



New England Fishery Management Council

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Council Approves Framework 4 to Adjust Skate Bait Fishery

The New England Fishery Management Council today approved Framework Adjustment 4 to the Northeast Skate Complex Fishery Management Plan (FMP). The framework revises the threshold trigger and possession limits in the skate bait fishery. The measures are expected to help keep the bait fishery open throughout the fishing year while minimizing the risk of fishermen exceeding their annual total allowable landings (TAL) limit. The framework also effectively eliminates the link between the skate wing fishery and the skate bait fishery regarding incidental possession limits. This move was requested by industry since the two fisheries operate very differently.

During the 2016 fishing year, the bait fishery was subject to an essential closure when the incidental possession limit was implemented in Season 3 and then was further reduced to 1,135 pounds to match the whole weight equivalent of the 500-pound limit imposed on the skate wing. This made it uneconomical to pursue the bait fishery. Once approved and implemented by the National Marine Fisheries Service, Framework 4 will:

- Give the bait fishery its own incidental limits;
- Keep the commercial bait per-trip possession limit at 25,000 pounds for Seasons 1 and 2 with a 90% trigger, meaning when 90% of the seasonal TAL is projected to be reached, the bait fishery will be subject to an 8,000-pound incidental limit *unless* the annual TAC is not expected to be achieved;

- Reduce the possession limit in Season 3 to 12,000 pounds and impose an 80% TAL trigger *unless* the annual TAL is not expected to be achieved; and
- As a hard backstop, close the fishery when 100% of the annual TAL is projected to be reached.

Framework Adjustment 4 Skate Bait Fishery Possession Limits and Triggers

	Season 1 May 1–July 31 30.8% of TAL allocated	Season 2 August 1–October 31 37.1% of TAL allocated	Season 3 November 1–April 30 Remainder of TAL
25,000 pounds	X	X	
12,000 pounds			X
80% trigger			X
90% trigger	X	X	
8,000-pound Incidental limit	X	X	X
Closure			X



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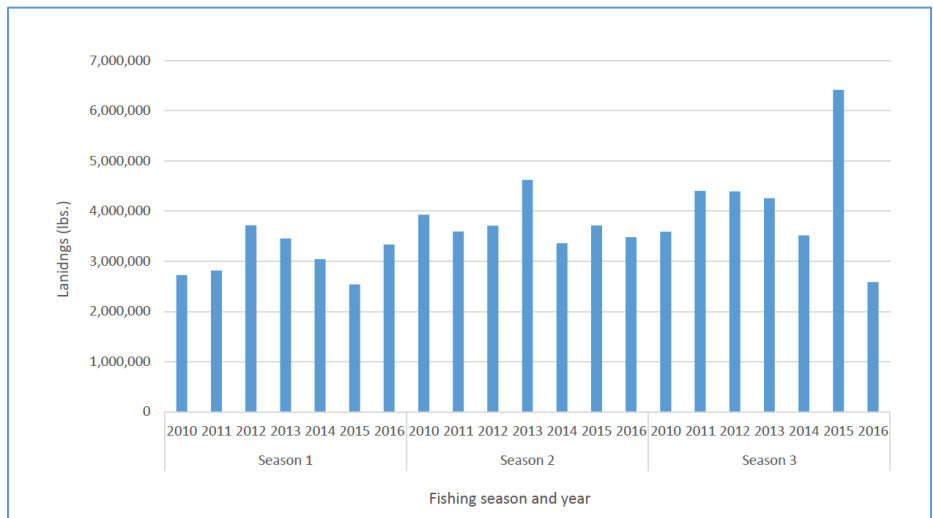
The Council approved Framework 4 based on a recommendation from its Skate Committee, which considered input from industry members in developing the new measures. Skate bait fishermen proposed the 12,000-pound Season 3 possession limit as a compromise to enhance the likelihood of keeping the fishery open at a lower but still functional level during the final portion of the fishing year. Committee members considered the provision to close the fishery when 100% of the TAL is reached to be an important safeguard against the TAL being exceeded.

Framework Adjustment 5

The Council also initiated Framework 5 to the Northeast Skate Complex FMP to:

- (1) Develop specifications for the skate wing and skate bait fisheries for the 2018-2019 fishing years; and
- (2) Propose alternatives for allowing barndoor skate landings. At present, possession of barndoor skates is prohibited, but the stock is fully rebuilt.

Skate Bait Landings by Season for Fishing Years 2010-2016



The Skate Plan Development Team (PDT) will review the status of all seven skate species this summer – barndoor, clearnose, little, rosette, smooth, thorny, and winter skates – and conduct the necessary analyses for the framework. The Skate Committee and Skate Advisory Panel will revisit the possession limits for both the wing and bait fisheries as part of the framework’s development. The Council could take final action at its Sept. 26-28 meeting in Gloucester, MA or, if additional time is needed, the vote will take place at the Dec. 5-7 meeting in Newport, RI.

The framework is a high priority because of the need to develop specifications. However, as time allows, the PDT and Skate Committee will continue working on Amendment 5, which is considering converting the skate fishery from open access to limited access. The Council held six scoping hearings on the amendment this winter. After considering public comment, the Council now intends to, among other things:

- Analyze the feasibility and/or practicality of separating the skate bait and skate wing fisheries to develop independent limited access programs for each one; and
- Further investigate whether or not limited access is justified for either fishery at this point in time.

Questions?

Contact Dr. Fiona Hogan, the Council’s skate plan coordinator, at (978) 465-0492, ext. 121, email fhogan@nefmc.org

Skate documents used during the Council’s April 18 discussion can be found at: <http://www.nefmc.org/library/june-2017-skate>