Ministry of Agriculture,
Nature and Food Quality

Roadmap for skates and rays

Best practices
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Agreed exemption for skates and rays

- Proposal is a result of a number of round tables with stakeholders from different member states
- The joint recommendations for high survivability exemption was submitted in May 2018.
- Discussions in June, July and August (STECF, Commission, regional groups).
- Exemption now on a temporary basis until 31 December 2021
- Exemption for cuckoo ray until 31 December 2019
- Roadmap submitted to Commission 31 October 2018

Main components

- Fill data gaps in all (prioritised) areas, métiers and species – Regional groups/MS
- Define and implement best practices at fleet level - Advisory Councils

Timeline

1 May 2019: AC submit a programme of measures implementing best practices at fleet level to regional group.

31 May 2019: RG submit new evidence on the discard survival rates of Cuckoo ray for extension of high survival exemption to Commission.

31 May of each year: RG submit to Commission an updated roadmap including:

a) measures to improve selectivity and survivability by Advisory Councils

b) updated state of play regarding data gaps and proposed filling of data gaps.

End of year: annual report on the progress, plans for, and modifications made to the survivability programmes

Filling data gaps (Regional Groups / MS)

Goals

- Lead, complete and disseminate gap analysis to identify where discard survival evidence is missing or requires strengthening
- Agree priority data needs within Regional Group and generate new robust evidence to enhance understanding of discard survival of skates and rays, including:
    1. Identify and understand factors influencing discard survival
    2. Produce new directly observed estimates of discard survival (incl. Cuckoo ray)
    3. Utilising all available data on discard estimates in the stock assessments to provide context to future exemptions
- **Responsibility of the regional groups to commission and assign science and research to fill the data gaps identified as necessary to support extension to temporary exemption**

Define and implement best practices at fleet level (ACs)

Goals

- The Advisory Councils will coordinate the development of a **program of measures** - for fleets requesting to use the exemption - that describe practical steps and actions taken to minimise discard mortality of skates and rays and improve data on discard levels
- Actions may include spatial/temporal avoidance measures, gear selectivity enhancements that either avoid unwanted catches or improve survival chances, and/or modifying catch handling practices to improve discard survival chances
- *To be **submitted on 1 May** to the regional groups.*

Drafting annual plan for best practices at fleet level

- Fishing fleets using the high survival exemption will draft an annual fishing plan (by May 1st)
- The fishing plan should indicate the status of the measures:

  (i) potential measures still needing some basic research;

  (ii) measures which could be trialed; and

  (iii) measures which can be implemented.
- If research is part of the fishing plan, any effort undertaken should use a standardized format (trial duration, number of vessels involved, analytical methods used, etc.)

	Status	Type of measure	Gear	
	1. Research still needed; 2. could be trialed; 3. could be implemented		Trawls	Nets
Avoidance	1, 2	Active sharing of information between operators	x	x
	1	Move on rules	x	
	1	Use of side-scan sonar to identify aggregations	x	
	1	Identify and avoid known spawning/nursery areas	x	x
Selectivity	1, 2	Deterrents - making use of sensory organs (lights, magnets)	x	x
	1	Behaviour of rays in and around the net	x	x
	1, 2	Tow speed & tow duration	x	
	2, 3	Raised fishing line	x	
	2, 3	Mesh size	x	x
	2, 3	Selective grid	x	
	2, 3	Escape panel	x	
Survival	2 & 3	Prompt release after catch	x	
	3	Handle with care (don’t lift by tail)	x	x
	3	Keep catch wet before and during sorting	x	
	2	Effects of fishing practice and gears	x	x

Avoidance: first step to selective fishing

	Status	Type of measure	Gear	
	1. research still needed; 2. could be trialed; 3. could be implemented		Trawls	Nets
Avoidance	1, 2	Active sharing of information between operators	x	X
	1	Move on rules	X	
	1	Use of side-scan sonar to identify aggregations	X	
	1	Identify and avoid known spawning/ nursery areas	X	X

- Research on **active sharing of information**: warn other fishermen about high density areas
- Research on **move on rules**: currently used to reduce catches of undersized fish but could also be developed for avoiding other unwanted catches
- Identify and avoid **known spawning/nursery areas**: protect large females and juveniles.

Selectivity: improvement by gear-based technical measures

Status		Type of measure	Gear	
	1. research still needed; 2. could be trialed; 3. could be implemented		Trawls	Nets
Selectivity	1, 2	Deterrents - making use of sensory organs (lights, magnets)	X	X
	1	Behaviour of rays in and around the net	X	X
	1, 2	Tow speed & Tow duration	X	
	2, 3	Raised fishing line	X	
	2, 3	Mesh size	X	X
	2, 3	Selective grid	X	
	2, 3	Escape panel	x	

- **Deterrents** - making use of sensory organs: lights, magnets in fixed gear
- Study of **ray behaviour** in or around the net to **improve selectivity** measures (grids/escape panels)
- **Adjusting tow speed & duration** to influence the composition of the catch/survival potential
- **Selective fisheries** by adjusting mesh size / escape panel / using selective grid

Increasing chances of survival

	Status	Type of measure	Gear	
	1. research still needed; 2. could be trialed; 3. could be implemented		Trawls	Nets
Survival	2 & 3	Prompt release after catch	X	
	3	Handle with care (don't lift by tail)	X	x
	3	Keep catch wet before and during sorting	X	
	2	Effects of fishing practice and gears	x	x

- **Prompt release**: adopting a strategy to promptly discard unwanted bycatch (discard first)
- **Increase the chance** of survival by:
  - Handling the bycatch with care;
  - Keeping the catch wet;
  - Reduce damage to fish caused by gear or crowding in the net.

Next steps

- Meetings and follow up between member states to agree substance and process of filling data gaps, goals and delivery deadlines (special focus on cuckoo ray): 14th of February, London
- Coordination of work done in different regional groups
- Advisory Councils will develop and submit a program of measures implementing best practices.
- Reap benefits of the work done in previous years through regular international expert dialogue meetings.