

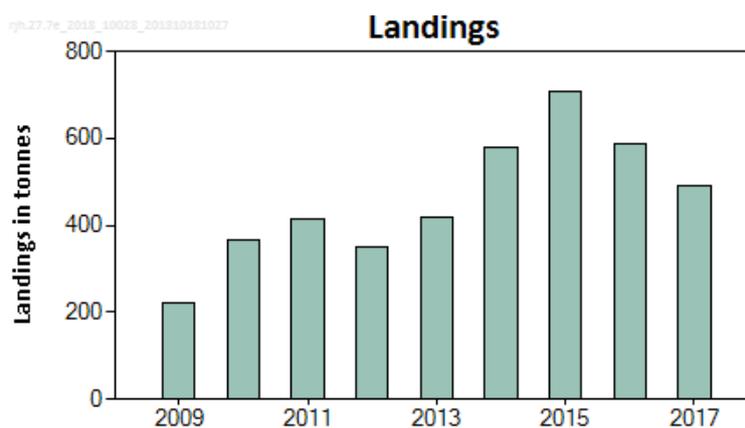
## Blonde ray (*Raja brachyura*) in Division 7.e (western English Channel)

### ICES advice on fishing opportunities

ICES advises that when the precautionary approach is applied, landings should be no more than 266 tonnes in each of the years 2019 and 2020. ICES cannot quantify the corresponding catches.

### Stock development over time

Landings have decreased since a peak in 2015.



**Figure 1** Blonde ray in Division 7.e. ICES estimated landings (in tonnes).

### Stock and exploitation status

ICES cannot assess the stock and exploitation status relative to the maximum sustainable yield (MSY) and precautionary approach (PA) reference points because the reference points are undefined.

**Table 1** Blonde ray in Division 7.e. State of the stock and fishery relative to reference points.

|                           |                   | Fishing pressure |      |      | Stock size     |                   |      |   |   |                |
|---------------------------|-------------------|------------------|------|------|----------------|-------------------|------|---|---|----------------|
|                           |                   | 2015             | 2016 | 2017 | 2015           | 2016              | 2017 |   |   |                |
| Maximum sustainable yield | $F_{MSY}$         | ?                | ?    | ?    | Unknown        | $MSY B_{trigger}$ | ?    | ? | ? | Unknown        |
| Precautionary approach    | $F_{pa}, F_{lim}$ | ?                | ?    | ?    | Unknown        | $B_{pa}, B_{lim}$ | ?    | ? | ? | Unknown        |
| Management plan           | $F_{MGT}$         | —                | —    | —    | Not applicable | $B_{MGT}$         | —    | — | — | Not applicable |
| Qualitative evaluation    | -                 | ?                | ?    | ?    | Unknown        | -                 | ?    | ? | ? | Unknown        |

## Catch scenarios

The 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 unless there is ancillary information clearly indicating that the current level of exploitation is appropriate for the stock. The precautionary buffer was last applied in 2014, and has therefore been applied again in 2018.

Discarding is known to take place, but ICES cannot quantify the corresponding dead catch.

**Table 2** Blonde ray in divisions 7.e. The basis for the catch scenarios.\*

|   |         |         |
|---|---------|---------|
| Advised landings for 2017–2018 (issued in 2016) |         | 333 t   |
| Discard rate                                    |         | Unknown |
| Precautionary buffer                            | Applied | 0.8     |
| Landings advice **                              |         | 266 t   |
| % Advice change ***                             |         | -20%    |

\* 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.

\*\* [Advised landings for 2017–2018] × [precautionary buffer].

\*\*\* Advice value for 2019 relative to advice value for 2018.

The advised landings for 2019 and 2020 are lower than advised for 2017 and 2018 because the precautionary buffer has been applied.

## Basis of the advice

**Table 3** Blonde ray in Division 7.e. The basis of the advice.

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

## Quality of the assessment

The quality of landings data has generally improved in recent years, especially following the WKSHARK2 workshop in which ICES revised elasmobranch landings data for the period 2009–2015 (ICES, 2016a). However, data for blonde ray and spotted ray are often confounded. The increase in landings from 2009 to 2015 might have been also influenced by the introduction of mandatory species-specific reporting of skate landings. Stock-specific landings data are not available before 2009.

## Issues relevant for the advice

Blonde ray is an important commercial species, accounting for about one third of the skate landings in this division. It is a bycatch in demersal fisheries, but may be targeted in areas of high local abundance due to its large size and high market value.

Restrictions on fishing for undulate ray from 2009 onwards may have re-directed fishing effort to this species.

