Blonde ray (*Raja brachyura*) in divisions 4.c and 7.d (southern North Sea and eastern English Channel)

ICES advice on fishing opportunities

ICES advises that when the precautionary approach is applied, landings should be no more than 191 tonnes in each of the years 2022 and 2023. ICES cannot quantify the corresponding catches.

Stock development over time

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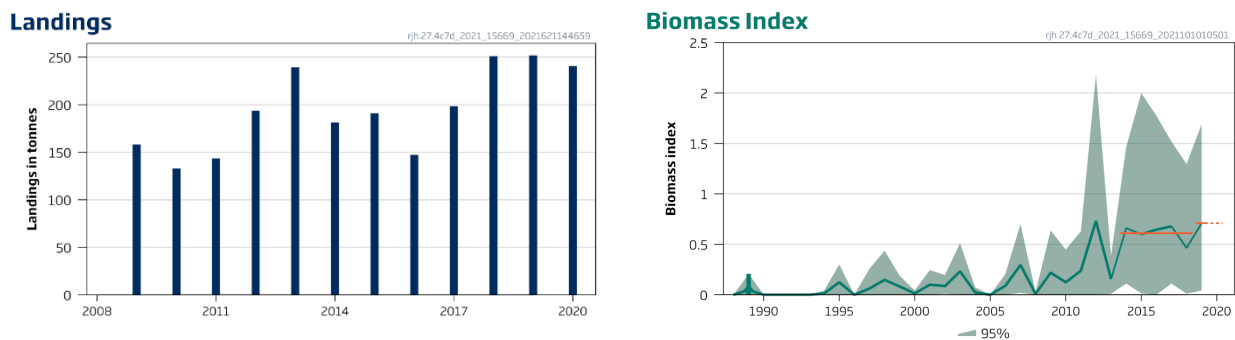

Figure 1   Blonde ray in divisions 4.c and 7.d. Summary of the stock assessment. Left: ICES estimates of landings of blonde ray since 2009. Right: swept area exploitable biomass (individuals of ≥ 50 cm total length) indicator from the FR-CGFS-Q4 (G3425) survey with 95% confidence intervals. The horizontal lines indicate the average exploitable biomass index in the respective year range (2019–2020; 2020 missing) and the preceding five years (2014–2018).

Catch scenarios

The ICES framework for category 3 stocks was applied (ICES, 2012). A biomass index derived from the FR-CGFS-Q4 survey was used as the stock-size indicator. The advice is based on a comparison of the last two years (2020 missing) index value (index A) with the five preceding values (index B), multiplied by the recent advised landings. The index is estimated to have increased by less than 20% and thus the uncertainty cap was not applied. The precautionary buffer was last applied in 2019, and its application has therefore not been considered again.

Discarding is known to take place, but ICES cannot quantify the corresponding dead catch. Discard survival, which is likely to occur, has not been estimated.

Table 1   Blonde ray in divisions 4.c and 7.d. The basis for the catch scenarios.*

Index A (2019–2020; 2020 missing)		0.71
Index B (2014–2018)		0.61
Index ratio (A/B)		1.16
Uncertainty cap	Not applied	-
Advised landings for 2020 and 2021 (issued in 2019)		164 tonnes
Discard rate		Unknown
Precautionary buffer	Not applied	-
Landings advice **		191 tonnes
% Advice change ***		16 %

* 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 2020 and 2021] × [Index ratio].
*** Advice value for 2022 and 2023 relative to the advice value for 2020 and 2021.

The advised landings have increased by 16% because the biomass index has increased.

Basis of the advice

Table 2   Blonde ray in divisions 4.c and 7.d. 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

Species-specific landings data are incomplete prior to 2009 and therefore are not shown.

In 2020, only the French waters of the English Channel were sampled during the FR-CGFS-Q4 (G3425) survey, which has an impact on the index for 2020. The 2020 survey was incomplete, with important areas for blonde ray not sampled; this was therefore not used in the assessment. The use of a single value for index A in the category 3 approach adds a degree of uncertainty.

The current assessment relies on the FR-CGFS-Q4 survey, showing an increasing stock trend in recent years. Catch rates of blonde ray in NS-IBTS-Q1 [G1022] and NS-IBTS-Q3 [G2829] show a similar recent increase, but the underlying data are highly variable and have a large number of zero hauls (ICES, 2021a).

