

# Recommendation paper

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**Title: Review of Skate Fishery**

**Date: 10<sup>th</sup> November 2022**

**Report of: Fisheries Manager**

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## **1. Background:**

- a) Skate (*Rajidae*) have been separated from other groundfish trawl fisheries since 1994 and are targeted under licence type F.
- b) A large proportion of skate catch is routinely taken in finfish trawls, while skate-licensed vessels may take large amounts of groundfish other than skate.
- c) The skate fishery has been regulated by total allowable effort (TAE) of licensed vessels. VUs are translated to fishing time (vessel-days or vessel-months) by the vessel-units per month (VUMs), which are a function of catchability and available fish biomass.
- d) In August 2020 industry were advised of changes to the minimum mesh size to 400mm which would be effective from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2021. Since 2021 there has been no targeted fishing for skates.
- e) To evaluate the potential for reactivating the skate fishery, four trawl surveys from 2013 to 2021 were analysed, with the results indicating that skate biomass in Falkland Islands waters may have decreased by 45% to 70% over that period.
- f) Under existing VU protocols, 158 F licence days were technically available for 2022 and 114 F licence days for 2021.
- g) The general aim of Licencing Advice is to maintain fisheries at sustainable catch levels while mitigating year-to-year fluctuations in allocated effort. Vessel Units (VU) are therefore calculated over three-year rolling averages (FIFD 2021). However, the speculative use of F license in recent years has made the VU protocol impractical. Given the hiatus in skate target fishing, and the change in regulatory mesh, the existing Vessel Unit protocol for F license cannot presently be maintained

## **2. Research, Presentation and Consultation:**

- a) The 2018 and 2021 surveys with 400 mm mesh obtained skate catch rates in the range of 100 – 300 kg / hour As F-licensed vessels often trawled 20+ hours per day (unpublished catch reports), these data suggest that the 2021 allocation of 114 license days would suffice to catch 500 tonnes of skate.

### 3. Recommendation:

- a) That a skate TAC of 500 tonnes be allocated, with use of the new regulatory mesh (see Decision Log dated 20<sup>th</sup> August 2020 by the Senior Fishery Scientist) providing the following are met:-
  - i) continuance of the exclusion zone to skate target fishing south of 51°S latitude
  - ii) a fishing plan to include the embarkation of a Scientific Observer must be submitted to the Department of Natural Resources for review
  - iii) any recommendations that follow from the develop of a National Plan of Action for Elasmobranchs may create additional conditions and these will be notified to industry next year on completion of the work.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sheena Ross', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Sheena Ross  
Fisheries Manager