



Short-term national management recommendations:

1. Harmonised minimum conservation reference sizes (MCRS) across all areas of 20cm winged/45cm whole (undulate ray exempt due to preexisting slot size).
2. Implementation of maximum landing size (developed with stakeholders).
3. Updated handling guidelines to be circulated to all commercial and recreational fishers fishing in English waters.
4. Develop clear guidelines on regulations for use by commercial and recreational fishers.

Why: Skate and ray species are slow growing and exhibit low fecundity. Whilst ray stocks are generally considered to be in good health, recent reports indicate a lack of some species on previously abundant grounds. Slot sizing is a proven method to maintain stocks of slow growing, low fecundity species. Currently, two IFCAs mandate a MCRS, with further voluntary guidelines adhered to by both commercial and recreational fishers on minimum and maximum landing sizes. Harmonised non-specific MCRS across all areas adds clarity to regulation whilst also protecting stocks and enhancing the sustainable credibility of the fishery. Emphasis on the use of updated handling guidelines (which already exist) will support these measures by promoting post-release survival.

Short-term area specific management recommendations:

1. A lift in the prohibition of landing small-eyed ray in 7.e. Consider gear, effort and/or spatiotemporal management to promote sustainability, particularly if localised abundances are associated with breeding/juvenile rays.

Why: There is unclear scientific evidence behind the prohibition of small-eyed ray retention in 7.e. Small-eyed ray is reported as locally abundant and is retained in adjacent areas.

Short-term evidence requirements:

1. Understand the level of ray landings when used solely for pot-bait and ensure that reporting is robust (national).
2. Understand how management associated with other FMPs may impact skate and ray fisheries and *vice versa* (national).
3. Collect evidence on the localised abundances of endangered undulate ray in 7.d and explore the efficacy of existing and potential management options (i.e. gear, effort, spatiotemporal) to protect potential juvenile/breeding assemblages whilst allowing for continued high value recreational fishing and commercial landings/bycatch.
4. Using the North Devon Fishermen's Association voluntary codes as a case study, gather evidence on how management can improve sustainability ratings and market demand for commercial skate and ray landings.





Marine Management Organisation

Skates and Rays Fisheries Management Plan

DRAFT: Proposed Management
Recommendations and Evidence Requirements
Mid-Term (2-5 years) and Long-Term (5+ years)



Mid/long-term national management recommendations:

1. Implement species-specific minimum and maximum conservation reference sizes, being conscious of social and economic impacts.
2. Establish species-specific TACs, initially for thornback ray (mid-term) and other species in the long-term.
3. ID guidelines and workshops to support the above, as well as improve species specific reporting.
4. Explore spatiotemporal management such as closed seasons and 'Ray Boxes' to protect breeding and juvenile assemblages of rays, particularly for undulate in 7.d.
5. Implement other management as identified in short term evidence work to support enhanced commercial markets for skate and ray landings.
6. Explore options to maximise the social and economic benefits associated with recreational fishing activity for skates and rays.
7. Areas should also be explored to balance commercial and recreational needs, with case studies such as the Skerries Angling Zone providing examples of good practice.

Why: Species-specific minimum and maximum conservation reference sizes offer better protection of juvenile and mature specimens, particularly as some ray species are not mature at current MCRSSs. The current combined TAC doesn't include species-specific biology and conservation issues and may lead to the overexploitation of individual species. Whilst species-specific reporting has improved recently, further work is needed to support any species-specific measures. Given that skates and rays exhibit site fidelity for mating and as juveniles, there is an increased risk of fishing pressure causing localised stock depletion; spatiotemporal measures are therefore an ideal management measure. The commercial value of skates and rays is low but could be improved through enhanced sustainability ratings. Skates and rays are a highly valuable recreational target species, specific angling opportunities and industry support will therefore promote social and economic benefits in coastal communities with limited retention of catches.

Mid/long-term evidence requirements:

1. As with undulate in 7.d, gather evidence on other important skate and ray breeding and nursery sites and seek to understand the efficacy of management in these areas to protect localised assemblages of skates and rays. Evaluate preexisting areas first.
2. Understand fluctuations in skate and ray abundance based on climatic and environmental variables.
3. Understand how practices in skate and ray fisheries (including mixed fisheries) can be improved to reduce environmental and ecological damage, including bycatch issues.
4. Explore species-specific discard survival rates to understand if the Landing Obligation is applicable to all species of skates and rays, potentially through tagging studies.
5. Gather evidence on the abundance and distribution of common blue skate in 7.e.



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