

Small-eyed ray (*Raja microcellata*) in divisions 7.d and 7.e (English Channel)

ICES advice on fishing opportunities

ICES advises that when the precautionary approach is applied, landings should be no more than 32 tonnes in each of the years 2023 and 2024. ICES cannot quantify the corresponding catches.

Management of the catches of skates and rays under a combined TAC prevents effective control of single-stock exploitation rates and could lead to overexploitation of some species.

Stock development over time

ICES cannot assess the stock and exploitation status relative to the maximum sustainable yield (MSY) and precautionary approach (PA) reference points because information to define reference points is not available.

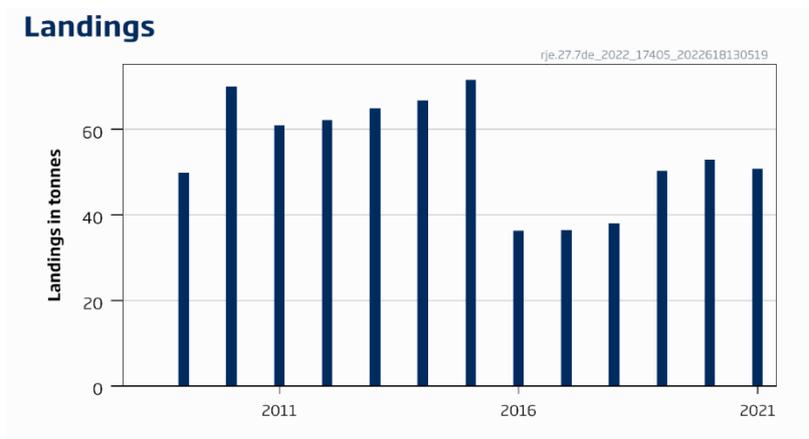


Figure 1 Small-eyed ray in divisions 7.d–e. ICES estimated landings for 2009–2021 (in tonnes).

Catch scenarios

ICES framework for category 5 stocks was applied (ICES, 2012). For stocks without information on abundance or exploitation, ICES considers that a precautionary reduction of catches should be implemented where there is no ancillary information clearly indicating that the current level of exploitation is appropriated for the stock. The precautionary buffer was last applied in 2018 and has therefore been considered in 2022. The stock status relative to reference points is unknown; therefore, the precautionary buffer was applied in the advice.

Discarding is known to take place, but ICES cannot estimate the quantity or the corresponding dead catch.

Table 1 Small-eyed ray in divisions 7.d–e. The basis for the catch scenarios.

Advised landings for 2021–2022 issued in 2020		40 tonnes
Discard rate		Unknown
Precautionary buffer	Applied	0.8
Landings advice *		32 tonnes
% advice change **		–20%

* Advice landings for 2023–2024.

** Advice value for 2023 and 2024 relative to the advice value for 2021 and 2022.

The advised landings for 2023 and 2024 are 20% lower than the previous advice because the precautionary buffer was applied.

Basis of the advice

Table 2 Small-eyed ray in divisions 7.d and 7.e. The basis of the advice.

Advice basis	Precautionary approach
Management plan	ICES is not aware of any agreed precautionary management plan for small-eyed ray in this area

Quality of the assessment

Reported landings of small-eyed ray from Division 4.c have been attributed to this stock. In addition, reported landings of *Leucoraja circularis* are considered to refer to *Raja microocellata* in this stock area, due to confusion over the local name “sandy ray”.

Issues relevant for the advice

This species is an occasional bycatch in most fisheries operating in the English Channel. It has a patchy distribution, which may relate to its habitat preferences, and is observed infrequently in trawl surveys.

Stock-specific landings data are not available before 2009.

Fishing opportunities for this stock are covered by two management areas (divisions 6.a, 6.b, 7.a–c, 7.e–k, and 7.d), with the TAC being set for all skates and rays. Since 2016 small-eyed ray in Division 7.e has been subjected to a non-retention regulations, whilst landings of this stock are allowed from Division 7.d (and Division 4.c).

