



# New England Fishery Management Council

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
October 7, 2016

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## Council Welcomes News: Barndoor Skates Declared “Rebuilt”

In a management success story that came after years of highly restrictive measures, the New England Fishery Management Council is welcoming the recent declaration that “barndoor skate is now considered rebuilt based on the best available scientific information.” Barndoor skate has been a prohibited species for commercial and recreational fishermen since 2003 when the Council’s Northeast Skate Complex Fishery Management Plan (FMP) was implemented and the stock was considered to be overfished.

The Council was informed of this change in status through a Sept. 30 letter from Regional Administrator John Bullard of the National Marine Fisheries Service’s (NMFS) Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office.

Council Chairman Dr. John Quinn noted that in 1999, NMFS received two petitions to list barndoor skate as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

“We’ve come a long way since then,” Quinn said.

In 2002, NMFS determined that an ESA listing was not warranted because of several “positive trends” in the population, which included: “recent increases in abundance of barndoor skate observed during trawl surveys; the expansion of known areas where barndoor skate have been encountered; increases in size range; and the increase in the number of small barndoor skate that have been collected.”

**Q:** What led to the change in status and recent “rebuilt” declaration?

**A:** The Northeast Fisheries Science Center conducted a Skate Stock Status Update this summer using: (1) bottom trawl survey data through autumn 2015 and spring 2016; and (2) revisions of landings and discards of skates by species. The 2013-2015 autumn average survey biomass index for barndoor skate came in at 1.59 kilograms (kg) per tow, which is above the biomass threshold reference point of 0.78 kg/tow and above the “biomass at maximum sustainable yield” ( $B_{msy}$ ) proxy of 1.57 kg/tow.



Barndoor skates on deck. – Northeast Fisheries Science Center photo



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The stock has continued to improve over the years and many fishermen have reported encountering higher numbers of barndoor skate in many areas. In light of the stock's rebuilt status, some now are asking whether the Council will allow future landings. The answer is: It's too soon to tell.

*"We need to give our Skate Committee a chance to review the new information and see if changes are needed in the fishery," Chairman Quinn said.*

Other skate stock status findings by the science center include:

- Overfishing was not occurring on any of the seven species in the Northeast Skate Complex, which are: winter skate (*Leucoraja ocellata*); barndoor skate (*Dipturus laevis*); thorny skate (*Amblyraja radiata*); smooth skate (*Malacoraja senta*); little skate (*Leucoraja erinacea*); clearnose skate (*Raja eglanteria*); and rosette skate (*Leucoraja germane*).
- Thorny skate is the only species in the complex that remains in an overfished condition. Like barndoor skate, possession of thorny skate is prohibited.

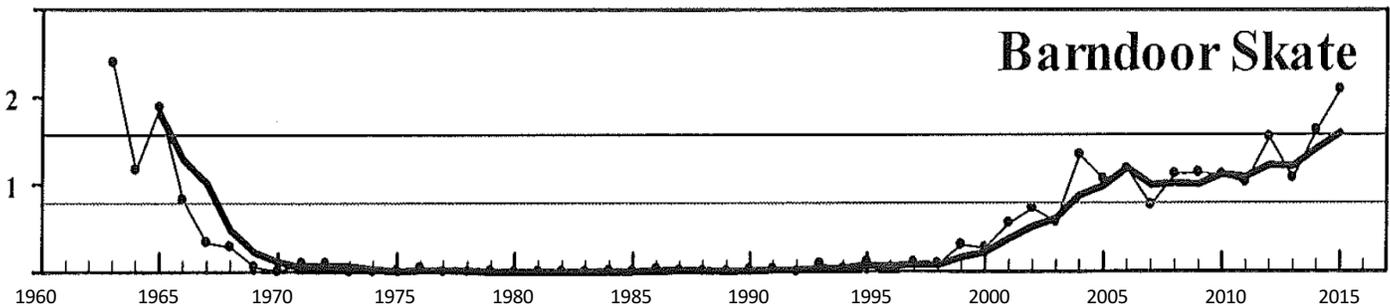


Barndoor skate with characteristic small dark spots and pointy snout. – Dr. Fiona Hogan photo

*"Whatever comes next, this clearly is a success story we all should be proud of."*

– Dr. John Quinn

More information about the Northeast Skate Complex FMP, visit the New England Council's skate webpage at <http://www.nefmc.org/management-plans/skates>.



Above, Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFMC) survey biomass indices in kilograms per tow from 1960 through 2015. The thin line with dots shows annual indices. The thick line is the three-year moving average. The thin horizontal lines show the biomass threshold and target developed through 2007/2008 with consistent strata sets. – NEFSC graphic