

Ms. Charlina Vitcheva
Director-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (MARE)
European Commission
Rue Josef II 99
1000 Brussels
Belgium

Dun Laoghaire, Zoetermeer, 15 September 2022
NSAC Ref. No.: 15-2122

Dear Ms Vitcheva,

Subject: Request for harmonisation of skates and rays identification guides on an EU wide basis

In 2020 the North Western Waters Advisory Council and the North Sea Advisory Council set up a joint Focus Group on Skates & Rays in order to develop advice to Commission and the Member States on improving management of skates and rays. The group meets regularly and has produced several advice documents to the Commission and the Member States over the course of its existence and supported the Commission with technical information for the setting up of an STECF Expert Working Group which is scheduled to meet at the end of September.

To advance its ongoing work on harmonised management measures for skates and rays in the North Sea and North Western Waters, the joint Focus Group Skates & Rays would like to request specific support from the Commission regarding the harmonisation of skates and rays identification guides for fishers in EU waters.

Currently multiple identification guides in various languages are available both online as well as in printed format. It is felt that this can lead to confusion and potential misidentification of individuals. You can find an overview of those relating to the North Sea and North Western Waters on the NWWAC website [here](#).

In [2020](#) and [2021](#) the NWWAC and NSAC advised their respective Member States Groups on best practice measures for the management of skates and rays. Both years, the NWWAC advised that

- To standardise ID guides: Practical identification guides should consist of a single page, which is robust and waterproof. Guides should be standardised across all Member States, regionalised (e.g., Channel, Celtic Sea, West of Scotland and Ireland, North Sea) to reduce confusion with species that do not occur in specific areas and available to download online in different languages. Efforts should be made to actively engage with fishermen to increase the uptake of available identification tools.
- To hold regular training sessions: Training of both scientific observers and crew should be organised on a regular basis to guarantee uptake and illustrate and quantify improvement.
- To distribute ID guides: Fishing plans should be distributed to the fishing industry and information posters should be made available to display onboard vessels. In addition, disseminating information on best practice via video and/or training workshops increases fishers knowledge on the bycatch issue, improves their ability to remain alert, and increase buy-in. Fishermen's knowledge should be integrated into the design of a best practice guide.



In [2022](#), the NWWAC reiterated its advice from the two previous years to the NWW Member States Group and added “In the meantime, NWWAC and NSAC members strongly believe that the harmonisation of skates and rays identification guides would greatly assist fishers on the ground in their day-to-day activities. Several publications are available online from various individual organisations which could form the basis for a joint publication covering multiple Member States ([link](#)). Therefore, we recommend that work is carried out in developing a harmonised publication for distribution across the North Sea and NWW Member States which ideally would also involve identification training for fishers.”

The ACs request assistance from the Commission to the various Member States to pursue and progress this important topic, for example by specifically requesting the Member States to set aside EMFAF funding for this important work as well as identifying the most suitable service provide to carry out this work.

As always, the ACs stand ready to assist the Commission and the Member States with this important work. We look forward to your response and thank you for the collaboration we continue to receive from the EC, which is crucial for our work.

Yours sincerely,



Emiel Brouckaert
Chairman
NWWAC Executive Committee



Kenn Skau Fisher
Chairman
NSAC Executive Committee

