



New England Fishery Management Council

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 28, 2017

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

Skates: Council Approves 2018-2019 Fishery Specifications and Proportional Barndoor Skate Possession Limit for Wing Fishery

With one exception, the New England Fishery Management Council has approved Framework Adjustment 5 to the Northeast Skate Complex Fishery Management Plan (FMP). The framework contains specifications for the 2018 and 2019 fishing years, including total allowable landings (TALs) for both the skate wing and skate bait fisheries, as well as measures to allow the landing of barndoor skates.

Once approved and implemented by the National Marine Fisheries Service, the framework will allow the landing of barndoor skates in the wing fishery. Barndoor skate landings will be capped at 25% of the total wing possession limit allowed per season.

The Council adopted a 31,327 metric ton (mt) acceptable biological catch (ABC) for the skate complex based on advice from its Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC). Under the skate plan, which covers seven species of skates, the annual catch limit (ACL) is equal to the ABC. Deductions from the ACL are made to account for: (1) management uncertainty; (2) projected dead discards; and (3) projected state landings, all to achieve the TAL for the overall federal fishery.

NAFO EXEMPTION

On September 27 during its meeting in Gloucester, MA, the Council voted to add measures into the framework to consider exempting vessels that fish exclusively within the NAFO Regulatory Area on a given trip from Skate FMP regulations that pertain to permit, mesh size, effort control, and possession limit restrictions, similar to exemptions that already exist within this area for Northeast multispecies and monkfish. NAFO is the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization.

The Skate Plan Development Team (PDT) now will develop a range of alternatives for this NAFO area exemption. The Council discussed an expedited process for selecting its preferred alternative with the goal of having Framework 5 implemented as close to May 1, 2018 as possible. This date marks the start of the new fishing year for skates.



*Winter skate, the primary target of the wing fishery to date.
– UMass Dartmouth School for Marine Science and Technology (SMAST) photo*



New England Fishery Management Council

SPECIFICATIONS BREAKDOWN

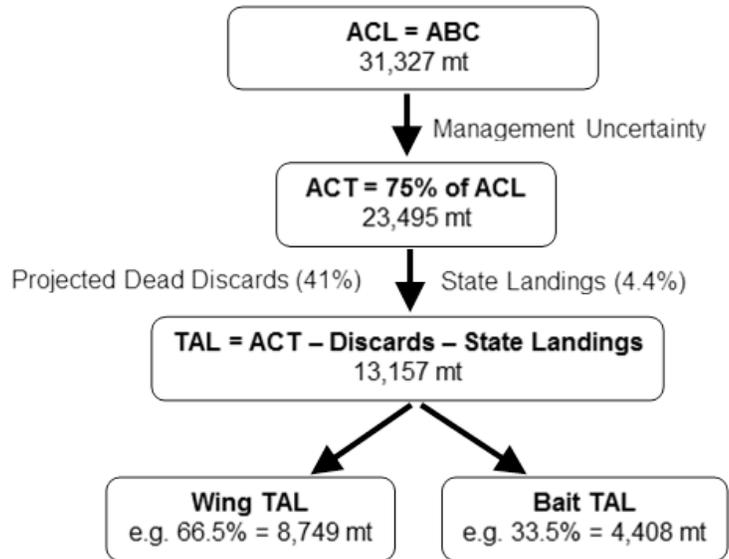
Using the Council’s approved specifications flowchart (at right), the fishing year 2018 and 2019 landing limits for the skate wing and skate bait fisheries break down as follows:

- **WING FISHERY** – allocated 66.5% of the overall TAL, equivalent to 8,749 mt, up 377 mt from the current TAL; and
- **BAIT FISHERY** – allocated 33.5% of the overall TAL, equivalent to 4,408 mt, up 190 mt from the current TAL.

The specifications were developed using updated scientific information that was analyzed by the Skate PDT and peer reviewed by the SSC.

The information included 2015-2017 spring survey data for little skate, which are the largest component of the bait fishery, and 2014-2016 fall survey data for the other six species. The discard rate was presumed to remain the same as 2014-2016.

Additionally, the Council was presented with the Skate Annual Monitoring Report covering fishing year 2016 activity. The report and Framework 5 both contain updated landings information for the skate wing and skate bait fisheries.



Landings and percent of TAL achieved in the wing fishery between FY2010 and FY2016

| Fishing year | TAL | Landings | Percent of TAL |
|--------------|--------|----------|----------------|
| 2010 | 9,209 | 4,330 | 47 |
| 2011 | 14,338 | 11,790 | 82 |
| 2012 | 15,538 | 10,113 | 65 |
| 2013 | 14,338 | 7,981 | 56 |
| 2014 | 11,169 | 10,605 | 97 |
| 2015 | 10,896 | 8,911 | 81.8 |
| 2016 | 8,372 | 8,268 | 98.8 |

Landings and percent of TAL achieved in the bait fishery between FY2010 and FY2016

| Fishing year | TAL | Landings | Percent of TAL |
|--------------|-------|----------|----------------|
| 2010 | 4,639 | 4,571 | 99 |
| 2011 | 7,223 | 4,132 | 57 |
| 2012 | 7,827 | 5,504 | 70 |
| 2013 | 7,223 | 5,596 | 77 |
| 2014 | 5,626 | 4,499 | 82 |
| 2015 | 5,489 | 5,541 | 100.9 |
| 2016 | 4,218 | 4,262 | 101 |



New England Fishery Management Council

Barndoor Skates

In what has been widely hailed as a management success story, the barndoor skate resource was declared “rebuilt” a year ago. The Council officially received the news on September 30, 2016.

Currently, landings of barndoor skates are prohibited. But in light of the rebuilt status – and at the urging of industry – the Council’s Skate Committee has been working with its Skate Advisory Panel (AP) and Skate PDT to develop proposals to allow at least a limited amount of barndoor skate landings. At a September 12 AP meeting, advisors urged the Council to adopt a cautious approach and not allow unlimited landings. At a September 25 meeting, the Skate Committee agreed with the recommendation, and on September 27, the full Council approved the limits as part of Framework 5.

TWO-PRONGED APPROACH

The new Framework Adjustment 5 barndoor skate wing fishery measures include:

- A discard restriction so that any skate species already winged could not be discarded in order to land barndoor skate (i.e., no high-grading); and
- A 25% proportional possession limit as follows:
 - **Season 1** – 2,600 pounds total with no more than 650 pounds being barndoor skate wings; and
 - **Season 2** – 4,100 pounds total with no more than 1,025 pounds being barndoor skate wings.

The bait fishery rarely encounters barndoors. Once Framework 5 is approved, the only prohibited species in the skate complex will be thorny skates throughout the range of the resource and smooth skates in the Gulf of Maine.



*Barndoor skate, 2014 image captured by HabCam.
– Photo courtesy of the Northeast Fisheries Science Center*

The Council’s October 6, 2016 announcement of the “rebuilt” status of barndoor skate is available at:
<http://s3.amazonaws.com/nefmc.org/NEFMC-Barndoor-Skate-Release-Oct-7-2016.pdf>

For more information, contact Dr. Fiona Hogan, the Council’s skate plan coordinator, at (978) 465-0492, ext. 121, fhogan@nefmc.org. Visit the Council’s skate webpage at: <https://www.nefmc.org/management-plans/skates>