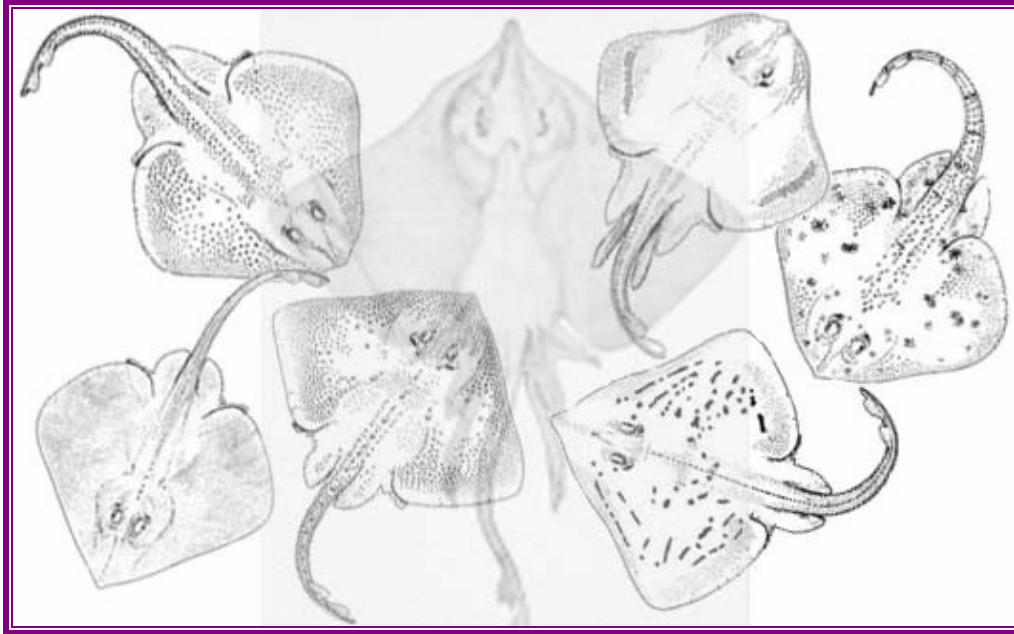




Northeast Skate Complex Fishery Management Plan



Species Managed Under Fishery Management Plan (FMP)

Seven species of skates are included in the Northeast complex: winter skate, barndoor skate, thorny skate, smooth skate, little skate, clearnose skate, and rosette skate. The Northeast skate complex is distributed along the coast of the northeast United States from near the tide line to depths exceeding 700 m (383 fathoms). In the northeast, the center of distribution for little and winter skates is Georges Bank and Southern New England. Barndoor skate is most common in the offshore Gulf of Maine, on Georges Bank, and in Southern New England. Thorny and smooth skates are commonly found in the Gulf of Maine. Clearnose and rosette skates have a more southern distribution, and are found primarily in Southern New England and the Chesapeake Bight. Skates are not known to undertake large-scale migrations, but move seasonally in response to changes in water temperature, moving offshore in summer and early autumn and returning inshore during winter and spring. Members of the skate family lay eggs that are enclosed in a hard, leathery case commonly called a mermaid's purse.

Management Plan Overview

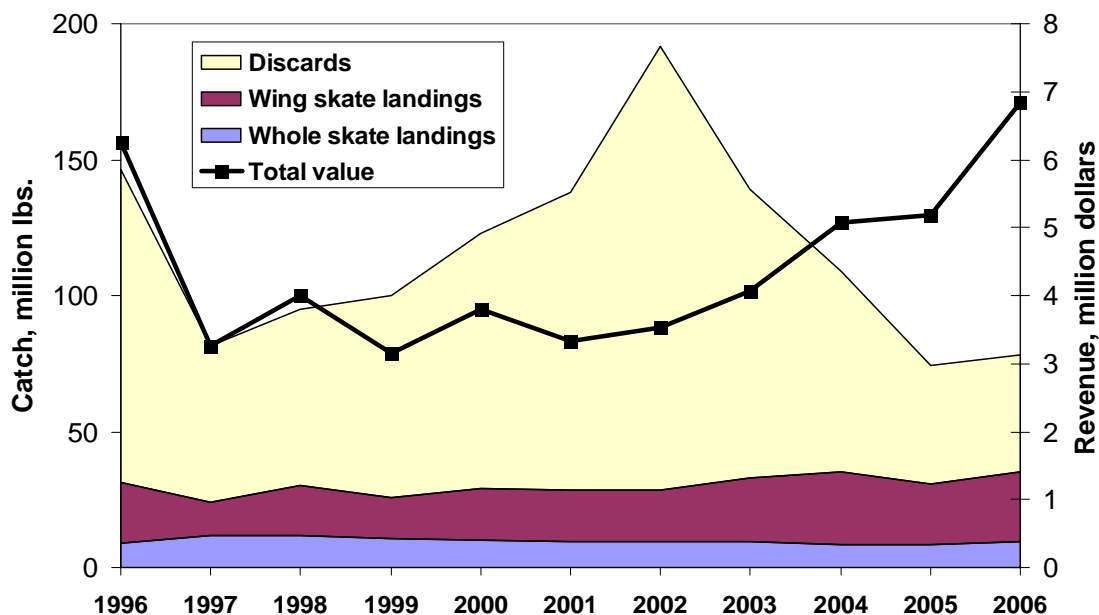
The Skate FMP was implemented in September 2003. The primary objectives of the Skate FMP are to: (1) protect the overfished species of skates and increase their biomass to target levels specified in the FMP while preventing overfishing of the other skate species and (2) collect information critical for improving knowledge of skate fisheries by species and for monitoring the status of skate fisheries, resources, and related markets, as well as the effectiveness of skate management approaches. The FMP includes reporting requirements to improve fishery information; prohibitions on overfished species, a trip limit for the skate wing fishery, and mechanisms for FMP monitoring and plan adjustments. Importantly, through the establishment of a "baseline" of management measures in other fisheries, the FMP recognizes the interactions of skates with the groundfish, scallop and monkfish fisheries.