A Belgian fisheries Producer Organisation established a measure to exclude landings of this species, from 1 January 2021, which will have increased discarding.

Catches of Skates and rays are managed under a common TAC. However, most landings are reported by species (ICES, 2022b). ICES considers that management of the catches of several stocks under a combined TAC prevents effective control of single-stock exploitation rates and could lead to overexploitation of some stocks.

Reference points

No reference points are defined for this stock.

Basis of the assessment

Table 3 Small-eyed ray in divisions 7.d and 7.e. Basis of the assessment and advice.

ICES stock data category	5 (ICES, 2022a).
Assessment type	No assessment (ICES, 2022b).
Input data	Landings data 2009–2021.
Discards and bycatch	Discarding is known to take place but has not been quantified.
Indicators	None.
Other information	None.
Working group	Working Group on Elasmobranch Fishes (WGEF)

History of the advice, catch, and management

Table 4 Small-eyed ray in divisions 7.d–e. History of ICES advice and ICES estimates of landings *. All weights are in tonnes.

Year	ICES advice	Landings corresp. to advice	ICES landings
2011	No specific advice		61
2012	No specific advice		62
2013	No TAC, species-specific measures needed, catch to decrease by at least 20%	-	65
2014	No new advice, same as 2013	-	67
2015	Decrease at least 20% from the average of the last three years	43	72
2016	No new advice, same as 2015	43	36
2017	Precautionary approach	≤ 36	36
2018	Precautionary approach (same value as advised catches for 2017)	≤ 36	38
2019	Precautionary approach	≤ 40	50 **
2020	Precautionary approach	≤ 40	53
2021	Precautionary approach	≤ 40	51
2022	Precautionary approach	≤ 40	
2023	Precautionary approach	≤ 32	
2024	Precautionary approach	≤ 32	

* There is no specific TAC for this stock. Fishing opportunities are managed through an overall TAC by management unit, which includes all species of skates and rays.

** Revised in 2022 (ICES, 2022b).

History of the catch and landings

The distribution of this stock does not extend into the NEAFC Regulatory Area.

Table 5 Small-eyed ray in divisions 7.d and 7.e. Catch distribution by fleet in 2021 as estimated by ICES.

Catch	Landings				Discards
	Beam trawl	Bottom trawl	Nets	Other gears	
Unknown	10%	47%	41%	2%	Unquantified
51 tonnes					

Table 6 Small-eyed ray in divisions 7.d and 7.e. ICES estimates of landings by country (in tonnes). Data include some landings of small-eyed ray from the southern North Sea (Division 4.c) and reported landings of sandy ray in divisions 7.d and 7.e. The figures in the table are rounded. Calculations were done with unrounded inputs and computed values may not match exactly when calculated using the rounded figures in the table. Blank cell = no data reported; 0 = value less than 0.5.

Year	Belgium	UK	France	Ireland	Total landings
2009		18	32		50
2010	3	40	28		70
2011	5	28	28		61
2012	5	33	24		62
2013	7	32	26		65
2014	7	36	24		67
2015	9	39	24		72
2016	9	19	8		36
2017	12	15	8	2	36
2018	15	12	11		38
2019	16	20	15 *		50 *
2020	15	24	14		53
2021	0	28	23		51

* Revised in 2022 (ICES, 2022b).

Summary of the assessment

There is no assessment for small-eyed ray in this area.

Sources and references

ICES. 2012. ICES Implementation of Advice for Data-limited Stocks in 2012 in its 2012 Advice. ICES CM 2012/ACOM:68. 42 pp. <https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.pub.5322>

ICES. 2022a. Advice on fishing opportunities. *In* Report of the ICES Advisory Committee, 2022. ICES Advice 2022, Section 1.1.1. <https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.advice.19928060>

ICES. 2022b. Working Group on Elasmobranch Fishes (WGEF). ICES Scientific Reports, 4:74. <http://doi.org/10.17895/ices.pub.21089833>. *In prep.*

[Download the stock assessment data and figures.](#)

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