0)**



August 6 Committee motions

Goals (7/0/0/0)

1. Avoid tripping the skate incidental possession limit.
2. Improve skate data, leading to improved assessments (e.g., no longer be considered data-poor) and more precise and accurate understanding of the landings and discards in different segments of the fishery.
3. Minimize bycatch and discards.
4. Better characterize the directed and non-directed fisheries.
5. Better understand the true potential for vessels to enter the fishery.
6. Minimize the impact on any other fisheries that have interactions with skates.
7. Preserve, to the extent possible, ongoing participation the fishery consistent with how past utilization has occurred.

Also had a draft motion on objectives that was tabled.



PDT feedback

- The motions adequately address PDT concerns with the earlier language: goals were developed, a conservation focus was added, and terms were sufficiently clear (though concepts will need further work as measures get developed).
- To better predict the number of fishery participants and level of effort, could consider requiring that the skate permit be year-round (not be able to add and drop the permit multiple times within a year), so that the “universe” of vessels is known at the start of the year.
- Dead discards are about equal to landings (have been higher in the past); if there were ways to reliably convert dead discards into landings, perhaps landing limits could be increased (conservation neutral).



AP Input – no quorum

Generally comfortable with the problem statement, goals and objectives. Note:

- Though landing limits have increased recently, there is still a concern that incidental limits could be triggered in future if lowered again.
- Please clarify if the objectives apply to wing and/or bait.
- Support developing an intermediate incidental possession limit trigger.
- Keep any limited access permit tiers or sub-TALs simple.
- Concerned about developing electronic monitoring in this action.
- No intention to exclude people or impact other fisheries w/ gear restrictions.
- Support increasing gillnet mesh size to 12”.



Sept. 10 Committee motion

Objectives: Types of measures to achieve goals

1. An intermediate trigger to slow the wing and/or bait fishery.
2. Limited access for the wing and/or bait fishery, with or without tiers for different qualification criteria for permit categories.
3. Creating different TALs for the wing fishery segments (e.g., directed and non-directed TALs).
4. Monitoring requirements for the wing and/or bait fishery beyond NEFOP/SBRM requirements.
5. Restrict switching between state and federal fishing for the wing and/or bait fishery.
6. Gear modifications that could reduce bycatch for the wing and/or bait fishery (e.g., 12" mesh gillnet size).
7. Make the Federal skate permit a year-round permit for the wing and/or bait fishery.
8. Additional reporting requirements for the wing and/or bait fishery (e.g., VMS declarations, daily catch reports).



Additional considerations

- Original scoping (early 2017) was limited to developing limited access.
- Committee is signaling that A5 should continue and expand in scope.
- If the Council approves, re-scoping will be needed.
- Some discussion on the potential need to update FMP objectives. Would note in rescoping document.

Potential Timeline

2020	September	Council approves expanded scope.
	December	Council approves rescoping document; some PDT background work
2021	Jan-Mar	Rescoping period. Cte review comments, start making alternatives
	April	Council review comments, initial alternative ideas
	Summer-Fall	A5 alternatives, assessment, specifications
2022	June??	Approve range of A5 alternatives??

Questions?





Back pocket

Skate FMP Goals and Objectives

Goal: Consistent with the requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act and other applicable laws, to develop a Fishery Management Plan to research and manage the Northeast Skate Complex at long-term sustainable levels.

Objective 1: Collect information critical for substantially improving knowledge of skate fisheries by species and for monitoring: (a) the status of skate fisheries, resources, and related markets and (b) the effectiveness of skate management approaches.

Objective 2: Implement measures to: protect the two **currently overfished** species of skates (**barndoor** and thorny) and increase their biomass to target levels, **reduce fishing mortality on winter skate**, and prevent overfishing of the other species in the Northeast skate complex – this may be accomplished through management measures in other FMPs (groundfish, monkfish, scallops), skate-specific management measures, or a combination of both as necessary.

Objective 3: Develop a skate permit system, coordinate data collection with appropriate state agencies for vessels fishing for skates or catching skates as bycatch only in state waters, and work with the fishing industry to establish a catch reporting system consistent with industry capabilities, including the use of study fleets.

Objective 4: Minimize the bycatch and discard mortality rates for skates caught in both directed and non-directed fisheries through the promotion and encouragement of experimentation, conservation engineering, and gear development.

Objective 5: Promote and encourage research for critical biological, ecological, and fishery information based on the research needs identified in the **Skate SAFE Report and scoping document**, including the development and dissemination of a skate species identification guide.

Objective 6: Minimize, to the extent possible, the impacts of skate management approaches on fisheries for other species on which New England and Mid-Atlantic fishermen depend (for example, groundfish, monkfish, scallops, and fluke), recognizing the interconnected nature of skate and other fisheries in the Northeast Region.

Objective 7: To the extent possible, **manage clearnose and rosette skates separately** from the other five species in the skate complex, recognizing that these two species are distributed primarily in the Mid-Atlantic and South Atlantic regions.

