



New England Fishery Management Council

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Skates: Work on Amendment 5 Continues but Council Drops Limited Access from Toolbox for Both Wing and Bait Fisheries

The New England Fishery Management Council will continue to work on Amendment 5 to the Northeast Skate Complex Fishery Management Plan (FMP). However, the Council will not be developing alternatives that involve limited access for either the skate wing or skate bait fisheries as part of this amendment. The Council made this decision during its [April 13-15, 2021](#) webinar meeting.

The Council conducted two rounds of scoping for Amendment 5. The first was in [2017](#) when the amendment was largely focused on limited access and qualification criteria. The second was in January and February of [2021](#) after the Council agreed to expand the scope of the amendment to consider ways other than limited access to:

- Prevent triggering incidental skate possession limits;
- Improve the precision and accuracy of fishery data; and
- Better define fishery participants.

A Summary of All Comments
Collected During Both Scoping Periods
is Posted [HERE](#).

The Skate Committee and Skate Advisory Panel (AP) met in March to review the scoping comments, which reflected a range of viewpoints, and to determine next steps. The Committee and AP both supported

pursuing limited access alternatives in the amendment, although more support was expressed for doing so in the bait fishery than the wing fishery.

The Council as a whole, however, was divided, as it has been from the start. And, on [April 14, 2021](#) during the skate report, motions to develop alternatives for limited access in the bait fishery and the wing fishery both failed.

This means the Council will no longer be developing limited access for the skate fishery through Amendment 5.

The Council did support the following next steps for the amendment:



Winter skate, the target species of the wing fishery. – SMAST photo



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- Proceeding to develop Amendment 5 using the problem statement, goals, and other types of measures already approved by the Council at previous meetings;
- Updating two objectives of the Skate FMP that need technical revisions;
- Developing alternatives for an intermediate possession limit trigger for the wing and bait fisheries and options for possession limit reductions of 50% and 75% when an intermediate possession limit is triggered;
- Developing alternatives that would require federal skate permits to be held year-round to prevent fishery participants from dropping or picking up permits mid-year, which has led to past problems; and
- Developing options to improve precision and accuracy of skate data with at-sea monitoring and/or vessel monitoring system (VMS) requirements.

The Skate AP and Skate Committee will meet on [May 13](#) and [May 18, 2021](#) respectively to regroup and follow up on Amendment 5. The AP and Committee also will discuss 2022-2023 skate specifications, which are under development. The Council will receive more information during its June meeting and likely take final action on specifications in September. A short overview is available in this [presentation](#).

Control Dates on June Meeting Agenda

Control dates do exist for skates as follows:

- **Bait Fishery** – July 30, 2009; and
- **Wing Fishery** – March 31, 2014.

Given that these control dates are many years old now and considered to be “stale,” the Skate Committee and AP recommended the Council ask NOAA Fisheries to establish new control dates for both skate fisheries.

The Council will consider this request at its [June meeting](#). While the Council will not be developing limited access options in Amendment 5, this recommendation would update the control dates in case the Council revisits limited access down the road.

Control dates are meant to discourage speculative entry or fishing activity in the event the Council decides at some point later to control participation in the fishery.

*** IMPORTANT NOTE *** The Council is not obligated to use a control date even if one is published.

Northeast Skate Identification Guide and More Information

Barndoor Skate (*Dipturus laevis*)

Permitted up to 25 percent of catch in the directed wing fishery

- VTR Code(s): SKBARN (whole) SKBARNW (wings)
- Range: Most common on southern Georges Bank and southern New England
- Depth: Most common 35–80 fathoms
- Max Length: 60 inches (152 cm)

Features:

- Very pointed snout
- Reddish brown body surface
- Small dark spots covering body
- No spines on wings
- Underside of wings are gray



IDs for All Seven Skate Species can be found [HERE](#).

– NOAA Fisheries

- Visit the Council’s skate [webpage](#).
- Visit the Council’s Amendment 5 [webpage](#).
- All materials used during the Council’s April skate discussion are posted [here](#).
- **Questions?** Contact Dr. Rachel Feeney, the Council’s skate plan coordinator, at:
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