



# Scottish Sea Angling Conservation Network

## Skates and Rays

### Scottish skates and rays

Fifteen species of ray and skate are found in Scottish waters.

Skates and rays are flat cartilaginous fishes related to shark. They occur over a variety of habitats and are valued by both commercial and recreational anglers.

**Like most sharks, slow growth, late maturity and low fecundity make skates and rays particularly vulnerable to over fishing.**

### Stock Issues

The FRS survey data 2000-2007 (Fig 1) clearly shows common skate, and blonde ray are locally extinct on the west coast from the Clyde to the Solway.

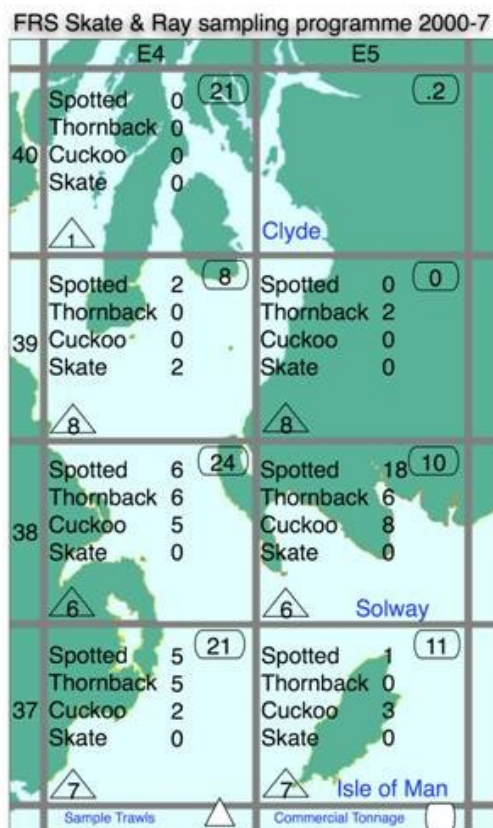


Fig1.

### Stock Levels

In the past, skate and ray catch records were aggregated for all species.

This has made it very difficult to assess actual stock levels and trends.

What seems to be happening is that smaller skates are replacing the larger species whose stocks have collapsed.

The net result is that the decline of certain species is masked by an apparent comparative stability in catch records, however, with more analysis reveals :-

- Stocks of rays and skate are lowest in the Clyde
- Thornback are seriously depleted with the survey vessel catching just 19 thornback in 51 survey tows over a seven year period
- The stocks are more widely depleted on the Scottish coastline.
- Only the spotted ray is thought to be biologically safe.

### Research

Gallagher stated in his ray fishery survey of 2001 that failure to implement a suitable regime was likely to result in :-

- an unregulated increase in effort
- the diminution of localized ray populations
- the destruction of refuge areas
- the ultimate commercial disappearance of this valuable resource.

More recently the Fisheries Science Partnership Bristol Channel ray survival report: 2007 stated :

“The status of several skate and ray stocks in the North-east Atlantic is of concern, with some species classified as depleted while others are locally extirpated.”



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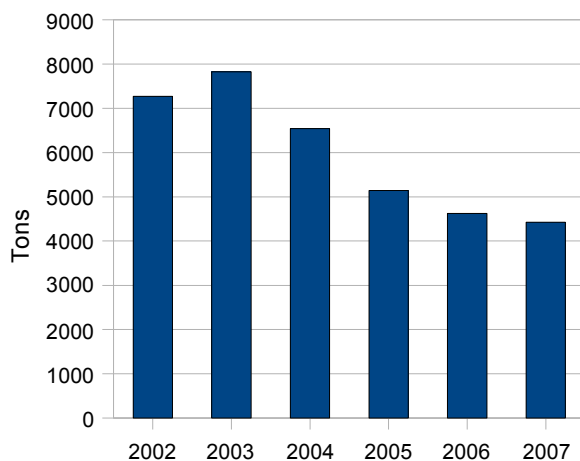
## Skates and Rays

### Scotland's situation

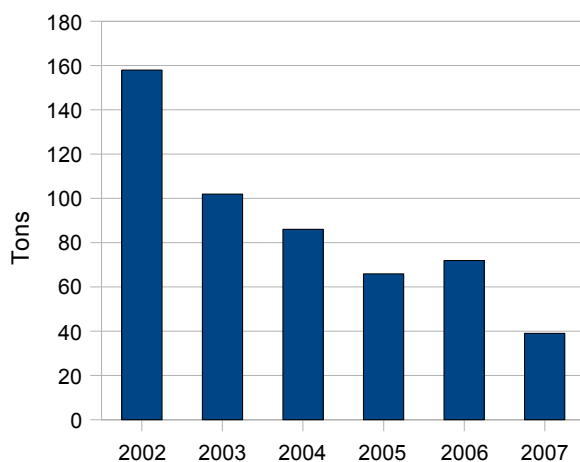
The warning signs regarding the depletion of the stocks of skates and rays have been there for many years, however, EU and Scottish fisheries management have systematically chosen to ignore them.

The following graphs show UK skate and ray landings are still falling and that Scottish thornback landings are in free-fall.

UK skate and ray landings



Scottish thornback landings



**Landings are at a 100 year all time low.**

### ICES Conclusions

The International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) on Fisheries Management concluded :-

- The common skate can be considered extinct in the north Irish sea and thornback ray stocks are severely depleted.
- Target fisheries should not be permitted
- By-catch in mixed fisheries should be reduced to the lowest possible level.

The North Sea had bycatch restrictions placed upon it for thornback last year.

**The Scottish Government is doing nothing to protect the inshore waters from the Clyde to the Solway even though these waters formerly supported an important ray fishery.**

### Required Measures

The Scottish Government needs to implement the following measures before the thornback and other species of rays join the elasmobranchs already on the IUCN critically endangered list.

- 1.Enforcement of a zero quota for especially vulnerable species per ICES' recommendations.
- 2.Protection of inshore nursery areas.
- 3.Species-specific landings enabling detailed assessments of population trends as recommended by the ICES elasmobranchs working Group.
- 4.All fish to be landed whole to aid identification.
- 5.Minimum landing size: enforcement of proposed 40 cm minimum disc width.
- 6.Reduction of bycatch.
- 7.Adoption of a precautionary approach: essential until species-specific management is enforced.

**SSACN would like to know if the Government is going to do anything or will they allow the west coast skate and ray stocks to be extirpated.**

**Are skates and rays to join the many other species sacrificed on the altar of the West Coast langoustine industry?**