



## New England Fishery Management Council

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### MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** August 2, 2017  
**TO:** Science and Statistical Committee  
**FROM:** Thomas A. Nies, Executive Director  
**SUBJECT:** Terms of Reference for Northeast Skate Complex MSY and ABC recommendations for fishing years 2016 and 2017.

#### Terms of Reference

1. Review method for estimating gillnet discard mortality for use in developing ABC specifications for fishing years 2018-2019 - Information item 2.3
2. Review and approve revised estimate of MSY resulting from preliminary discard mortality updates.
3. Recommend an ABC for the Northeast Skate Complex consistent with the fishing mortality limit ( $F_{MSY}$  or its proxy) and the ABC control rule or rebuilding program for fishing years 2018-2019 contingent on the use of the approved method for finalizing discard mortality estimates.

#### Background

Amendment 3 established a control rule for setting the Northeast Skate Complex ABC that uses the median catch/biomass ratio and the three year moving average of the fall Northeast Science Center Trawl survey (spring survey for little skates). The Skate PDT report (Document 1) updates the survey information through spring 2017 using the approved calibration method.

Landings data were updated through fishing year 2016 and discards were estimated through calendar year 2016 to estimate a 2014-2016 dead discard rate and apply it to the 2018-2019 specifications. In 2016, the landings and catch did not exceed thresholds that would have triggered post-season accountability measures. The PDT also reviewed recent winter skate discard mortality research on commercial sink gillnet fishing trips and is recommending using the new discard mortality estimate in the ABC specifications. The current default ABC control rule uses the median catch/biomass ratio as an estimate of exploitation rate applied to the three-year moving average of the NEFSC fall (spring for little skate) trawl survey stratified mean weight per tow. This update would revise the historic catch and therefore alter the catch/biomass medians.

In their February 11, 2009 report, the SSC concluded that an OFL "cannot be determined, because overfishing reference points are survey proxies, and estimates of fishing mortality or fishing mortality reference points are not available. Therefore, the method of determining ABC

should be considered an interim proxy until an OFL and its uncertainty can be quantified, and supplemental management actions will continue to be required for individual skate species that are overfished or for which overfishing is occurring.”

After a final review of the ABC by the SSC, the Council will identify management measures that should be adjusted in a management action. The final specifications for fishing years 2018-2019 and measures would be approved by the Council at its September 2017 or December 2017 meeting and would be implemented on May 1, 2018.

### **Information**

- 2.1 August XX, 2017 memo from Skate Plan Development Team to SSC – NE Skate Complex ABCs for FY 2018 - 2019
- 2.2 Memo from the NEFSC. Re: Update of Skate Stock Status Based on NEFSC Bottom Trawl Survey Data through Autumn 2016/Spring 2017
- 2.3 Sulikowski et al. Evaluating the Condition and Discard Mortality of Winter Skate, *Leucoraja ocellata*, Following Capture and Handling in the Sink Gillnet Fishery
- 2.4 Risk Policy Matrix for Skates