Blonde ray (*Raja brachyura*) in divisions 7.a and 7.f–g (Irish Sea, Bristol Channel, Celtic Sea North)

ICES advice on fishing opportunities

ICES advises that when the precautionary approach is applied, landings should be no more than 573 tonnes in each of the years 2025–2028. 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.

Non-fisheries conservation considerations

Conservation aspects and associated management measures may exist at a national or regional level but were not reviewed by ICES.

Stock development over time

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

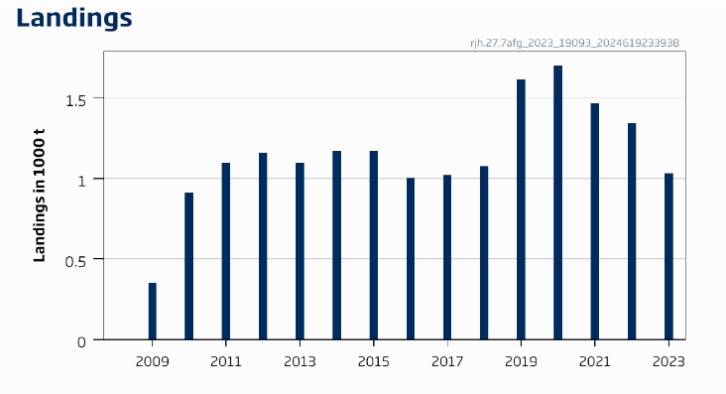

Figure 1 Blonde ray in divisions 7.a and 7.f–g. ICES estimated landings.

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 2022 and has therefore not been considered in 2024.

Discarding is known to take place, but ICES cannot estimate the quantity, nor the corresponding dead catch.

Table 1 Blonde ray in divisions 7.a and 7.f–g. The basis for the catch scenarios.

Advised landings for 2023–2024 (issued in 2022)		573 tonnes
Discard rate		Unknown
Precautionary buffer	Not applied	-
Landings advice*		573 tonnes
% advice change**		0%

* Advised landings for 2025–2028.
** Advice value for 2025–2028 relative to the advice value for 2023 and 2024.

Basis of the advice

Table 2 Blonde ray in divisions 7.a and 7.f–g. The basis of the advice.

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

Quality of the assessment

Despite improvements in species-specific reporting in recent years, misidentification at species level is likely still occurring for spotted ray and blonde ray. Hence the accuracy of landings data will be uncertain.

In the UK (E&W)-BTS-Q3 survey, the species is caught most regularly in the Bristol Channel and off the east coast of Ireland. Catch rates for blonde ray in this survey have increased (ICES, 2024); however, the survey is not considered a reliable indication of stock size for quantitative advice, as it has limited coverage in areas of local abundance and larger individuals are not sampled effectively by this survey gear.

Issues relevant for the advice

Blonde ray is a coastal and inner shelf species that has a patchy distribution and is often found in greater abundance on sandbanks.

Blonde ray is an important commercial species in this area. It is taken in trawl fisheries targeting the overall skate complex and is a bycatch in various demersal fisheries. It may also be targeted in areas of high local abundance because of its large size and high market value.

Catches of skates and rays are managed under a common TAC. However, most landings are reported by species (ICES, 2024). 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.

This advice has changed to become quadrennial advice until more catch and survey data are made available to ICES.

Reference points

No reference points are defined for this stock.

Basis of the assessment

Table 3 Blonde ray in divisions 7.a and 7.f–g. The basis of the assessment.

ICES stock data category	5 (ICES, 2023)
Assessment type	No assessment (ICES, 2024)
Input data	Landings data
Discards and bycatch	Discarding is known to take place but has not been quantified
Indicators	None
Other information	Survey: UK (E&W)-BTS-Q3 [B6596]
Working group	Working Group on Elasmobranch Fishes (WGEF)

History of the advice, catch, and management

Table 4 Blonde ray in divisions 7.a and 7.f–g. History of ICES advice and ICES estimates of landings. * All weights are in tonnes.

Year	ICES advice	Landings corresp. to advice	Agreed TAC (6.a–b and 7.a–ce–k)*	ICES landings
2011	No specific advice		11379	1099
2012	No specific advice		9915	1160
2013	No TAC, species-specific measures needed, catch to decrease by at least 20%	-	8924	1097
2014	No new advice, same as 2013	-	8032	1170
2015	Decrease at least 20% from the average of the last three years	897	8032	1172
2016	No new advice, same as 2015	897	8032	1004
2017	Precautionary approach	≤ 895	8434	1020
2018	Precautionary approach (same value as advised catches for 2017)	≤ 895	9699	1077
2019	Precautionary approach	≤ 716	10184	1616
2020	Precautionary approach	≤ 716	10184	1703
2021	Precautionary approach	≤ 716	9675	1467**
2022	Precautionary approach	≤ 716	9482	1342
2023	Precautionary approach	≤ 573	9797	1034
2024	Precautionary approach	≤ 573	9756	
2025	Precautionary approach	≤ 573		
2026	Precautionary approach	≤ 573		
2027	Precautionary approach	≤ 573		
2028	Precautionary approach	≤ 573		

* There is no specific TAC for this stock. Fishing opportunities are managed through an overall TAC for EU and UK waters of divisions 6.a–b and 7.a–ce–k, which includes all species of skate and ray (Rajiformes).
** Updated in 2024 (ICES, 2024)

History of the catch and landings

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

Table 5 Blonde ray in divisions 7.a and 7.f–g. Catch distribution by fleet in 2023 as estimated by ICES.

Catch (2023)	Landings				Discards
Unknown	Beam trawl 47%	All other bottom trawls 49%	Set nets 3%	Other gears 2%	Unquantified
	1034 tonnes				

Table 6 Blonde ray in divisions 7.a and 7.f–g. History of landings; ICES estimates of landings by country (in tonnes).

Year	Belgium	UK	Ireland	France	Total
2009	170	138	5	36	350
2010	210	226	402	73	910
2011	313	273	382	131	1099
2012	404	261	407	87	1160
2013	406	262	377	52	1097
2014	351	229	420	170	1170
2015	359	245	351	218	1172
2016	313	245	171	275	1004
2017	338	270	154	257	1020
2018	348	328	228	172	1077
2019	520	404	396	295	1616

Year	Belgium	UK	Ireland	France	Total
2020	721	322	383	277	1703
2021	445*	405	353	264	1467*
2022	515	293	247	287	1342
2023	372	346	199	117	1034

* Updated in 2024 (ICES, 2024)

Summary of the assessment

There is no assessment for blonde 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. https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.pub.5322

ICES. 2023. Advice on fishing opportunities. *In* Report of the ICES Advisory Committee, 2023. ICES Advice 2023, Section 1.1.1. https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.advice.22240624

ICES. 2024. Report of the Working Group on Elasmobranch Fishes (WGEF). ICES Scientific Reports 06:75. http://doi.org/10.17895/ices.pub.26935504.

Download the stock assessment data and figures.

Recommended citation: ICES. 2024. Blonde ray (*Raja brachyura*) in divisions 7.a and 7.f-g (Irish Sea, Bristol Channel, Celtic Sea North). *In* Report of the ICES Advisory Committee, 2024. ICES Advice 2024, rjh.27.7afg. https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.advice.25019543