



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES

The Director-General

Brussels,
MARE.C5/CR/vr/Ares(2021)

Dear Mr Brouckaert,
Dear Mr Fischer,

Thank you for your letter of 14th May requesting for updated scientific information on skates and rays.

We acknowledge and welcome the work of the Advisory Councils, as well as your collaboration with the Member States (MS)' groups on skates and rays. The outputs of these initiatives has proven to be key to the development of scientific evidence and knowledge that ultimately feeds into scientific advice in support of sustainable management. This is especially important for the development and implementation of the landing obligation and the specific TAC derogations.

In the letter addressed to the Commission services, you request the Commission's support to three points in particular:

- a. a synthesis of existing European, national and regional management measures in place in European Atlantic waters;
- b. an overview of the potential advantages and disadvantages of size restrictions;
- c. on the current group-TAC for skates and rays, an evaluation of the potential advantages of having different TACs for different species or groups of species (e.g. one for thornback ray and another one for all the other species).

In the same letter, you request that ICES is invited to provide a synthesis of the national, regional and international management measures in place in relation to the European Atlantic waters in case of size restrictions. You furthermore ask that both ICES and STECF are consulted, in relation to the preparation of a joint workshop on future skates and rays management options.

Mr E. Brouckaert
NWWAC Chairman
Mr Skau Fischer
NSAC Chairman
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As you may know, in May 2017, DG MARE organized a seminar, which looked into the advice received from the North-Western Waters Advisory Council (NWWAC) suggesting several alternative management measures, and requested STECF to review these measures. This seminar was attended by fishers, scientists, national administrations and other stakeholders, who helped in the drafting of the terms of reference for an STECF Expert Working Group (the EWG 17-10) dedicated to review the proposed management measures. This STECF EWG and the plenary produced a comprehensive report and provided the scientific advice as per the Commission's request.

We note that in this STECF report, two of the three points (points b and c) included in your letter have been analyzed, and that scientific advice has been provided in light of the scientific knowledge available at that moment. The same STECF advice led to the conclusion that MS' groups and ACs are to develop bespoke plans to replace group TACs in early 2018. Furthermore, such plans could contain a variety of measures such as seasonal closed areas, further sub-TACs or technical measures, depending on what MS can agree within the regional groups. These plans have unfortunately not been materialised to date. **It is our view that these plans should constitute the first step towards an assessment of future management measures.**

In addition to this, the NWW and NS ACs together with the MS' groups have produced the skates and rays roadmap, which amongst others, should oversee and compile the synthesis of existing EU national and regional management measures in place. It is therefore our understanding that at EU level this compilation could firstly be handled by the NWW and NS MS' groups.

Lastly, the TAC management of the skates and rays in the NWW and NS is a topic that was debated during the ongoing consultations with the UK, which due to its nature, and following the approach taken for other topics, was agreed to defer for further discussion under the remit of the Specialized Committee on Fisheries (SCF). We therefore expect that as soon as the SCF is established, talks with the UK will take place, including the ones related to the skates and rays' TAC management. This will likely focus on the skates and rays group TACs, and the translation of scientific advice into TAC management.

In summary, and following the above, we thank you again for the letter, and take this opportunity to recall the need for MS' groups to progress on this matter, notably on envisaging future TAC management. I have therefore asked my services to proactively approach the relevant MS' regional groups in order to recall the need for progress. We also look forward to our continued fruitful cooperation, especially in relation to the future work of the SCF on this topic.

Should you have any further questions on this reply, please contact Ms Pascale COLSON, coordinator of the Advisory Councils (Pascale.COLSON@ec.europa.eu; +32.2.295.62.73), who will forward it to relevant colleagues.

Yours sincerely,



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