



# New England Fishery Management Council

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## Skates: Council Signs Off on 2022-2023 Specifications; Discontinues Amendment 5 and Initiates Framework 9

The New England Fishery Management Council dealt with two skate-related actions when it met by webinar in late-September. First, the Council voted to submit a fishing year 2022-2023 specifications package to NOAA Fisheries for review and implementation. Second, the Council agreed to: (a) discontinue work on Amendment 5 now that limited access and several other measures are no longer part of the action; and (b) initiate a simpler framework adjustment to address the last two outstanding components in the amendment.

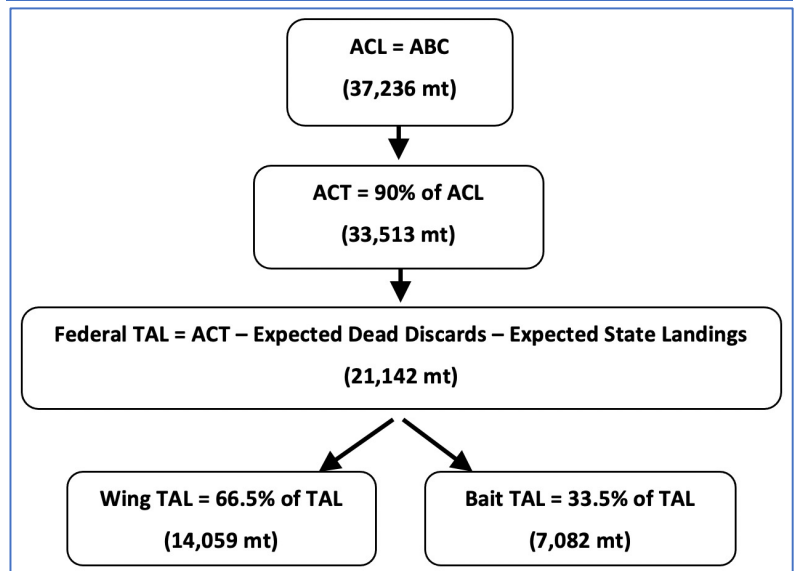
Skates are managed by the Council under the Northeast Skate Complex Fishery Management Plan (FMP). The complex covers seven species – barndoor, clearnose, little, rosette, smooth, thorny, and winter skates, which are found in state and federal waters throughout New England and the Mid-Atlantic.

The Council sets skate specifications every two years for the entire complex based on an acceptable biological catch (ABC) control rule and a formula that were established under [Amendment 3](#) to the FMP.

The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) [recommends the ABC](#). The Council then uses a flow chart (at right) to determine total allowable landings. Expected dead discards and state landings are subtracted from the annual catch target, and the resulting total allowable landings are divided between the skate wing and skate bait fisheries.

The 2022-2023 specifications were based on updated survey data through 2019. The Skate Plan Development Team developed a method for setting the ABC that accounted for missing survey stations in 2018 and no data from 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The SSC supported this approach and recommended the new ABC of 37,236 metric tons (mt), which is a 14% increase from the 2020-2021 ABC, largely due to trawl survey increases for skates. The Council

### Skate Flow Chart for Fishing Years 2022-2023 in Metric Tons (mt) Live Weight



ACL = Annual Catch Limit | ABC = Acceptable Biological Catch | ACT = Annual Catch Target | TAL = Total Allowable Landings | MT = Metric Tons



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previously decided that it would not adjust trip limits under this action. Prior to voting on the new specifications, the Council received a [presentation](#) that highlighted the following.

- Overfishing is not occurring on any of the seven species in the skate complex, and the risk of overfishing in the next two fishing years is low.
- The only species that is overfished is thorny skate, which is under a 25-year rebuilding plan. Possession is prohibited. The stock remains at a very low level and far below its rebuilding target.
- Little and winter skates, the primary components of the bait and wing fisheries respectively, continue to dominate stock assessment survey biomass for the skate complex. Since 2010, skates have generated between \$5 million to \$9 million in revenue annually.
- Warming ocean conditions are likely to impact the distribution of many or all skate species, and thorny skates are apt to shift northward into the Gulf of Maine and into deeper water.
- Skate have been landed in roughly 400 different fishing ports since 2018, but the fishery is primarily centered around three major landing ports – Chatham and New Bedford, MA and Point Judith, RI.



*Above, a winter skate tagged on a research trip. The primary target species in the skate fishery are winter and little skates. Winter skates are harvested for their wings for human consumption, and little skates are harvested as bait.*

*– University of New England photo*

## Framework Adjustment 9

During its [April 2021 meeting](#), the Council voted to stop working on all alternatives in Amendment 5 that involved limited access. During its [June 2021](#) meeting,

the Council recommended that NOAA Fisheries rescind the control dates for skates, which the agency did on [August 31, 2021](#). Then, during this most recent [September meeting](#), the Council further whittled down Amendment 5 to two elements: (1) clarification of the Skate FMP's objectives; and (2) alternatives focused on federal skate permits and the interplay between fishing for skates in state and federal waters.

Given the greatly narrowed scope of the action and based on a recommendation from its Skate Committee, the Council agreed by consensus to stop further work on Amendment 5 and instead refine and finalize the two remaining items in a framework adjustment. This will become Framework 9.

➤ The history of Amendment 5 can be found [here](#) and in the [September 2021 meeting materials](#).

*Questions? Contact Dr. Rachel Feeney, the Council's skate plan coordinator, at (978) 465-0492 ext. 110, [rfeeney@nefmc.org](mailto:rfeeney@nefmc.org). Also visit the Council's [skate webpage](#).*