



New England Fishery Management Council

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Skate Scoping Hearings Scheduled: NEFMC Seeks Public Input to Help Shape Potential Limited Access Alternatives

The New England Fishery Management Council has scheduled six scoping hearings to gather public input on Amendment 5 to the Northeast Skate Complex Fishery Management Plan. This action could lead to the development of a limited access program for both the skate bait and skate non-bait/wing fisheries.

The hearings will be held Jan. 24 through Feb. 22 from Portsmouth, NH to Cape May, NJ. The deadline for written comments is March 6.

The skate fishery currently is “open access,” so any vessel may join at will. The Council is considering converting the fishery to “limited access” and establishing qualification criteria, permit categories, permit conditions, and other measures to better manage the fishery.

“In initiating this action, the Council is responding to calls from industry members who wish to see these fisheries maintained,” said Dr. Matt McKenzie, chairman of the Council’s Skate Committee.

Skate fishermen have expressed concern that increasingly strict measures in other fisheries – particularly

groundfish – could lead to unrestrained increases in fishing effort on skates by new entrants into the fishery and: (1) cause quotas to be harvested more quickly; (2) trigger reduced skate trip limits; and (3) have negative economic impacts on current participants.

The scoping hearings mark the first opportunity for members of the public to make suggestions or raise concerns about the range of issues the Council should consider in a limited access program under Amendment 5.

“We welcome constructive public comments from all interested stakeholders – either in person or submitted in writing,” said McKenzie.



Winter skate caught on University of New England research trip.
– Photo by Angela Cicia



New England Fishery Management Council

Qualification criteria may include factors such as: the time period vessels have participated in the fishery; historical levels of landings; and dependence on the fishery. The Council may develop different categories of limited access permits. If so, these categories may treat vessels differently and possibly differentiate between vessels that target skates and those that catch skates as bycatch in other fisheries.

Two control dates already are in place:

- **Skate bait fishery** – July 30, 2009; and
- **Skate non-bait/wing fishery** – March 31, 2014.

These dates may or may not be used by the Council in developing qualification criteria.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

The Council is asking for input on issues such as:

- Should the Council consider and use limited access to manage capacity in the skate complex?
- If a limited access program is established, should qualifying criteria be based on the bait and non-bait control dates or on other dates?
- Should the qualification criteria be different for the bait fishery vs. the non-bait/wing fishery since the two are distinctively different?
- Should limited access permits be based on a level of landings during a specific time period?
- Should a mechanism exist to allow new entrants into the fishery if optimum yield isn't being achieved due to low fishing effort?
- If multi-tiered limited access permit categories are developed, should the amount of allowable skate fishing activity be differentiated by permit category?
- Should vessels that do not qualify for a limited access permit be allowed to have a low skate possession limit?

Here are the locations, dates, and start times for the five in-person scoping hearings:

- **Portsmouth, NH** – Tuesday, Jan. 24, Sheraton Harborside Hotel, 250 Market Street, 5 p.m.
- **Buzzards Bay, MA** – Tuesday, Feb. 7, Massachusetts Maritime Academy, 101 Academy Drive, 6 p.m.
- **Narragansett, RI** – Thursday, Feb. 9, URI Graduate School of Oceanography Coastal Institute Building, Hazard Room, 215 S Ferry Road, 6 p.m.
- **Cape May, NJ** – Tuesday, Feb. 21, Grand Hotel of Cape May, 1045 Beach Avenue, 6 p.m.
- **Montauk, NY** – Wednesday, Feb. 22, Montauk Playhouse Community Center Foundation, 240 Edgemere Street, 6 p.m.

Webinar Option

Can't make one of the in-person hearings? Take part in the Council's Skate Scoping Webinar on Tuesday, Jan. 31, beginning at 6 p.m.

A) Register online at

<https://global.gotomeeting.com/join/194149773>

B) Call in by dialing +1 (646) 749-3122 (regular phone charges apply) and plug in the following access code when prompted: 194-149-773

- What sources of data should be used to determine limited access qualification?



New England Fishery Management Council

Fishermen and other stakeholders will have several other opportunities down the road to comment on Amendment 5 as the potential limited access program begins to take shape. However, input gathered during this early stage of the process is especially important since the Council is starting off with a blank slate.

Skate Committee Chairman McKenzie emphasized, “These scoping comments will help guide the Council’s development of possible alternatives.”

Copies of the scoping document for Amendment 5 to the Northeast Skate Complex Fishery Management Plan are available online at <http://www.nefmc.org/library/amendment-5-3> or by calling the New England Council office at (978) 465-0492.

Written comments will be accepted until 5 p.m. on March 6, 2017. Submit comments one of three ways:

- By fax: (978) 465-3116
- By email: comments@nefmc.org
- By mail: Executive Director Tom Nies, New England Fishery Management Council, 50 Water Street, Mill #2, Newburyport, MA 01950

Label written comments as “Northeast Skate Complex Amendment 5 Scoping Comments.”

Anyone with questions may contact Dr. Fiona, the Council’s skate plan coordinator, at (978) 465-0492, ext. 121, email fhogan@nefmc.org.

Q: What are the seven species of skates that make up the Northeast skate complex?

A: Barndoor, clearnose, little, rosette, smooth, thorny, and winter skates.

Q: Which species are caught in the bait fishery?

A: The bait fishery targets little skate but also catches a small percentage of juvenile winter skate.

Q: What about the non-bait fishery?

A: The non-bait fishery primarily targets adult winter skate for the wing market.

The New England Fishery Management Council is one of eight regional councils established in 1976 by what is now called the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. The Council develops rules for both commercial and recreational fisheries in federal waters from three to 200 miles offshore in the Gulf of Maine, on Georges Bank, and in Southern New England.

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