



# New England Fishery Management Council

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
June 12, 2018

PRESS CONTACT: Janice Plante  
(607) 592-4817, [jplante@nefmc.org](mailto:jplante@nefmc.org)

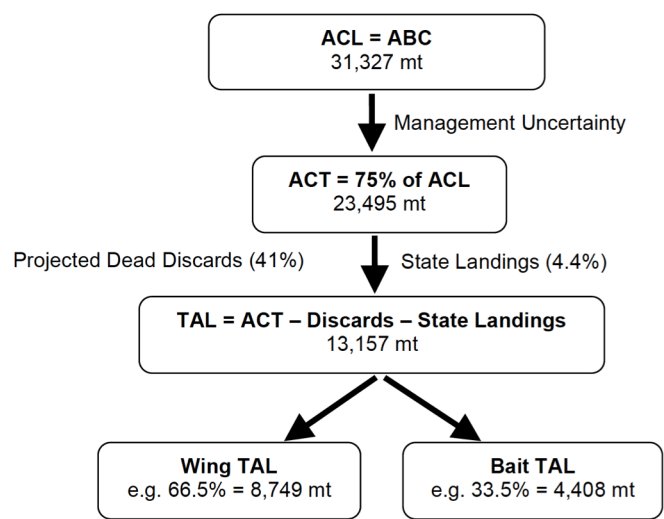
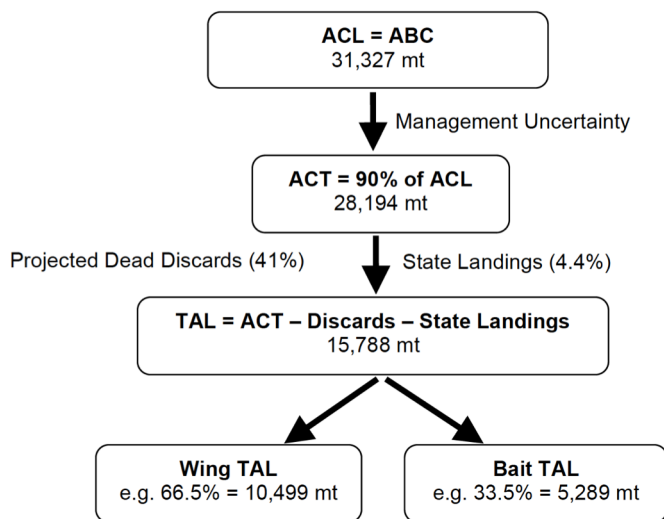
## Skates: Council Approves Framework 6 to Prolong Wing Fishery and Enable Industry to Better Utilize TAL

Aiming to keep the skate wing fishery open as long as possible within annual catch and landing limits, the New England Fishery Management Council today approved Framework Adjustment 6 to the Northeast Skate Complex Fishery Management Plan. The framework reduces – from 25% to 10% – the “uncertainty buffer” that’s used in the specification-setting process. If implemented by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS, NOAA Fisheries), the action will result in a 2,631 metric ton (mt) increase in total allowable landings (TAL) over what the Council adopted in Framework Adjustment 5 for the 2018 and 2019 skate fishing years (see flowcharts below).

The Council voted on the 10% uncertainty buffer back at its April meeting in Mystic, CT. Today at its June meeting in Portland, ME, the Council considered other options to prolong the length of the wing fishery, including adjustments to possession limits. However, based on advice from its Skate Committee and Skate Advisory Panel, the Council ultimately determined that modifying the uncertainty buffer by itself was: (1) warranted; (2) the quickest way to ensure that revised specifications are implemented sometime this fall; and (3) the most expedient way to allow the Skate Committee to resume work on Draft Amendment 5, which is being developed to consider limited access in the fishery – deemed to be a high priority by many fishermen.

**FRAMEWORK 6:** Revised 2018 and 2019 skate fishery specifications utilizing a 10% uncertainty buffer. If approved by NMFS, total allowable landings will increase by 2,631 metric tons from those at right in Framework 5.

**FRAMEWORK 5:** 2018 and 2019 skate fishery specifications utilizing a 25% uncertainty buffer. Although the Council submitted this action to NMFS, it is seeking to update the specifications with the figures at left through Framework 6.





# New England Fishery Management Council

---

The Council uses an uncertainty buffer to reduce the likelihood of the fishery exceeding its annual catch limit (ACL). For skates, management uncertainty and scientific uncertainty are included in a single buffer.

The Council initially had selected a 25% buffer because the fishery is subject to complicating factors. For one, the skate complex is made up of seven species – barndoor, clearnose, little, rosette, smooth, thorny, and winter skates – and identification between species has been challenging. However, fishermen over time have greatly improved their skills in recognizing and recording skates on a species-by-species basis. Estimates of discards and discard mortality also have improved. These and other noteworthy advancements enabled the Council to support reducing the uncertainty buffer to 10%. The reduction is applied between the ACL and annual catch target (ACT). Following further deductions to account for projected dead discards and state landings, the resulting level of total allowable landings is appreciably higher under the 10% buffer.

Although the Council initiated this action to consider alternatives for prolonging the length of the skate **wing** fishery, Framework Adjustment 6 also will benefit the skate **bait** fishery. Both segments of the skate fishery recently have been subject to late-season possession limit reductions that have made it uneconomical to conduct directed fisheries, thereby disrupting markets and business plans.



*Winter skate, the primary target species of the wing fishery. – UMass Dartmouth School for Marine Science and Technology photo*

*“Reducing the uncertainty buffer is expected to prolong the duration of the fishing year for both the wing and bait fisheries and support shoreside infrastructure.”*

*– Framework Adjustment 6*

Many skate fishermen expressed support for simplifying Framework 6 in order to not divert additional time from work on Amendment 5, which went out to scoping in early 2017 and is considering alternatives to convert the skate fishery from open access to limited access.

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

Skate-related materials used during the June 2018 Council meeting can be found at <https://www.nefmc.org/library/june-2018-skate-committee>.