

Thornback ray (*Raja clavata*) in Division 7.e (western English Channel)

ICES advice on fishing opportunities

ICES advises that when the precautionary approach is applied, landings should be no more than 170 tonnes in each of the years 2023 and 2024. ICES cannot quantify the corresponding catches.

Management of the catches of skates and rays under a combined TAC prevents effective control of single-stock exploitation rates and could lead to overexploitation of some species

Stock development over time

ICES cannot assess the stock and exploitation status relative to the maximum sustainable yield (MSY) and precautionary approach (PA) reference points because information to define reference points is not available.

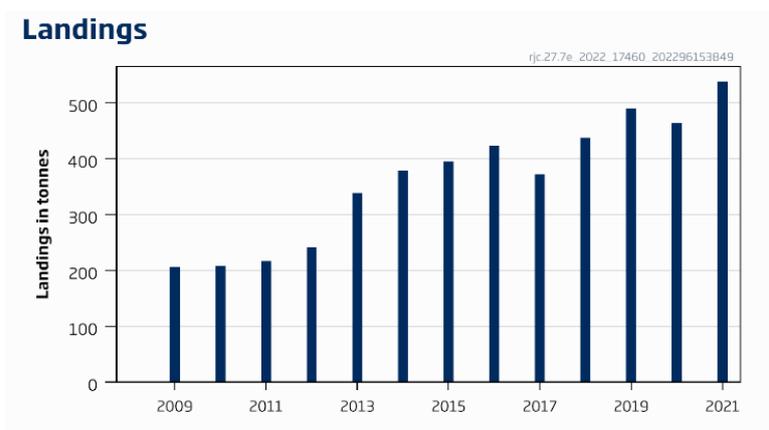


Figure 1 Thornback ray in Division 7.e. ICES estimates of species-specific landings (in tonnes) since 2009.

Catch scenarios

ICES framework for category 5 stocks was applied (ICES, 2012). For stocks without information on abundance or exploitation, ICES considers that a precautionary reduction of catches should be implemented where there is no ancillary information clearly indicating that the current level of exploitation is appropriate for the stock. The precautionary buffer was last applied in 2020 and was therefore not considered in 2022.

Discarding is known to take place, but ICES cannot estimate the quantity or the corresponding dead catch.

Table 1 Thornback ray in Division 7.e. The basis for the catch scenarios.

Advised landings for 2021–2022 issued in 2020	170 tonnes	
Discard rate	Unknown	
Precautionary buffer	Not applied	-
Landings advice*	170 tonnes	
% advice change**	0%	

* Advised landings (2021, 2022)

** Advice value for 2023 and 2024 relative to the advice value for 2021 and 2022.

Basis of the advice

Table 2 Thornback ray in Division 7.e. The basis of the advice.

Advice basis	Precautionary approach
Management plan	ICES is not aware of any agreed precautionary management plan for thornback ray in this area

Quality of the assessment

The stock structure of thornback ray in Division 7.e is unclear, and it is unclear as to whether it is discrete or associated with the neighbouring stocks in either Subarea 4 and Division 7.d or with the stock in divisions 7.a and 7.f–g. Until the stock structure is clarified, ICES provides advice separately for Division 7.e.

The increase in landings in the period 2009 to 2013 is likely to have been caused by the introduction and improvement of species-specific reporting.

Issues relevant for the advice

Thornback ray is one of the most commercially important skate species in this division. The UK-Q1-SWBeam (2006–present) survey has shown that thornback ray is locally common in Lyme Bay. Preliminary analyses of this survey indicated a greater biomass in 2014–2017 than at the beginning of the time-series, with 2018 at a similar level to the beginning of the time-series, and thereafter showing a sharp increase (ICES, 2022b).

Catches of Skates and rays are managed under a common TAC. However, most landings are reported by species (ICES, 2022b). ICES considers that management of the catches of several stocks under a combined TAC prevents effective control of single-stock exploitation rates and could lead to overexploitation of some stocks.

Reference points

No reference points are defined for this stock.

Basis of the assessment

Table 3 Thornback ray in Division 7.e. Basis of the assessment and advice.

ICES stock data category	5 (ICES, 2022a)
Assessment type	No assessment
Input data	ICES estimated landings
Discards and bycatch	Discarding is known to take place but has not been quantified
Indicators	None
Other information	Survey: UK-Q1-SWBeam [B2732]
Working group	Working Group on Elasmobranch Fishes (WGEF)

History of the advice, catch, and management

Table 4 Thornback ray in Division 7.e. History of ICES advice and ICES estimates of landings*. All weights are in tonnes.

Year	ICES advice	Landings corresp. to advice	ICES landings
2011	<i>Status quo</i> catch		216
2012	No new advice, same as 2011		242
2013	No TAC, species-specific measures needed, catch could increase by max. 20%	-	339
2014	No new advice, same as 2013	-	379
2015	No increase in landings from the average landings of the last three years	260	395
2016	No new advice, same as 2015	260	423
2017	Precautionary approach	≤ 212	372
2018	Precautionary approach (same value as advised catches for 2017)	≤ 212	437
2019	Precautionary approach	≤ 212	490

Year	ICES advice	Landings corresp. to advice	ICES landings
2020	Precautionary approach	≤ 212	464
2021	Precautionary approach	≤ 170	538
2022	Precautionary approach	≤ 170	
2023	Precautionary approach	≤ 170	
2024	Precautionary approach	≤ 170	

* There is no specific TAC for this stock. Fishing opportunities are managed through an overall TAC by management unit, which includes all species of skates and rays.

History of the catch and landings

The distribution of this stock does not extend into the NEAFC Regulatory Area.

Table 5 Thornback ray in Division 7.e. Catch distribution by fleet in 2021 as estimated by ICES.

Catch	Landings				Discards
	Beam trawl 10%	Bottom trawl 72%	Nets 13%	Other gears 5%	
Unknown	538 tonnes				Unquantified

Table 6 Thornback ray in Division 7.e. History of landings. ICES estimates of landings by country (in tonnes). Blank cell = no data reported; 0 = value less than 0.5.

Year	Belgium	Spain	France	UK	Ireland	Netherlands	Total landings
2009	2		122	82		0	206
2010	8	0	101	98		2	208
2011	3	0	114	98		1	216
2012	4		108	129		0	242
2013	4		181	151	0	2	339
2014	3		224	151			379
2015	9		225	158	2	0	395
2016	14		213	195		0	423
2017	21		176	173	2	0	372
2018	14		212	206	4		437
2019	13		263	212	2	1	490
2020	9		264	189	1	1	464
2021	35		289	214		1	538

Summary of the assessment

There is no assessment for thornback ray in this area.

Sources and references

ICES. 2012. ICES implementation of Advice for Data-limited stocks in 2012 in its 2012 Advice. ICES CM 2012/ACOM:68. 42 pp.

ICES. 2022a. Advice on fishing opportunities. In Report of the ICES Advisory Committee, 2022. ICES Advice 2022, Section 1.1.1. <https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.advice.19928060>

ICES. 2022b. Working Group on Elasmobranch Fishes (WGEF). ICES Scientific Reports, 4:74. <http://doi.org/10.17895/ices.pub.21089833>. In prep.

[Download the stock assessment data and figures](#)

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