Issues relevant for the advice

Misidentification occurs between spotted ray (*Raja montagui*) and blonde ray (*Raja brachyura*).

Blonde ray is also taken in recreational fisheries, but the retained catches are unquantified.

Reference points

No reference points are defined for this stock.

Basis of the assessment

Table 3   Blonde ray in divisions 4.c and 7.d. Basis of the assessment and advice.

ICES stock data category	3(ICES, 2021b)
Assessment type	Survey-based trends (ICES, 2021c)
Input data	Survey FR-CGFS-Q4 (G3425)
Discards and bycatch	Unknown
Indicators	None
Other information	None
Working group	Working Group on Elasmobranch Fishes (WGEF)

History of the advice, catch, and management

Table 4 Blonde ray in divisions 4.c and 7.d. History of ICES advice, agreed TAC and species-specific estimated landings. All weights are in tonnes.

Year	ICES advice	Landings corresp. to advice	Agreed TAC *		ICES landings
			2.a ** and 4	7.d	
2009	No specific advice	-	1643	1044	158
2010	No specific advice	-	1397	887	133
2011	No specific advice	-	1397	887	144
2012	No specific advice	-	1395	887	194
2013	No TAC, species-specific measures needed, catch to decrease by at least 20%	-	1256	798	239
2014	No new advice, same as 2013	-	1256	798	181
2015	No new advice, same as 2014	-	1382	798	191
2016	Precautionary approach	162	1313	966	147
2017	Same advice as 2016	162	1378	1063	199
2018	Precautionary approach	≤ 195	1654	1276	251
2019	Precautionary approach (same advice as 2018)	≤ 195	1654	1404	252
2020	Precautionary approach	≤ 164	1737	1474	241
2021	Same advice as in 2020	≤ 164	1650	1400	
2022	Precautionary approach	≤ 191			
2023	Precautionary approach	≤ 191			

* Combined TAC for skates and rays.

** Since 2016 fishing vessels have not been allowed to retain the species from EU waters in Division 2.a.

History of the catch and landings

Table 5 Blonde ray in divisions 4.c and 7.d. Catch distribution by fleet in 2020 as estimated by ICES.

Catch (2020)	Landings			Discards
Unknown	Beam trawl 60%	Nets 12%	Other gears 28%	Unknown
	241 tonnes			

Table 6 Blonde ray in divisions 4.c and 7.d.ICES estimates of landings by country (in tonnes). Blank cell = no data reported; 0 = value less than 0.5.

Year	Belgium	Germany	France	UK	Netherlands	Total
2009	104		13	35	6	158
2010	63		21	39	10	133
2011	45		27	58	13	144
2012	72		23	45	53	194
2013	109		24	71	36	239
2014	69		30	57	24	181
2015	90		31	36	34	191
2016	65	0	36	22	25	147
2017	75	0	50	29	44	199
2018	108	0	46	32	65	251
2019	83	1	75	28	65	252
2020	101	0	59	33	46	241

Summary of the assessment

Table 7   Blonde ray in divisions 4.c and 7.d. Summary of the assessment. Swept-area exploitable biomass index from the FR-CGFS-Q4 trawl survey (in tonnes, individuals ≥ 50 cm total length).

Year	Lower CI (2.5)	Biomass index	Upper CI (97.5)
1988	0	0	0
1989	0	47	207
1990	0	0	0
1991	0	0	0
1992	0	0	0
1993	0	0	0
1994	0	13	42
1995	0	123	301
1996	0	0	0
1997	0	61	258
1998	0	147	437
1999	0	82	189
2000	0	13	43
2001	0	100	246
2002	9	85	196
2003	0	232	512
2004	0	23	73
2005	0	0	0
2006	0	88	205
2007	19	295	701
2008	0	9	30
2009	0	219	637
2010	0	123	448
2011	0	238	630
2012	0	731	2186
2013	9	155	388
2014	111	661	1463
2015	14	600	2000
2016	0	645	1776
2017	110	678	1519
2018	10	464	1296
2019	41	709	1693
2020 *	NA	NA	NA

* 2020 survey was incomplete and not used in the assessment.

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.

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ICES. 2021c. Working Group on Elasmobranch Fishes (WGEF). ICES Scientific Reports, 3:59. http://doi.org/10.17895/ices.pub.8199.

Download the stock assessment data and figures.

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