



NOAA

NATIONAL OCEANIC AND
ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 15, 2010

NOAA: New Science Shows Improvement in Northeast Skate Stock Condition
Less Severe Catch Limits Necessary for this Fishing Year

New scientific information showing improvement in Northeast skate stock health has allowed NOAA to adjust catch levels and avoid severe catch reductions in the skate fishery in 2010.

New management measures were also adopted to establish annual catch limits for all skate species and accountability measures if catches are exceeded as well as to establish a rebuilding program for smooth skates.

In March, new scientific information indicated that the overall condition of the skate stock complex, which includes winter, barndoor, thorny, smooth, little, clearnose and rosette skates, had improved. As a result, NOAA delayed implementation of the new skate management measures scheduled to go into effect on May 1, in order to use the best available science to define catch levels for the 2010 and 2011 fishing years.

"We made a commitment to be as responsive as possible when new science is made available that impacts our management decisions," said Patricia Kurkul, northeast regional administrator, NOAA Fisheries Service. "Because of this information, we did not have to reduce catch levels by as much as we initially thought necessary to avoid overfishing this stock, thus we were able to minimize impacts on fishermen and local communities."

The annual catch limit for the fishery will only be cut by 1 percent over last year's total catch in state and federal waters combined. However, the amount of the catch that can be landed from federal waters will be significantly reduced from previous years.

The bulk of the skate catch occurs in the groundfish, monkfish and scallop fisheries as unintentional catch or bycatch. Skate “wings” are typically kept and sold as food. Skates are also harvested for bait for the American lobster fishery. The skate wing fishery will receive 66.5 percent of the total allowable catch (9,209 mt) and the skate bait fishery will receive 33.5 percent (4,639 mt).

The New England Fishery Management Council had originally recommended a trip limit of 1900 lbs for the wing fishery. Based on the new scientific advice, we were able to increase that to 5,000 lbs. Other measures that will go into effect this year include seasonal quotas for the bait fishery, and the ability to make adjustments to trip limits during the fishing season if necessary.

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