



New England Fishery Management Council

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 11, 2020

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

Skates: Council Sends Out Amendment 5 for Extra Scoping; Seeks Input on More Options to Manage Wing, Bait Fisheries

The New England Fishery Management Council will conduct two public scoping meetings by webinar in January and February 2021 on Amendment 5 to the Northeast Skate Complex Fishery Management Plan. The purpose is to gather additional suggestions for how to improve management of the region's skate fisheries that may go beyond or possibly not involve limited access.

The Council started working in 2017 [to develop a limited access program](#) for the skate bait and/or wing fisheries. In September 2020, the Council agreed to expand the scope of Amendment 5 to consider additional measures besides limited access that may: (1) prevent the triggering of incidental skate possession limits; (2) improve the precision and accuracy of catch data; and (3) better define skate fishery participants.

In early December, the Council approved a [Supplemental Scoping Document](#). Next, the Council will collect both written and oral public comments during the supplemental scoping period, which will run from January 11 through February 12, 2021. More specifically, the Council is looking for input on:

- Other potential types of measures to enhance skate management; and
- The original intent of the amendment to consider developing a limited access program for skates.

Here's What You Need to Know

The scoping meetings will be held on:

- [Thursday, January 21, 2021 from 3:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.](#); and
- [Monday, February 8, 2021 from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.](#)

Information about how to register for and speak during the webinars is posted on each of the above meeting webpages.

- The scoping document is available [HERE](#).



Winter skate, the target species of the wing fishery, being sampled on a research trip. — Angela Cicia photo



New England Fishery Management Council

AMENDMENT 5 GOALS: In September, the Council approved seven goals for the amendment, which include: (1) avoiding tripping the skate incidental possession limit; (2) improving skate data; (3) minimizing discards; (4) better characterizing the directed and non-directed fisheries; (5) better understanding the true potential for vessels to enter the fishery; (6) minimizing the impact on other fisheries that have interactions with skates; and, (7) to the extent possible, preserving ongoing participation in the fishery consistent with how past utilization has occurred.

Things to Remember – Control Dates!

Control dates do exist for the skate fishery as follows:

- **Bait Fishery:** A control date for the skate bait fishery was established on July 30, 2009.
- **Wing Fishery:** A control date for the skate wing fishery was established on March 31, 2014.

Control dates are not binding on the Council, but they do put the public on notice that participation in a fishery beyond the published control date may not be guaranteed for new entrants if a limited access program is implemented.

Questions to Consider

Here is a sampling of the types of questions the Council is looking for comments on. The Council is urging people to note whether their comments are specific to the wing fishery or the bait fishery.

- Should the Council consider and use limited access to manage capacity in the skate wing and/or bait fisheries? If so, what qualification criteria should limited access be based on?
- Would an intermediate possession limit successfully prevent incidental possession limits from being triggered and total allowable landing limits from being exceeded?
- How could fishery monitoring and reporting change to improve data on landings and discards?
- Which gear modifications could reduce discards?



Skates on the processing line. – NOAA Fisheries photo

The Library of
Amendment 5
Documents is Available
[HERE](#)

- Should the Skate Fishery Management Plan goal and/or objectives be revised or updated?



New England Fishery Management Council

Recap: How Did We Get Here?

The Council first began scoping for Amendment 5 in early 2017 to address concerns that increasingly strict regulations in other fisheries might cause fishermen to shift effort into the open access skate fishery. This could cause the fishery to use its quota quickly, trigger reduced skate possession limits, or have negative economic impacts on current participants. To prevent this, the Council has been considering implementing limited access for the skate fishery.

In September 2020, the Council expanded the scope of Amendment 5 to consider other measures that may prevent the triggering of incidental skate possession limits, improve the precision and accuracy of fishery data, and better define skate fishery participants.

Problem Statement Excerpt:

"There are two modes of the skate fishery, directed and non-directed fisheries. The incidental limit has been triggered five times since first implemented in 2010, and when it gets triggered, there are negative impacts on the directed skate fishery and on the other fisheries that incidentally harvest skate ..."

HOW TO COMMENT: The public is invited to provide both oral and written comments during the January 11 through February 12, 2021 scoping period.

- **ORAL:** Join one of the scoping webinars on [January 21](#) or [February 8, 2021](#) and speak up.
- **WRITTEN:** Email comments to comments@nefmc.org or mail comments to Executive Director Tom Nies, New England Fishery Management Council, 50 Water Street, Mill #2, Newburyport, MA 01950. Label as "Northeast Skate Complex Amendment 5 Scoping Comments."

Skate Fast Facts

- The seven species of skates that make up the Northeast skate complex are barndoor, clearnose, little, rosette, smooth, thorny, and winter skates.
- The bait fishery primarily targets little skates.
- The wing fishery, also known as the "non-bait" or "food" fishery, primarily targets adult winter skates.
- Overfishing is not occurring on any of seven skate species.
- The only species that is in an overfished condition and is currently under a rebuilding plan is thorny skate.
- The bait and wing components of the skate fishery each have total allowable landing limits that are divided into seasons and have distinct possession limits that have varied over time.
- The skate fishery presently is an open access fishery. Anyone with a valid federal fishing permit can get a federal skate permit. It is one of the few remaining open access permits available in New England.

[Visit the Council's skate webpage.](#)

Winter skate.

— NOAA Fisheries graphic



- **Questions? Contact Dr. Rachel Feeney, the Council's Skate Plan Coordinator, by phone at (978) 465-0492 ext. 110 or by email at rfeeney@nefmc.org.**