The stock structure of blonde ray in the western English Channel is unknown, and it is unclear as to whether it is a discrete stock or associated with the neighboring stocks in the eastern English Channel/southern North Sea or the Bristol Channel/Irish Sea.

It is a coastal and inner shelf species that has a patchy distribution and is often found in greater abundance in sand bank habitats. The former UK Carhelfmar survey (1989–2011) suggested low but stable catch rates in Lyme Bay (Burt *et al.*, 2013). More recent survey data (e.g. UK-Q1-SWBTS) are much more variable.

## Reference points

No reference points are defined for this stock.

## Basis of the assessment

**Table 4** Blonde ray in Division 7.e. The basis of the assessment.

|                          |  |
|--------------------------|--|
| ICES stock data category | 5 (ICES, 2016b).   |
| Assessment type          | No assessment (ICES, 2018).  |
| Input data               | Landings data 2009–2017.   |
| Discards and bycatch     | Discarding is known to take place but has not been fully quantified. |
| Indicators               | None.  |
| Other information        | UK Carhelmar survey (discontinued).                                  |
| Working group            | Working Group on Elasmobranch Fishes (WGEF)                          |

## Information from stakeholders

There is no additional available information.

## History of the advice, catch, and management

**Table 5** Blonde ray in Division 7.e. History of ICES advice and ICES estimates of landings.\* All weights are in tonnes.

| Year | ICES advice   | Landings corresp. to advice | ICES species-specific landings: minimum estimate based on reported landings** |
|------|---|-----------------------------|---|
| 2011 | No specific advice  |                             | 414   |
| 2012 | No specific advice  |                             | 349   |
| 2013 | No TAC, species-specific measures needed, catch to decrease by at least 20% | -                           | 419   |
| 2014 | No new advice, same as 2013   | -                           | 579   |
| 2015 | Status quo for skate TAC  | 310                         | 708   |
| 2016 | No new advice, same as 2015   | 310                         | 587   |
| 2017 | Precautionary approach  | ≤ 333                       | 492   |
| 2018 | Precautionary approach (same value as advised catches for 2017)             | ≤ 333                       |   |
| 2019 | Precautionary approach  | ≤ 266                       |   |
| 2020 | Precautionary approach  | ≤ 266                       |   |

\* 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 2018 (ICES, 2018).

## History of the catch and landings

The distribution of this stock does not extend into the NEAFC regulatory area.

**Table 6** Blonde ray in Division 7.e. Catch distribution by fleet in 2017 as estimated by ICES.

| Catch (2017) | Landings   |               |            |            | Discards     |
|--------------|------------|---------------|------------|------------|--------------|
|              | beam trawl | bottom trawls | fixed-nets | other gear |              |
| Unknown      | 17%        | 32%           | 43%        | 8%         | Unquantified |
| 492 tonnes   |            |               |            |            |              |

**Table 7** Blonde ray in Division 7.e. History of landings. ICES estimates of landings by country (in tonnes). Data revised in 2018.

| Year | Belgium | France | UK  | Ireland | Netherlands | Total |
|------|---------|--------|-----|---------|-------------|-------|
| 2009 | 6       | 56     | 159 |         |             | 221   |
| 2010 | 3       | 148    | 215 |         |             | 365   |
| 2011 | 5       | 205    | 204 |         |             | 414   |
| 2012 | 5       | 169    | 175 | 0.43    | 0.150       | 349   |
| 2013 | 6       | 191    | 222 |         | 0.07        | 419   |
| 2014 | 3       | 281    | 295 |         |             | 579   |
| 2015 | 6       | 304    | 396 | 2       |             | 708   |
| 2016 | 11      | 223    | 352 |         |             | 587   |
| 2017 | 9       | 240    | 241 | 2       | 0.02        | 492   |

### Summary of the assessment

There is no assessment for this stock in this area.

### Sources and references

Burt, G. J., Ellis, J. R., Harley, B. F., and Kupschus, S. 2013. The FV Carhelmar beam trawl survey of the western English Channel (1989–2011): History of the survey, data availability and the distribution and relative abundance of fish and commercial shellfish. Science Series Technical Report (CEFAS, Lowestoft), 151. 139 pp.

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ICES. 2016b. Advice basis. *In* Report of the ICES Advisory Committee, 2016. ICES Advice 2016, Book 1, Section 1.2.

ICES. 2018. Report of the Working Group on Elasmobranch Fishes (WGEF), 19–28 June 2018, Lisbon, Portugal. ICES CM 2018/ACOM:16. 1306 pp.