

## NEW ENGLAND FISHERY MANAGEMENT Council

### Skates

#### I. STATUS

- A. Amendment 3 status: The Council postponed taking final action at the November 2008 Council meeting to allow time to incorporate new catch time series into the Amendment 3 analysis. The next step would be to approve a final alternative and submit a Final EIS, or to develop new alternatives and revise the Draft EIS.

The new catch time series were incorporated into the Draft Amendment 3 analysis of skate rebuilding potential, which led to ABC recommendations for approval by the Scientific and Statistical Committee. The technical documents (listed in Document #2) that describe the PDT analysis and derivation of the catch time series are available on the skate web page under “Technical Documents and Analysis”.

- B. Assessments: The Data Poor Assessment Workshop (DPWS) met in early December to review the assessment of skate stocks. New catch time series were developed but analytical stock assessment models did not perform well. Therefore, the DPWS panel recommended retention of the current biological reference points, updated using survey data through 2007 (2008 for little skate). If accepted, the smooth and winter skate would not be overfished. Thorny skate would remain overfished and overfishing is occurring.
- C. Meetings: The Skate PDT met on January 15, 2009 and reviewed an analysis of skate rebuilding potential to recommend Skate ABCs. These recommendations were reviewed by the SSC which will report their decisions at the Council meeting. The Skate PDT also met on January 30, 2009 to evaluate new proposals for catch monitoring and TAC alternatives.

#### II. COUNCIL ACTION

- A. Depending on SSC advice on a Skate ACL, the Council may either direct the Oversight Committee and Advisory Panel to develop and recommend a final alternative from the Draft Amendment 3 document, or direct the Oversight Committee and Advisory Panel to develop new draft alternatives to achieve the amendment objectives and meet the revised skate catch limits.
- B. Act on the Skate PDT recommendation to update the skate biological reference points through 2007 (2008 for little skate) in Final Amendment 3.
- C. Consider referring to the Oversight Committee, the Skate PDT recommendations to establish a goal for amendments and framework adjustments to other management plans which would reduce skate discards by 50% from 2007 levels in regulated fisheries, and to approve Special Access Programs (SAPs) in the groundfish, scallop, and other fisheries only when skate discards are not higher than normally occur outside of a proposed SAP. The Oversight Committee should also reconsider the proposed gear restricted areas (in future skate management actions).

#### III. INFORMATION

1. Terms of Reference for skate ABC review, memo from Paul Howard.
2. Skate ABC recommendations from PDT, memo from the Skate PDT to the SSC.
3. Skate PDT advice on updated reference points and potential effects of interim groundfish action.