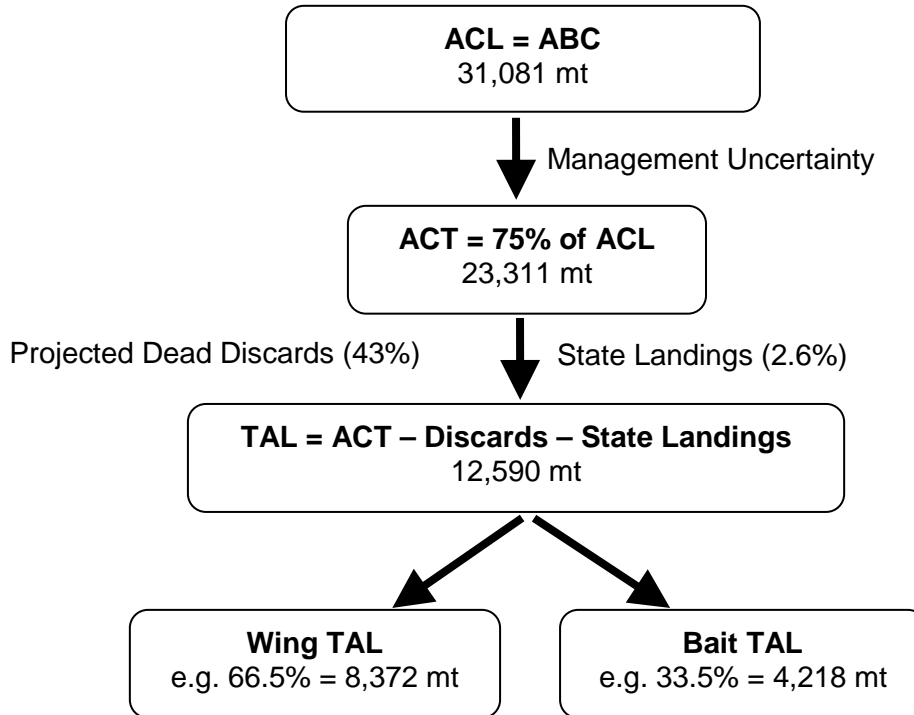


4.0 Alternatives Under Consideration

4.1 Updates to Annual Catch Limits

4.1.1 Option 1: No Action

The ACL parameters and limits would remain unchanged from the final ACL specifications for the 2016-2017 fishing years (see diagram below) in the final regulations for the specifications package and would not incorporate all of the updated scientific data and information.

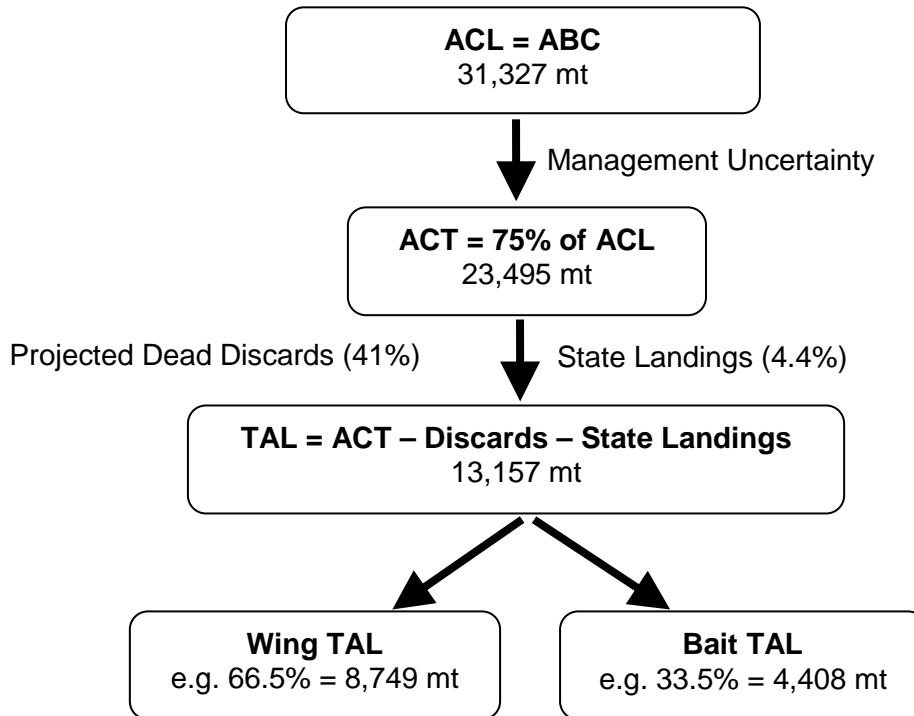


Rationale: The No Action alternative would not incorporate the updated survey biomass indices and discard mortality rate estimate. The ACL would be maintained at a lower level than the revised data would suggest is appropriate over the time period when specifications are being set. The No Action alternative may result in a slightly higher risk of not achieving optimum yield.

