

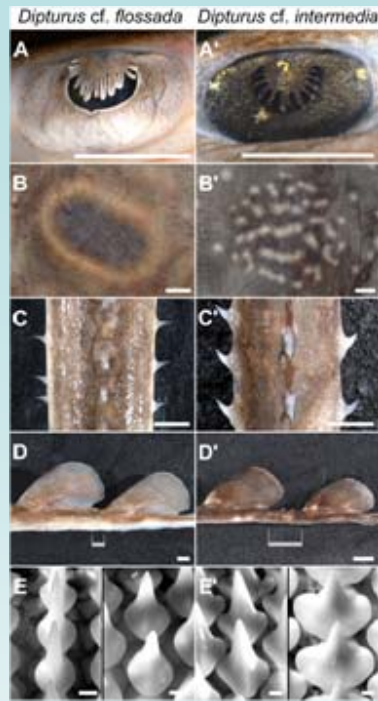
Common Skate Species

It has recently been discovered that there are in fact two different species of Common Skate:
the Flapper Skate (*Dipturus cf. flossada*)
and the Blue Skate (*Dipturus cf. intermedia*).

The figure on the right shows the five main differences between the two species:

- A. the eye colour
- B. the blotches on the wings
- C. the spines on the tail
- D. the dorsal fins, and
- E. the teeth.

Both these species should be considered as one, (i.e. the Common Skate) from the point of view of the current legislation and should be immediately released.



Common Skate Species eggcase. If found, release immediately.



White Skate eggcase. If found, release immediately.

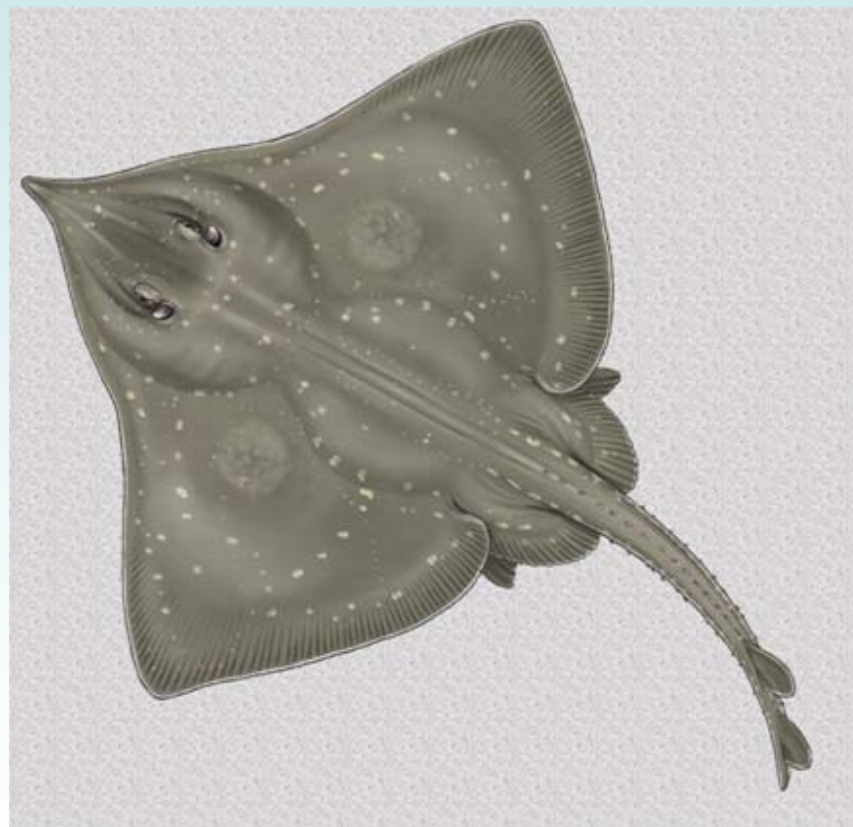
If you are not confident that you have identified the species as being one of the prohibited species, then you are advised to release the skates unharmed, to the extent practicable. Should you require any advise or help in identifying the various species, then consult your local SFPA officer. From a conservation and data gathering point of view, it would be best practise to log them as discards.

If in doubt – throw it out!



Industry Advice

Common Skate *Dipturus batis*



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The Sea Fisheries Protection Authority is charged with enforcing conservation legislation for the protection of our fishery resources.

The Common Skate is a Prohibited Species in All EU Waters

The Common Skate is a prohibited species in all EU Waters, meaning that no vessel can land them in any EU Waters. The risk of extinction of these depleted species appears unavoidable without immediate and incisive conservation action.

The Common Skate, (*Dipturus batis*) can live up to 100 years of age and measure nearly 3 metres in length. However its large size, late maturity and low reproductive rate combine to make it extremely vulnerable to fishing pressure. The species was the first ever fish to be considered locally extinct, after it disappeared from the Irish Sea in the 1980s. Whilst once abundant in the north-east Atlantic, it is now very rare. They stay in highly localised areas.



A small specimen of Common Skate in a fish box



A larger specimen of Common Skate on two fish boxes

Legislation

Article 6 of EC regulation 53/2010, as adopted by S.I. 67 of 2010 states: “It shall be prohibited for EU vessels to fish for, to retain on board, to tranship and to land the following species: ... (c) common skate (*Dipturus batis*) in EU waters of ICES zones IIa, III, IV, VI, VII, VIII, IX and X”.

In addition as regards the analytical TAC of skates and rays from EU waters of VIa, VIb, VIIa-c and VIII-k, the 2010 TAC and Quota, (as with 2009), states the following:

“(1) Catches of cuckoo ray (*Leucoraja naevus*) (RJN...), thornback ray (*Raja clavata*) (RJC...), blonde ray (*Raja brachyura*) (RJH...), spotted ray (*Raja montagui*) (RJM...), small-eyed ray (*Raja microocellata*) (RJE...), sandy ray (*Leucoraja circularis*) (RJI...) and shagreen ray (*Leucoraja fullonica*) (RJF...) shall be reported separately.

(2) Does not apply to **undulate ray** (*Raja undulata*), **common skate** (*Dipturus batis*), **Norwegian skate** (*Raja (Dipturus) nidarosiensis*) and **white skate** (*Rostroraja alba*). Catches of these species **may not be retained on board** and shall be **promptly released unharmed to the extent practicable**”. (Bold font and colouring added).

Summary of Legislation

If common skate, black skate, white skate or undulate ray are caught, they must be released unharmed.

Other skates and rays, namely: cuckoo, thornback, blonde, spotted, small-eyed, sandy and shagreen rays, must be **logged separately**.

The master of any fishing vessel retaining such prohibited species may be liable to prosecution.

Identification:

Common Skate have the following:

- Long, pointed snout
- 1 Row of 12–20 thorns on tail
- 1-2 thorns between dorsal fins.



A live Common Skate on a measuring board
Photograph courtesy of Ian Lawler