



New England Fishery Management Council

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MEMORANDUM

DATE: May 29, 2007
TO: Skate PDT
FROM: Andrew Applegate
SUBJECT: Observed species composition of skate discards and landings

Table 1. Percent skate species composition reported on 2006 Vessel Trip Reports, by fishery and sampling by the Sea Sampling Observer Program.

	Whole			Wings			Grand total
	Unobserved	Observed	Total	Unobserved	Observed	Total	
Trips	6,133	251	6,384	5,089	226	5,315	11,699
Barndoor	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Clearnose	1.1%	0.0%	1.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.8%
Little	24.9%	1.8%	24.0%	3.0%	1.1%	2.9%	18.5%
Rosette	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Smooth	0.3%	0.0%	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.2%
Thorny	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Winter	2.9%	6.1%	3.0%	33.5%	27.5%	33.0%	10.8%
Unclassified	70.8%	92.1%	71.5%	63.5%	71.3%	64.1%	69.6%

Out of the 11,699 trips in the 2006 VTR data that reported landings of skates, 477 matched the VTR serial number (VTRSERNO) for 634 observed trips where observed skates were retained for landing (i.e. ‘kept’). The VTRs listed a greater amount of unclassified skate (92% in the whole skate fishery and 71% in the wing fishery) for observed trips than for unobserved trips.

For trips where whole skates were the majority of skate landings, little skate was the species with the greatest landings, 24% of the total or 84% of the skates identified by species. For trips where wings were the predominant skate landings component, winter skate was the species with the greatest landings, 33% of the total or 92% of the skates identified by species.

Table 2. Observed trips and percent of observed winter and unclassified skates retained by skate identification on VTRs.

	Whole fishery	Wing fishery

Unclassified skates on VTR	Trips	228	186
	Percent winter skate	77.9%	83.6%
	Percent observed unclassified	15.9%	13.4%
VTR skates classified by species	Trips	23	40
	Percent winter skate	64.1%	81.8%
	Percent observed unclassified	12.3%	5.4%

Out of the 477 matching observed trips, 414 were for trips where the VTRs reported only unclassified skates. On these trips, 78% of the skates in the whole skate fishery were identified by observers as winter skate, while 84% were identified as winter skate in the wing fishery. Winter skate accounted for 64% of the observed skates retained on trips where the VTR reported skate landings by species. In contrast, little skates are reported by species more often when whole skate landings are reported on the VTR (see Table 1). In the wing fishery for VTRs where skates were identified by species, winter skate was identified by observers to account for 82% of total skate landings vs. 92% of landings reported as winter skates on the VTRs.

Table 3. Percent observed species composition on 414 trips where the VTRs did not identify skate landings by species.

	Whole fishery	Wing fishery
Barndoor	0.1%	0.2%
Clearnose	0.0%	0.0%
Little	5.4%	1.5%
Rosette	0.0%	0.0%
Smooth	0.0%	0.1%
Thorny	0.5%	1.3%
Winter	77.9%	83.6%
Unclassified	15.9%	13.4%

Most of the identified skates kept on trips that had VTRs with unidentified skate landings were winter skate, 78% in the whole fishery and 84% in the wing fishery. Only 5.4% of the observed kept skates were little skates in the whole fishery, in stark contrast with the reported landings in the VTR and dealer reports. Some retained skates on observed trips were barndoor and thorny skates, even though retention of these species are prohibited by the skate FMP.

While it appears that most of the skate landings in the wing fishery are winter skates, it also appears that nearly 80% of the unidentified landings of skates in the VTR data for the whole skate fishery are also winter skate. It is possible, however, that the observer program samples offshore (and federally permitted) vessels more frequently than vessels fishing for skates inshore (many without federal permits). Nonetheless, it appears that more of the whole (bait) skate fishery landings is composed of winter skates than previously thought.