



## New England Fishery Management Council

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Eric Reid, *Chair* | Thomas A. Nies, *Executive Director*

### MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** March 9, 2023  
**TO:** Skate Advisory Panel and Committee  
**FROM:** Scott Olszewski, Skate Committee Chair  
**SUBJECT:** Charge for meetings on March 22, 2023

The purpose of this memo is to help prepare the Skate Advisory Panel (AP) and Committee for their separate meetings on Wednesday, March 22. The AP meeting will start at 8:30 AM and the Committee meeting will start at 1:30 PM.

The meetings will be held at the Radisson Airport Hotel, 2081 Post Road, Warwick, Rhode Island, but a webinar option will be available for those unable to travel to the meeting. **In-person attendance is strongly encouraged; please let staff know ahead of time if you must join remotely.** If you are joining via webinar, please join the webinar ten minutes prior to test audio and to help the meetings start on time.

**PURPOSE.** The main purpose of both meetings is to begin work on the following 2023 skate priorities: 1) review progress and give input on a white paper regarding thorny skate, and 2) begin developing the 2024-2025 skate fishery specifications. Discussion will be informed by a conversation about recent fishery performance and outlook for 2023, updates on plans for the 2023 skate management track assessment, and other information. The AP meeting will be the first since the panel has been appointed for the next three-year term (2023-2025). During the AP meeting, we will welcome a new member of the AP and review Council policies with the entire group.

**MEETING MATERIALS.** To make the most of our meeting time, please familiarize yourself with the documents beforehand and come ready to make any recommendations. As documents become available, they will be posted on the Council webpages for each meeting:

**Advisory Panel:** <https://www.nefmc.org/calendar/mar-22-2023-skate-advisory-panel-hybrid-meeting>

**Committee:** <https://www.nefmc.org/calendar/mar-22-2023-skate-committee-hybrid-meeting>

**WEBINAR REGISTRATION.** For those joining remotely, to be able to view the webinar, listen, and talk during it, you must: 1) register for the webinar in advance and 2) join the webinar on the day of the meeting (you can then select phone or computer for your audio connection). If you just call in using the phone number provided on the meeting notice, you will be in listen-only mode and will not be able to speak during the meeting. Links to register for the webinars are posted on the above webpages.

**QUESTIONS/TECHNICAL SUPPORT.** If you have any questions about the meeting documents, agenda, or how to participate, please contact Rachel Feeney ([rfeeney@nefmc.org](mailto:rfeeney@nefmc.org); 978-465-0492 x110). A [Public Participation Guide](#) is available with tips on joining Council webinars. Staff would be happy to set up a practice webinar for you ahead of the meeting if that would be helpful. For technical support during the meeting, please email [helpdesk@nefmc.org](mailto:helpdesk@nefmc.org).

## Recent Fishery Performance and Outlook for Fishing Year (FY) 2023

**RECENT ACTIVITY.** During at least one Skate AP meeting each year since 2020, there has been time on the agenda devoted to discussing recent fishery performance and outlook for the coming fishing year. Committee members have noted that the insights have been informative for managing the fishery.

**ON MARCH 22.** The AP will again have an opportunity to discuss how the fishery is performing, focusing on FY 2022 and expectations for FY 2023, and the Committee will have time to reflect on this input.

### Discussion questions/starters

- What factors have influenced recent fishing activity and how (e.g., possession limits, environment/ecosystem, species distribution, domestic and foreign markets, costs)?
- How might these factors change in FY 2023? How do you expect the fishery to adjust?
- How has the global pandemic changed the fishery? Do you see the fishery returning to a pre-pandemic state or is there a new normal emerging?
- Have any recent regulatory changes affected the fishery and how?
- Are the current fishery regulations appropriate? How could they be improved and how would the improvements affect the fishery?
- What other factors may impact the fishery going forward?

**FUTURE STEPS.** This information could be informative for the development of future specifications, possession limits, or other management measures. The AP should note that the Council has already set its 2023 work priorities for skates. The Council discusses work priorities each fall for the coming year.

## Thorny Skate White Paper

**RECENT ACTIVITY.** Last December, the Council set as a work priority for 2023: “*development of a white paper detailing potential approaches to support rebuilding thorny skate.*” At its February 17 meeting, staff presented to the Skate PDT a preliminary literature review on thorny skate science and an outline for this white paper developed by staff. PDT discussion (Document #5c) was also informed by guest presentations by Dr. Jeff Kneebone (New England Aquarium) on several thorny skate research projects that he and colleagues have been involved with. Through correspondence, the PDT then drafted the white paper for review (Document #2).

**ON MARCH 22.** Staff will provide an update on the development of this white paper. The AP can make any recommendations to the Committee on the scope and content of the document. The Committee can make recommendations to the Council and task the PDT on additional work.

### Discussion questions/starters

- Does the draft white paper meet expectations regarding the potential scope of this document? If not, what other topics should be covered?
- Is there other information that could be informative that is not yet included?
- Do fishermen’s observations and knowledge about thorny skate align with what has been described through scientific literature? What are the areas of agreement and difference?
- For the section on potential management approaches, what other approaches could be explored through this paper? For example, are there possible gear or area-based measures to explore?

**FUTURE STEPS.** In April, the Council will receive an update on this task and is expected to approve the overall scope of this white paper. The PDT will continue work on the draft and expects that this document can be finalized ahead of the June Council meeting.

## 2024-2025 Skate Specifications

**RECENT ACTIVITY.** Last December, the Council set as a work priority for 2023: “*Develop 2024-2025 specifications. With smooth skate and barndoor skate rebuilt, consider measures that would allow for expanded possession by the fishery.*” At its February 17 meeting, the PDT had a preliminary discussion of this action. The PDT discussed the action plan (Document #3c) and the 2023 management track assessment that will inform specifications and reviewed the skate specification-setting process, and changes to that process that the Council agreed to in September 2022. Last September, several questions about recreational catch of skate were raised by the Committee and Council. The PDT discussed information gathered by Council staff on recreational catch. Finally, the PDT discussed the performance of possession limits and the potential to expand possession of smooth and barndoor skate. Through correspondence, the PDT developed a memo about recreational catch of skate (Document #3b) and the first version of a specifications discussion document (Document #3a).

**ON MARCH 22.** Staff will provide an update on all this work. After reviewing the background information, the AP and Committee will begin developing input on this action.

### Discussion questions/starters

- Should the Council make any recommendations to the Northeast Fisheries Science Center regarding the 2023 management track assessment for skates?
- Is there additional information that the PDT can provide about recreational catch of skates that could be helpful?
- Should the possession limits in place for FY 2022-2023 be maintained in FY 2023-2024 or should adjustments be considered? How so?
- Before the development of alternatives for expanding possession of smooth and/or barndoor skate, a goal(s) should be identified? Is the Committee ready to identify a goal? What additional information would be helpful?