4.1.2 Option 2: Revised Annual Catch Limit Specifications

ABC and ACL specifications are derived from the median catch/biomass exploitation ratio for time series up to 2017 and the three year average stratified mean biomass for skates, using the 2015-2017 spring survey data for little skate and the 2014-2016 fall survey data for the other managed skate species. For skates, the Council set the ACL to be equal to the ABC. TALs are set according to Amendment 3 procedures that assume that future discards would be equivalent to the average rate from the most recent three years (2014-2016); state landings would approximate to 4.4% of the total allowable landings, which represents the latest 3 year average of state landings.

The ABC/ACL specifications would be adjusted to be consistent with new scientific information and the approved ACL framework procedures in Amendment 3. The aggregate skate ABC/ACL would increase to **31,327** mt. The ACL is a limit that would trigger AMs if catches exceed this amount. The ACT would likewise increase to **23,495** mt. After deducting amounts for projected dead discards (calculated from applying the weighted discard mortality rate to the total discards from 2014-2016. The projected dead discards is calculated from the ratio between 2014-2016 dead discards and total catch), the TAL would increase to **13,157** mt. The proportion of dead discards in the catch decreased to **41%**, primarily due to an increase in overall skate discards. The incorporation of revised discard mortality rate in sink gillnet gear for winter (14%) skate slightly reduced the historic catch and affected the catch/biomass medians; it also slightly reduced the amount of discards attributed to dead discards for this gear type.



Rationale: This alternative would make the specifications (catch and landings limits) more consistent with the procedures approved in Amendment 3 and with updated science that has been analyzed by the Skate PDT and peer reviewed by the SSC. Framework 5 is not intended to develop alternative ACL/ACT/TAL calculation methodologies; instead it enacts the existing methodology in the FMP using updated data. The SSC reviewed the revised catch/biomass medians and those used in the previous specifications package and approved the use of the revised medians as they were consistent with previous decisions by the SSC to incorporate the most recently available discard mortality rate estimates. According to the Amendment 3 procedures, it would allow the fishery to achieve optimum yield, nearly all derived from catches of little and winter skates.

4.2 Barndoor Skate Possession Limits Alternatives

4.2.1 Option 1: No Action

The No Action alternative would not remove the prohibition on possessing barndoor skate.

Rationale: This alternative would allow for additional rebuilding of barndoor skate to continue.

4.2.2 Option 2: Barndoor Skate Possession Limit of 500 lb

This alternative would allow vessels to land a maximum of 500 lb of barndoor skate wings (1,135 lb whole weight) as part of their skate wing possession limit. Total pounds of skate wings on board would not be allowed to exceed 2,600 lb in Season 1 or 4,100 lb in Season 2. Vessels would not be required to land the maximum allowed poundage of barndoor skate.

Rationale: This alternative would take a cautious approach to landing barndoor skate. Barndoor skate was absent from the NEFSC trawl survey for roughly 3 decades and was petitioned to be listed under the ESA in 1999. Barndoor skate was declared rebuilt in 2016. This cautious approach would allow time for markets to develop and to see how the stock responds to commercial harvest.

4.2.3 Option 3: Proportional Barndoor Skate Possession limit

This alternative would establish a barndoor skate wing possession limit that reflected its contribution to overall observed catch based on observer data. For FY2018 and FY2019 this would result in a possession limit of 650 lb wings (25%) in Season 1 and 1,025 lb wings (25%) in Season 2.

Vessels would be allowed to land up to this amount on a trip. Total pounds of skate wings on board would not be allowed to exceed 2,600 lb in Season 1 or 4,100 lb in Season 2. Vessels would not be required to land the maximum allowed poundage of barndoor skate.

Rationale: This alternative would allow landings of barndoor skate in a higher amount in the fall when they are encountered more by the directed fleet. This would be expected to reduce regulatory discards of barndoor skate. The alternative would also allow the possession limit to be revisited in the next specifications cycle and potentially adjusted if any significant changes in the observed interactions with barndoor skates occurs.

4.2.4 Option 4: Mixed Skate Wing Possession limit

This alternative would not establish a specific barndoor skate possession limit. Total pounds of skate wings on board would not be allowed to exceed 2,600 lb in Season 1 or 4,100 lb in Season 2 but vessels could land wings from allowed species in desired quantities up to that amount. This would not restrict landings of barndoor skate and would allow vessels to shift their effort from winter skate to barndoor skate, if desired.

Rationale: This would not restrict fishing on barndoor skate beyond the overall skate wing possession limit.

4.2.5 Option 5: Discard restriction

Alternatives Under Consideration
Updates to Annual Catch Limits

Any skate species already winged would not be allowed to be then discarded in order to land barndoor skate.

Rationale: This would prevent any unnecessary mortality on skate and would formalize what is likely general practice by fishermen.