History of the Fishery

Skates are harvested in two very different fisheries, one for lobster bait and one for wings sold for human consumption. The fishery for lobster bait is a more historical and directed skate fishery, involving vessels primarily from Southern New England ports that target a combination of little skates and, to a lesser extent, juvenile winter skates. The fishery for skate wings evolved in the 1990s when fishermen shifted effort from groundfish and other troubled fisheries to skates and dogfish. The wing fishery is largely an incidental catch fishery that involves a larger number of groundfish, monkfish, and scallop vessels located throughout the region.

Landings have increased slowly since 1996, mainly in the wing fishery, while the prices for skate landings have markedly increased since 2002. As a result of better markets and regulations in other fisheries, vessels appear to have increasingly targeted skates to land wings. Although discards have declined considerably since 2002, they still represent nearly 60% of the total skate catch. Since skates are hard to identify by species, much of the landings and some of the observed discards are reported as unclassified skates.

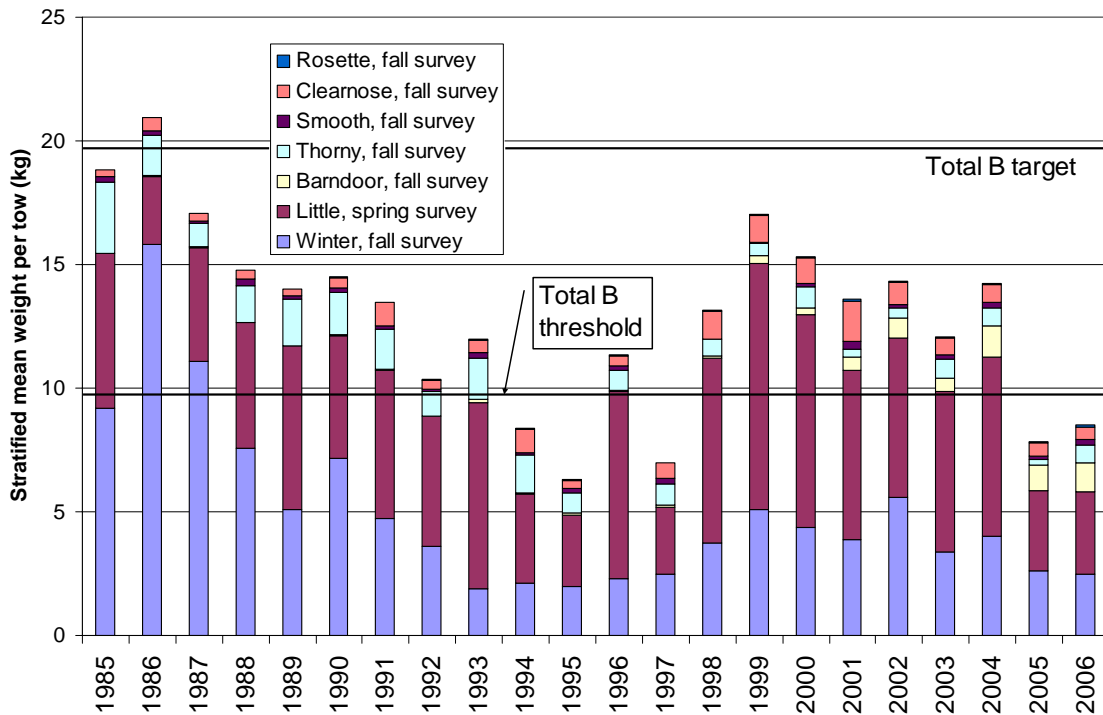
Skate Landings & Revenues



Fishery Status

In total, the Northeast skate complex is at a low biomass level. Clearnose and rosette skates are considered to be rebuilt (near or above their biomass target levels), while barndoor skate is rebuilding to the target. While winter and thorny skates are overfished, the abundance of barndoor skates has increased considerably in recent years. Little and smooth skate biomass are slightly above their minimum biomass threshold and may become overfished with the next survey.

Survey biomass of skates by species, 1985-2006



*Note that little skate is assessed using the spring survey.