



New England Fishery Management Council

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MEMORANDUM

DATE: June 1, 2007
TO: Council
FROM: Multispecies (Skate) Oversight Committee
SUBJECT: Draft Amendment 3 decision document

A joint meeting of the PDT and Advisory Panel resulted in a recommended set of alternatives, composed of measures to address the overfished condition of winter and thorny skate, while controlling mortality on little and smooth skate which are in danger of becoming overfished. These recommendations included Alternatives 1 to 4, but without the gear restricted areas to control skate mortality and/or reduce bycatch and incidental landings.

The Oversight Committee added gear restricted areas to the measures in Alternatives 1 to 4, plus added two new alternatives. Alternative 6 is like alternative 2, but without the seasonal minimum size measure due in part to the difficulty of identifying skate species. Alternative 5 is like Alternative 6, but includes a hard TAC rather than a target TAC. Some alternatives would apply a hard TAC with an accountability mechanism to deduct overages in the following fishing year. Other alternatives apply a target TAC with an accountability mechanism to ensure that the TAC is not exceeded, having in-season triggers to adjust specifications.

If approved by the Council, the PDT and Advisors would analyze the alternatives over a range of specifications and options to meet the rebuilding objectives. This analysis would include the estimated effects of Framework 42 and possibly the predicted effects of other management changes under development or not yet implemented. These analyses and alternatives will be included in a draft amendment document which will come back to the Oversight Committee and Council in September for approval and selection of preferred alternatives.

Table 1. Winter skate rebuilding options, Oversight Committee recommendation in boldface.

Objective	Annual increase in biomass needed to reach target	Initial catch reduction from 2005 level		Recommended by:
		Assumed discard mortality		
		25%	50%	
No rebuilding	0%	-5%	0%	
5 years	16.3%	-74%	-69%	
7.5 years	10.6%	-50%	-41%	
10 years	7.8%	-38%	-27%	Oversight Committee & PDT
10 years + 1 mean generation = 25 years	3.1%	-19%	-4%	

Table 2 Alternatives recommended to be evaluation and inclusion in Amendment 3, using several appropriate goals to reduce mortality, e.g. capping catch at present levels (2006 or 2007), reducing catch by 10%, reducing catch by 25%, reducing catch by 50%. All alternatives would augment existing DAS management and current skate regulations.

Alternatives	Status quo					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Source	Recommended by Oversight Committee & modified by Oversight Committee					
Measures recommended by advisors	1,2,3,5,7,8	2,3,6,7,8	1,4	6	Developed by Oversight Committee	
Additional measures approved by Oversight Committee	9,10	9,10	9,10	9,10	2,5,7,8,9,10	2,6,7,8,9,10
1. Reduce possession limit by x% on winter skate – dockside identification problem	X		X			
2. Reduce possession limit by x% for the wing fishery and institute a possession limit for the whole skate (bait) fishery. May be specified as a daily/trip limit or as a weekly maximum for each vessel, similar to the state summer flounder regulations or the federal scup fishery regulations (e.g. “aggregate landings program” enrollment)	X	X			X	X
3. Minimum size restriction during peak egg laying cycles (~44-48 cm for little skate; ~90 cm for winter skate). Jun-Aug for winter skate. Implementation issues	X	X				
4. Larger minimum mesh for skate fishery targeting large (winter) skate – need to analyze selectivity data from sea sampling.			X			
5. Hard TACs (possibly by season/quarter, regional or triggers) and AMs for the wing and bait fisheries. Catch, including discards, no possession of skates for the remainder of the fishing year, in small amount for incidental catch. Overages would be deducted from the next year’s TAC. A trigger might cause an adjustment to a possession limit which applies to the fishery approaching a quota or catch limit.	X				X	

Alternatives	1		2		3		4		5		6		Status quo
	1,2,3,5,7,8		2,3,6,7,8		1,4		6		2,5,7,8,9,10		2,6,7,8,9,10		
Source	Recommended by Advisors & modified by Oversight Committee												Developed by Oversight Committee
Measures recommended by advisors	9,10		9,10		9,10		9,10		9,10		2,6,7,8,9,10		
Additional measures approved by Oversight Committee	9,10		9,10		9,10		9,10		9,10		2,6,7,8,9,10		
6. A target TAC which would trigger a change in annual specifications (e.g. possession limit) as the monitored catch approaches the annual TAC. The PDT should be asked to develop an annual adjustment mechanism that does not jeopardize rebuilding.			X					X				X	
7. Replace baseline review process with monitoring and skate management adjustment program	X		X							X		X	
8. Explore and encourage bycatch reduction through gear modifications and other means, via a TAC set aside research initiative.	X		X							X		X	
9. Closed area management to reduce mortality from fishing targeting skates	X		X					X		X		X	
10. Gear restricted areas to reduce mortality from bycatch and incidentally landings	X		X					X		X		X	
11. Requirement to land skates in whole form (Rejected by the Oversight Committee)													
12. Consolidate skate management into the Multispecies FMP (deferred)													