Blonde ray (*Raja brachyura*) in divisions 7.a and 7.f–g (Irish Sea, Bristol Channel, Celtic Sea North)

ICES advice on fishing opportunities

ICES advises that when the precautionary approach is applied, landings should be no more than 573 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 maximum sustainable yield (MSY) and precautionary approach (PA) reference points because information to define reference points is not available.
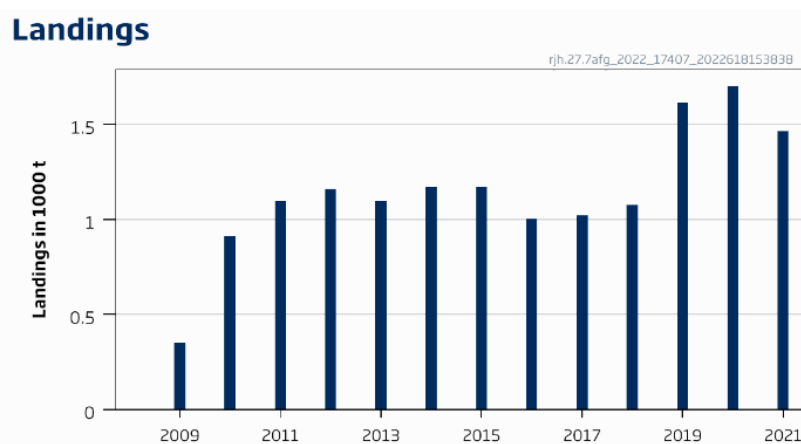

Figure 1   Blonde ray in divisions 7.a and 7.f–g. ICES estimated species-specific landings.

Catch scenarios

CES 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 appropriate 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   Blonde ray in divisions 7.a and 7.f–g. The basis for the catch scenarios.

Advised landings for 2021–2022 (issued in 2020)		716 tonnes
Discard rate		Unknown
Precautionary buffer	Applied	0.8
Landings advice *		573 tonnes
% advice change **		−20 %

* Advised 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 advised for 2021 and 2022 because the precautionary buffer has been applied.

Basis of the advice

Table 2   Blonde ray in divisions 7.a and 7.f–g. 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

Despite improvements in species-specific reporting in recent years, misidentification at species level is likely still occurring for spotted ray and blonde ray. Hence the accuracy of landings data will be uncertain.

In the UK (E&W)-BTS-Q3 survey, the species is caught most regularly in the Bristol Channel and off the east coast of Ireland. Catch rates for blonde ray in this survey have increased (ICES, 2022b); however, the survey is not considered a reliable stock size indicator for quantitative advice, as it has limited coverage in areas of local abundance and larger individuals are not sampled effectively by this survey gear.

Issues relevant for the advice

Blonde ray is a coastal and inner shelf species that has a patchy distribution and is often found in greater abundance on sandbanks.

Blonde ray is an important commercial species in this area. It is taken in trawl fisheries targeting the overall skate complex and is a bycatch in various demersal fisheries. It may also be targeted in areas of high local abundance, due to its large size and high market value.

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   Blonde ray in divisions 7.a and 7.f–g. The basis of the assessment.

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	UK (E&W)-BTS-Q3 [B6596].
Working group	Working Group on Elasmobranch Fishes (WGEF)

History of the advice, catch, and management

Table 4 Blonde ray in divisions 7.a and 7.f–g. 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		1099
2012	No specific advice		1160
2013	No TAC, species-specific measures needed, catch to decrease by at least 20%	-	1097
2014	No new advice, same as 2013	-	1170
2015	Decrease at least 20% from the average of the last three years	897	1172
2016	No new advice, same as 2015	897	1004
2017	Precautionary approach	≤ 895	1020
2018	Precautionary approach (same value as advised catches for 2017)	≤ 895	1077
2019	Precautionary approach	≤ 716	1616
2020	Precautionary approach	≤ 716	1703
2021	Precautionary approach	≤ 716	1464
2022	Precautionary approach	≤ 716	
2023	Precautionary approach	≤ 573	
2024	Precautionary approach	≤ 573	

* 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.

History of the catch and landings

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

Table 5 Blonde ray in divisions 7.a and 7.f–g. Catch distribution by fleet in 2021 as estimated by ICES.

Catch	Landings			Discards
Unknown	Beam trawl 47%	Other trawls 51%	Nets 2%	Unquantified
	1464 tonnes			

Table 6 Blonde ray in divisions 7.a and 7.f–g. History of landings; ICES estimates of landings by country (in tonnes).

Year	Belgium	UK	Ireland	France	Total
2009	170	138	5	36	350
2010	210	226	402	73	910
2011	313	273	382	131	1099
2012	404	261	407	87	1160
2013	406	262	377	52	1097
2014	351	229	420	170	1170
2015	359	245	351	218	1172
2016	313	245	171	275	1004
2017	338	270	154	257	1020
2018	348	328	228	172	1077
2019	520	404	396	295	1616
2020	721	322	383	277	1703
2021	442	405	353	264	1464

Summary of the assessment

There is no assessment for blonde 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

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Download the stock assessment data and figures.

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