

9.3.20 White skate (*Rostroraja alba*) in the Northeast Atlantic

ICES stock advice

ICES advises that when the precautionary approach is applied, there should be zero catches of this species in each of the years 2017, 2018, and 2019.

Stock development over time

This species has disappeared from most areas of former habitat in the ICES area. There are very few recent, authenticated records of white skate in the ICES area, and these isolated records are from the English Channel, Irish waters, and Portuguese waters. According to historical literature it appears to have occurred more frequently in previous decades.

Stock and exploitation status

Table 9.3.20.1 White skate in the Northeast Atlantic. State of the stock and fishery relative to reference points.

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		Fishing pressure				Stock size				
		2012	2013	2014		2013	2014	2015		
Maximum sustainable yield	F _{MSY}	?	?	?	Undefined	B _{trigger}	?	?	?	Undefined
Precautionary approach	F _{pa} , F _{lim}	?	?	?	Undefined	B _{pa} , B _{lim}	?	?	?	Undefined
Management plan	F _{MGT}	-	-	-	Not applicable	SSB _{MGT}	-	-	-	Not applicable
Qualitative evaluation	-	?	?	?	Unknown	-	✗	✗	✗	Depleted

Catch options

For this stock, current catches are zero. ICES advises that when the precautionary approach is applied, catches should not increase (ICES, 2012). This corresponds to zero catch in 2017-2019.

Discarding is known to take place, but ICES cannot quantify the corresponding catch. In addition, discard survival, which is likely to occur, has not been estimated.

Table 9.3.20.2 White skate in the Northeast Atlantic. For stocks in ICES data categories 3–6, one catch option is possible.

Recent advised catch for 2015–2016	0 tonnes	
Discard rate	Unknown	
Precautionary buffer	Not applied	-
Landings advice	0 tonnes	

Basis of the advice

Table 9.3.20.3 White skate in the Northeast Atlantic. The basis of the advice.

Advice basis	Precautionary approach.
Management plan	There is no management plan for this stock.

Quality of the assessment

Catches of white skate are now rare, both in surveys and commercially.

There is no assessment of this stock.

Issues relevant for the advice

The perception of the stock is based on the lack of recent records of this species in comparison with historical accounts, which documented a more widespread occurrence and localized abundance in parts of the ICES area.

Rostroraja alba is listed as a prohibited species (Article 8 in EU, 2011) for the entire ICES area. This is a high-level, long-term conservation strategy aimed at very depleted and vulnerable species. ICES supports this listing, having reviewed it in 2010.

Historical information indicates that white skate has formerly been targeted in fisheries in the English Channel and around Brittany (Ellis *et al.*, 2010), but present records show only a few isolated instances in scientific surveys.

Whilst listed in some official landings data, these include records from outside the biogeographical range and are assumed to reflect coding errors or misidentifications.

Given the depleted nature of the stock, many fishers and sea-going staff are unfamiliar with this species. Improved identification and educational material could be developed and circulated to fishers to aid in data collection and highlight the need for releasing prohibited species.

Reference points

No reference points are defined for this stock.

Basis of the assessment

Table 9.3.20.4 White skate in the Northeast Atlantic. The basis of the assessment.

ICES stock data category	6 (ICES, 2016a).
Assessment type	No assessment (ICES, 2016b).
Input data	None.
Discards and bycatch	Discards are known to take place but cannot be quantified.
Indicators	None.
Other information	Historical information.
Working group	Working Group on Elasmobranch Fishes (WGEF).

Information from stakeholders

No information has been provided.

History of the advice, catch, and management

Table 9.3.20.5 White skate in the Northeast Atlantic. History of ICES advice, the agreed TAC, and ICES estimates of landings. Weights in tonnes.

Year	ICES advice	Predicted landings corresp. to advice	Nominal reported landings *
2009	ICES (2008) advised that “ <i>White skate has a localized and patchy distribution, and is extirpated from most parts of the Celtic Seas ecoregion. It should receive the highest possible protection. Any incidental bycatch should not be landed, but returned, to the sea, as they are likely to have a high survival rate</i> ”.	0	9.1
2010	-	0	4.7
2011	Retain on the prohibited species list	0	10.0
2012	Biennial advice	0	2.2
2013	Retains on the prohibited species list	0	2.7
2014	Biennial advice	0	4.3
2015	No catches of this species. Measures should be taken to minimize bycatch to the lowest level. Retain on the prohibited species list	0	0.8
2016	Biennial advice	0	
2017	Zero catch, retain on the prohibited species list	0	
2018	same advice as for 2017	0	
2019	same advice as for 2017	0	

* In ICES (2016b, c) elasmobranch landings were revised, and the many reported landings of white skate in official data that were from outside the known biogeographical range were reallocated to other stocks. The data presented here were within the biogeographical range of white skate, but are still considered to be uncertain.

History of catch and landings

The distribution of this stock does not extend into the NEAFC regulatory area.

Table 9.3.20.6 White skate in the Northeast Atlantic. Catch distribution by fleet in 2014 as estimated by ICES.

Total catch (2015)	Commercial landings	Discards
Unknown	0 tonnes	Discarding is known to take place but cannot be quantified.

Table 9.3.20.7 White skate in the Northeast Atlantic. Nominal reported landings of white skate (in tonnes).

Country	France	Ireland	UK	Total *
2007	1.1			1.1
2008	0.2		0.9	1.2
2009	9.1		0.0	9.1
2010	4.7			4.7
2011	10.0			10.0
2012	2.0		0.2	2.2
2013	2.7		0.0	2.7
2014	4.0	0.3	0.1	4.3
2015	0.7	0.0	0.1	0.8

* Please see footnote for Table 9.3.20.5.

Summary of the assessment

There is no assessment for this stock.

Sources and references

Ellis, J. R., Silva, J. F., McCully, S. R., Evans, M., and Catchpole, T. 2010. UK fisheries for skates (Rajidae): History and development of the fishery, recent management actions and survivorship of discards. ICES CM 2010/E:10. 38 pp.

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ICES. 2016b. Report of the Working Group on Elasmobranch Fishes (WGEF), 15–24 June 2016, Lisbon, Portugal. ICES CM 2016/ACOM:20. 684 pp.

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