



## New England Fishery Management Council

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# MEETING SUMMARY

## Skate Plan Development Team

The PDT met on March 20, 2018 at the Mariner's House in Boston. The PDT discussed draft analyses of uncertainty buffer and possession limit modifications for Framework 6.

### Uncertainty Buffer

1. The PDT discussed whether the buffer between the ACL and ACT was comprised of scientific and management uncertainty. Various sources of uncertainty were discussed and it was agreed that the buffer does cover both. Table 1 summarizes the sources of uncertainty, any changes in these sources, and their impact on uncertainty. Based on the improvements, the PDT agreed that the uncertainty buffer could be revised to a lower number.
2. The PDT did not divide the 25% buffer into specific percentages of management and scientific uncertainty. It is difficult to quantify what each source of uncertainty contributes to an overall buffer. Concerns over the lack of an overfishing level, the high level of discards, and the open nature of the fishery allowing effort to increase in recent years all contribute to the need of a moderate buffer.
3. The PDT agreed to analyze a range of buffers – from 10% to 20% - to provide a robust analysis but considered a 10% buffer to be too low. The PDT did not recommend a specific number for the buffer but considered a buffer between 15-20% would be suitable. The PDT decided to include a 4<sup>th</sup> alternative, for a 15% uncertainty buffer for consideration by the AP and Committee.
4. Preliminary impact analyses were completed for the 10% and 20% uncertainty buffers. Potential landings were estimated using the existing wing TAL and FY2015 fishing pattern. Under the 3 uncertainty buffers run, the TAL was not fully achieved under any scenario but estimated landings did increase as the buffer decreased (Table 2).

### Intermediate Possession Limits

5. The PDT analyzed different triggers for an intermediate possession limit. For the analysis, the existing seasonal possession limits were halved. The fishing pattern from FY2015 had to be used for the analysis because during both FYs 2016 and 2017 the incidental possession limit of 500 lb was implemented for part of the fishing year. During

the period of the incidental possession limit, it is not possible to characterize what individual trips would have caught if they weren't restricted.

6. The usage of an intermediate possession limit in both seasons could result in 6 different possession limits being in effect in any one fishing year. The PDT agreed that enforcement would need to be consulted to determine whether this would be too challenging to enforce.
7. The PDT would need feedback from the AP in order to determine what would be a more appropriate intermediate possession limit, i.e. one that would slow down the fishery but still allow trips to occur.

Table 1 – Summary of factors affecting uncertainty in the skate fishery and any improvements made.

Issue	Starting point (2003 – 2009)	Improvements	Impacts on Uncertainty
-Fishery dependent data	-Landings reported largely as unclassified	-Unclassified reporting reduced in VTR codes; Outreach to aid in identifying skate species	Positive impact
-Observer data	-Somewhat unreliable in terms of ID -Variance/coverage	-Improved identification data  -Improved since 2008	-Positive impact
Discard estimation - Overall observed discards overlaid with survey - Discard mortality rate estimates	-Observed total discards are speciated with survey data  -Assumed 50% across gear types	-No change  -Improvements for some species and gear types: Trawl: little, smooth, thorny, winter Dredge: little, winter Gillnet: winter	-No change but contributes to uncertainty  -Improvement in species specific info with positive impact
Stock assessment	Data-poor  Relationship between catch and survey biomass	Data-poor	- No improvements in available models/methodology but recent issues with survey vessel reliability, and therefore coverage (& different vessel Pisces), may introduce uncertainty
Catch accounting		- FW2 – Fishing vessels and dealers no	- Neutral

		<p>longer allowed to report “unclassified” skates. The number of “Unclassified skates” have been reduced in VTR data, but still exist.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Annual monitoring reports</li> </ul>	
Management controls		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- FW4 allows in season closure of bait fishery once TAL reached</li> <li>- 500 lb incidental limit in wing fishery once trigger has been reached</li> <li>- Open permit fishery can contribute to unexpected increases in effort</li> <li>- Seasonal management for wing fishery introduced by FW3</li> <li>- Fishery specific trigger points for implementing adjustments to possession limits</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Most points positive for uncertainty</li> <li>- Open permit fishery makes it uncertain how much effort will be experienced in any one year adding uncertainty</li> </ul>
OFL	None	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Scientific uncertainty</li> <li>- Should be accounted for in buffer since no buffer between ABC and OFL exists</li> </ul>

Table 2 – Comparison of buffers and potential lbs landed for the wing fishery.

Buffer between ACL and ACT	Percent TAL achieved	Lb landed	Season 1 (May 1 – August 31) incidental limit implemented	Season 2 (September 1 – April 30) incidental limit implemented
25% buffer	91.7	7,787,658	17-Aug	2-Feb
20% buffer	90.1	8,166,524	27-Aug	23-Feb
10% buffer	86	8,764,425	NA	21-Apr