

Draft management plan for rays and skates in Sub-areas VI and VII

Initial Proposal to Northwestern Waters RAC by the Irish South and East Fish Producers Organisation and the Federation of Irish Fishermens Organisations

21st June, June 2011

Introduction

This plan sets out to achieve sustainable exploitation of rays and skates in western waters. It aims to exploit the commercially viable species at sustainable levels and to afford maximum protection to those species that are currently depleted.

The initial proposal is put forward by the Irish industry. Ireland has directed fisheries for rays, servicing the domestic market, supporting the local processing and the traditional retail sectors. Therefore Ireland has special responsibility to achieve a sustainable future for these fisheries, in biological, economic and social terms. The plan is the result of consultations between industry organisations, state agencies and a conservation organisation, and is based on the latest ICES advice and elements of the European Commission's policy statements on setting fishing opportunities (see Appendix).

In proposing this plan for adoption, to the NWWRAC, it is hoped that it will be evaluated by STECF, in 2011, and be considered by the European Commission in proposing fishing options for 2012, and beyond.

Basis for proposal

The draft plan consists of an incremental approach, in three phases:

- I implement an interim TAC decision rule and additional measures in 2012, , based on current ICES advice. New TACs shall be established for more appropriate taxonomic groups of rays
- II establish an interim TAC decision rule, and in collaboration with ICES, further develop a suite of additional measures that underpin sustainable exploitation and afford maximum protection to the depleted species, for 2013 onwards
- III achieve exploitation in line with an appropriate variant of maximum sustainable yield, from 2015 onwards.

The current ICES advice is provided bi-annually and the next advice will not be available until 2012. The current advice from ICES is based on trends in stock abundance. Phases I and II contain an interim TAC Decision Rule, following the logic of EC policy statements on TAC setting.

Current ICES advice states that a 15% TAC reduction should apply to cuckoo ray in VI and VII. To implement this advice, and achieve a more taxonomically appropriate TAC regime, a separate TAC is proposed for cuckoo ray and its closely-related species. A particular focus of the plan is to afford maximum protection to vulnerable species and to iteratively develop measures to assist recovery of these species.

DRAFT PLAN

Phase I (2012)

Depleted species

For the vulnerable and/or depleted *Dipturus* and *Rostroraja* skates, (*D. flossada* blue skate, *D. intermedia* flapper skate [both previously named *D. batis* common skate], *D. oxyrinchus* longnose skate, *D. nidarosiensis* Norwegian skate and *R. alba* white skate), a suite of measures shall be established:

1. All specimens shall be returned alive to the sea immediately, to the extent possible,
2. Mandatory recording of all returned rays and skates, in the EC logbook,
3. Tagging programmes for returnees to provide information on distribution and survival.
4. Establish a programme of information gathering on refuges, through science/industry partnership.

Leucoraja rays

A separate TAC shall be established for *Leucoraja* rays (*L. naevus* cuckoo ray, *L. fullonica* shagreen ray and *L. circularis* sandy ray), for the appropriate spatial units. For 2012, this TAC shall be set consistent with a 15% decrease relative to current catch levels, in keeping with current ICES advice for cuckoo ray.

Raja rays

A separate TAC shall be established for *Raja* rays (*R. clavata*, thornback ray, *R. montagui* spotted ray, *R. microocellata* smalleye ray and *R. brachyura* blonde ray), consistent with the current TAC area of VI and VII (excl. VIIId). For 2012, this TAC shall be set at current catch levels, excluding catches of cuckoo, shagreen and starry ray.

***Raja undulata* undulate ray**

In view of the poor knowledge and its patchy distribution, in line with ICES advice, there will be no target fishing unless information is available to show that such fisheries are sustainable.

Additional measures

All species to be landed separately, by species.

Landings of wings only will be prohibited, because this makes species identification very difficult.

A minimum size of equivalent of 50 cm TL shall apply. Any ray or skate below this size must be released alive to the extent practicable.

Mandatory recording, in EC logbooks, of all discarded rays and skates shall apply from 2012 onwards.

Sample schemes shall be established for vessels under 10 m L.O.A. to obtain species specific landings and discards information.

A pilot tagging programme shall be established by member states. In particular this should aim to clarify distribution of vulnerable species and improve information on survival.

By means of science/industry collaboration, possible experimentation and a request to ICES;

- Identify indicators that could be used achieve management in line with variants of maximum sustainable yield.
- Establish a programme of information gathering, to identify spawning areas/periods, nursery areas, mating areas, which will be used to frame area/seasonal closures in phases II and III.
- Identify further research, and summarise existing knowledge, on the utility of Technical Conservation Measures (TCMs) that may be appropriate to increase survival of discarded rays.

Phase II (2013 and 2014)

Leucoraja rays

In 2013 and 2014 the TAC for these species ray shall be set in accordance with paragraphs 1-5, below.

Raja rays

In 2013 and 2014 the TAC for these species ray shall be set in accordance with paragraphs 1-5, below.

The following procedure shall apply to TAC setting for 2013 and 2014.

1. Where there is evidence that any of the individual populations are overfished with respect to the fishing mortality that will deliver maximum sustainable yield (or are depleted to a low level compared with historic levels), a reduction in TAC as needed to reach F_{msy} , but no greater than 15% would apply.
2. Where there is evidence that any of the individual populations are underfished with respect to the fishing mortality that will deliver maximum sustainable yield, an increase as needed to reach F_{msy} , but no greater than 15%, would apply.
3. The considerations in paragraphs 1 and 2 override subsequent paragraphs. Until such time as ICES provides advice that can be used to implement paragraphs 1 and 2, paragraphs 4 and 5 will apply.
4. Where abundance information either indicates no change in abundance of all the reference stocks, or advice is not available or does not adequately reflect changes in stock abundance, an unchanged TAC will apply.
5. Where ICES considers that representative stock abundance information exists, the following rule applies:
 - a. If the average estimated abundance of all the stocks in the last two years exceeds the average estimated abundance in the three preceding years by 20% or more, a 15% increase in TAC applies.
 - b. If the average estimated abundance of any of the stocks in the last two years is 20% or more lower than the average estimated abundance in the three preceding years, a 15% decrease in TAC applies.

Additional measures

Stakeholders will work through the NWWRAC to implement refined management measures based on information collected in Phase I.

Stakeholders and scientists will develop, including through simulation, a suitable approach that can be used to set the TACs, consistent with variants of maximum sustainable yield. This process will be assisted by new FP7 Project “*Myfish*” and the ICES initiative on stock assessment methodologies. This will include requests to ICES for evaluation.

Data collection programmes, through industry/science partnerships, will be further enhanced to collect relevant data for assessment and management purposes.

Phase III (2015 and beyond)

Achieve management according to a suitable approach in line with variants of maximum sustainable yield, including requesting ICES for guidance.

Further utilise information through industry/science collaboration, to identify areas or periods, to be used to refine management measures.

The plan will be re-evaluated in 2015, and every third subsequent year, for success in relation to delivering sustainable conditions for ray stocks.

Appendix

List of organisations involved in consultations

Fishermens' Organisations

Irish South and East Fishermens' Organisation
Irish Fishermens Organisation
Irish Fish Producers Organisation
Killybegs Fishermens Organisation
Irish South and West Fish Producers Organisation

State Agencies

Marine Institute
Irish Sea Fisheries Board – Bord Iascaigh Mhara
Inland Fisheries Ireland
Sea Fisheries Protection Authority

Conservation Bodies

Irish Elasmobranch Group