

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 they do 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.

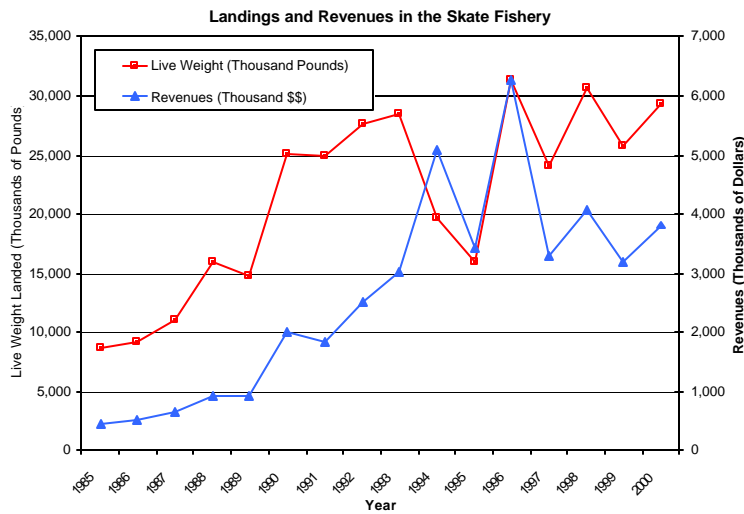
Management Plan Overview

A Skate FMP is currently under development by the Council and is scheduled for implementation in the summer of 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 Draft Skate FMP includes several options for: federal permits; reporting requirements to improve fishery information; possession limits for the skate wing fishery; prohibitions on possession, sale, and/or landing of skate species in need of protection; mechanisms for FMP monitoring and plan adjustments; and other elements important for information collection and long-term management of the skate fisheries. Public comments on the Draft FMP will be accepted through October 15, 2002, and the Council will select final management measures for the FMP at its November 5-7, 2002 meeting.

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 (>90%) and, to a much lesser extent, juvenile winter skates (<10%). The fishery for skate wings evolved in the 1990s as skates were promoted as "underutilized species," and 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.

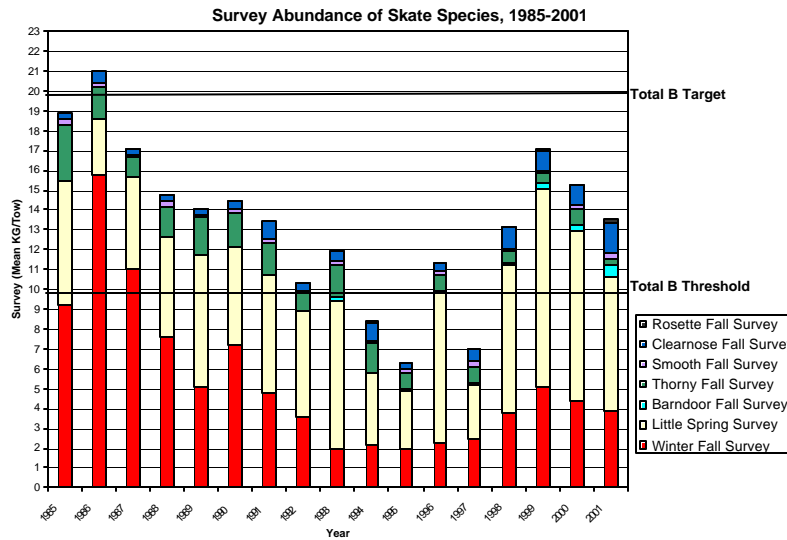
Because skates have not been managed under a federal FMP, reported landings (below) are considered to be incomplete. Also, landings of skates are not reported for individual species, so available information is based on total "unclassified skates."



*Note that landings are reported in live (total) weight of skates and are considered to be incomplete.

Fishery Status

In total, the Northeast skate complex is at a medium abundance level. Little, clearnose, and rosette skates are considered to be rebuilt (above their biomass target levels). Smooth and winter skates are not overfished and are rebuilding towards their target levels. Currently, barndoor and thorny skates are considered to be overfished (below their biomass threshold levels). The status of barndoor skate has greatly improved in recent years, however, with survey abundance at the highest levels since the 1960s.



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