



New England Fishery Management Council News Release

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New England Fishery Council Approves Skate Amendment 3

Mystic, CT In 15-1 vote yesterday, the New England Fishery Management Council approved Amendment 3 to its Fishery Management Plan for the Northeast Skate Complex. The new measures are intended to promote growth of the seven species managed under the plan, reduce discards both in the skate fishery, as well as in other fisheries that take skates as an incidental catch, and rebuild thorny and smooth skate, which were recently determined to be overfished. Most of the measures that will be forwarded to the Secretary of Commerce for final approval will augment rather than substitute for the existing skate management measures.

In addition to defining acceptable biological catch and accountability measures for the skate complex, the program includes possession limits that will affect fishing vessels that land wings or whole skates for food, those that land whole skates to sell as bait for use in the offshore lobster fishery and others that take skates as an incidental rather than a directed catch. A three-season quota system for the bait fishery was included to extend the period over which the catch may be taken, possibly minimizing the length of any closures. During the annual review also called for in the plan, a technical group will evaluate the most recent data available on skate stock status, mortality associated with fishing, landings, discards and changes to other fisheries that may affect the catch of skates. The Council may revise management measures based on the findings of the technical group.

The skate amendment is expected to be in place by January 2010. So that implementation occurs in an orderly manner, the Council recommended that the trip limits become effective once the plan is approved and that the rest of the measures take effect at the start of the fishing year on May 1, 2010.

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