Blonde ray (*Raja brachyura*) 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 213 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 the maximum sustainable yield (MSY) or precautionary approach (PA) reference points because the reference points are undefined.

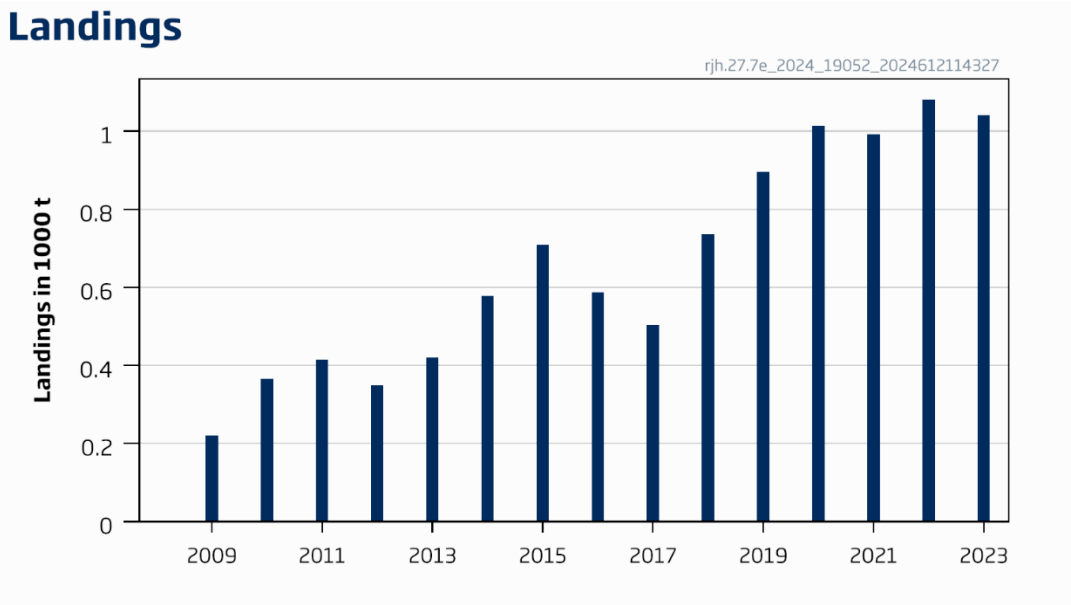

Figure 1 Blonde ray in Division 7.e. ICES estimated landings (2009–2023).

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 Division 7.e. The basis for the catch scenarios.

Advised landings for 2023–2024 (issued in 2022)		213 tonnes
Discard rate		Unknown
Precautionary buffer	Not applied (last applied in 2022)	-
Landings advice*		213 tonnes
% advice change**		0 %

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

The advised landings for 2025–2028 have not changed from previous advice.

Basis of the advice

Table 2 Blonde 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 blonde ray in this area

Quality of the assessment

Despite improvements in species-specific reporting in recent years, some misidentification at species level is still possible, especially between blonde ray and spotted ray. Stock-specific landings data are not available before 2009. The increase in landings from 2009 to 2015 might have been also influenced by the introduction and improvement in species-specific reporting of skate landings.

Issues relevant for the advice

Blonde ray is an important commercial species, accounting for about one-third of the skate landings in Division 7.e. It is a bycatch in demersal fisheries but may be targeted in areas of high local abundance because of its large size and high market value. Restrictions on fishing for undulate ray from 2009 to 2022 may have redirected fishing effort to this species during those years.

The stock structure of blonde ray in the western English Channel is unknown. It is a coastal species that has a patchy distribution and is often found in greater abundance in sand bank habitats.

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 Division 7.e. 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	None
Working group	Working Group on Elasmobranch Fishes (WGEF)

History of the advice, catch, and management

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

Year	ICES advice	Landings corresp. to advice	Agreed TAC* 6.a–b, 7.a–c and 7.e–k	ICES landings
2011	No specific advice		11 379	414
2012	No specific advice		9915	349
2013	No TAC, species-specific measures needed, catch to decrease by at least 20%	-	8924	419
2014	No new advice, same as 2013	-	8032	579
2015	*Status quo* for skate TAC	310	8032	708
2016	No new advice, same as 2015	310	8032	587
2017	Precautionary approach	≤ 333	8434	504
2018	Precautionary approach	≤ 333	9699	735
2019	Precautionary approach	≤ 266	10 184	896
2020	Precautionary approach	≤ 266	10 184	1014
2021	Precautionary approach	≤ 266	9675	992
2022	Precautionary approach	≤ 266	9482	1080
2023	Precautionary approach	≤ 213	9797	1041
2024	Precautionary approach	≤ 213	9756	
2025	Precautionary approach	≤ 213		
2026	Precautionary approach	≤ 213		
2027	Precautionary approach	≤ 213		
2028	Precautionary approach	≤ 213		

* 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).

History of the catch and landings

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

Table 5 Blonde ray in Division 7.e. Catch distribution by fleet in 2023 as estimated by ICES.

Catch (2023)	Landings				Discards
Unknown	Beam trawls 23%	All other bottom trawls 40%	Set nets 33%	Other gears 3%	Unquantified
	1041 tonnes				

Table 6 Blonde 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	France	UK	Ireland	Netherlands	Total
2009	6	56	159			221
2010	3	148	215			365
2011	5	205	204			414
2012	5	169	175	0	0	349
2013	6	191	222		0	419
2014	3	281	295			579
2015	6	304	396	2		708
2016	11	223	352			587
2017	9	242	251	2	0	504
2018	14	396	323	3	0	735
2019	10	450	435	0	0	896
2020	23	538	451	1	1	1014
2021	18	539	434		1	992
2022	13	639	428		0	1080
2023	9	584	448	0	0	1041

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.

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