



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES

The Director-General

Brussels,
MARE.C5/JB/vr

Subject: Reply to NWWAC/NSAC advice on skates and rays management.

Dear Ms Philippe and Mr Ronelöv Olsson,

Thank you for your letter of 24 June 2026 and for the detailed recommendations provided by the NWWAC and NSAC on the management of skates and rays (ref. Ares(2026)6393506). I greatly appreciate the constructive engagement of the Advisory Councils on this important and complex issue, as well as your sustained work on skates and rays since 2019.

The detailed input provided by both Advisory Councils on the footnotes accompanying the management measures is particularly appreciated. Simplifying these footnotes, where possible, will be high on the agenda for this year's consultations with the United Kingdom (UK), with a view to making the applicable provisions clearer and more transparent, while ensuring consistency with the relevant scientific advice and management objectives.

The recommendation to explore artificial intelligence and image-recognition technologies for species identification and data collection is also noted. The Commission supports the development of such innovative approaches, including through EU-funded initiatives such as the Marine Beacon project, which may contribute to improving the quality and timeliness of data available for fisheries management.

The Commission recognises the importance of ensuring that any future adjustments to the management framework are based on the best available scientific evidence and reflect the biological characteristics, distribution and stock structure of the different skate and ray species. Concerns regarding the current use of management areas and stock units, as well as the implications of the existing approach to the allocation of fishing opportunities, will be carefully considered. This is a complex issue for which there is no straightforward solution that can accommodate all interests, including those of different Member States.

Ms Philippe
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The EU and the UK have agreed in the Written Record for 2026 to review the application of the agreed “of which” provisions for four vulnerable stocks. The Advisory Councils’ observations on their implementation will be taken into account. Any such consideration must, however, remain within the framework of the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA). The TCA remains the applicable legal framework for these discussions, and any resulting management arrangements must be fully consistent with its provisions and applicable procedures. These considerations form part of the broader EU-UK fisheries management discussions under the Specialised Committee on Fisheries, bringing together scientific advice, management considerations and stakeholder input.

The Commission further recognises the importance of continued engagement with the fishing sector and the Advisory Councils. The sustained work of the NWWAC and NSAC, in particular through their joint Focus Group on skates and rays since 2019, has provided valuable input to the management of these fisheries. Continued dialogue will be important to ensure that future measures are informed by scientific advice while being workable, transparent and proportionate.

The Commission looks forward to continuing the close dialogue with both Advisory Councils as future management options are assessed and discussed with the UK. Should you have any further questions on this reply, please contact Jurgen Batsleer (Jurgen.Batsleer@ec.europa.eu) or Ms Julia Rubeck, our Advisory Councils coordinator, via the functional mailbox MARE-AC@ec.europa.eu.

Yours sincerely,

Charlina VITCHEVA