

WINTER SKATE

[Submit Your Comments Here](#)

The Government of Canada is consulting with Canadians on whether the Eastern Scotian Shelf and Newfoundland population of **Winter Skate** (ESSN Winter Skate) should be added to the List of Wildlife Species at Risk as an endangered species. **Please fill out the online survey by May 6, 2019.**

Your opinion counts!

The *Species at Risk Act* (SARA) supports Canada's international commitments to conserve biological diversity by providing legal protection for wildlife species at risk. SARA acknowledges that all Canadians have a role to play in the conservation of wildlife species.

Before deciding whether ESSN Winter Skate (*Leucoraja ocellata*) will be added to the List of Wildlife Species at Risk under SARA, we would like your comments regarding the possible ecological, cultural and economic impacts of listing or not listing this species.

Adding a species to the List of Wildlife Species at Risk

The first step in the process to determine if a species should be listed under SARA occurs when the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC), an independent committee of experts, assesses the status of a species based on the best available information. Information collected includes scientific data, local ecological information and Indigenous knowledge about how ESSN Winter Skate interacts with other species and its environment. COSEWIC then assigns the species a designation based on its risk of disappearing in Canada (e.g., endangered, threatened, special concern).

Once assessed, the Government of Canada decides if the species will be added to the List of Wildlife Species at Risk under SARA. Consultations with Indigenous Peoples, stakeholders and the general public are an important step in the process of gathering information on the potential positive and negative impacts of protecting a species under SARA.

Facts about Winter Skate

Reaching up to 100 cm in length, Winter Skate is a bottom-dwelling elasmobranch (group of fish that is made up of sharks, rays and skates). Winter Skate have a flattened body, large wing-like pectoral fins and a long slender tail (Figure 1). A rounded snout with thin cartilage, numerous small dark spots over its back, and 1 to 4 large

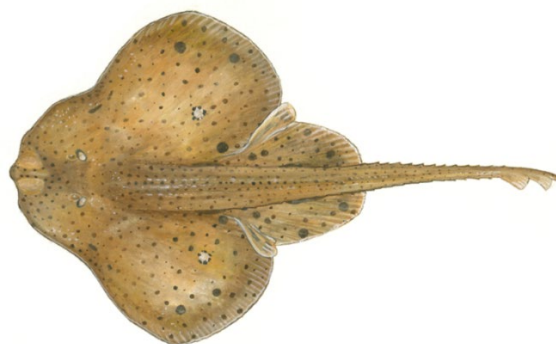


Figure 1. Image of a Winter Skate (Jeffery C. Domm).

pale (eye) spots located near the rear of each pectoral fin help to distinguish Winter Skate from other skates.

ESSN Winter Skate is 1 of 3 designatable units (DUs) of this species in Atlantic Canada. Its range extends from the eastern shore of Nova Scotia to the south coast of Newfoundland: an area that includes Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization (NAFO) Divisions 4VW and 3LNOP (Figure 2). ESSN Winter Skate are usually found in waters ranging from 5 to 9°C that are <100 m in depth. They mature later and at larger sizes than Winter Skate in the Southern Gulf of St. Lawrence DU. Mature females deposit 41 to 56 fertilized eggs on the ocean floor in rectangular hard-shelled cases (mermaids purse). The eggs take 18 to 22 months to hatch.

Status designation of Winter Skate in Canadian waters

COSEWIC assessed ESSN Winter Skate as endangered in May 2015. Under SARA, an endangered species is defined as one that is facing imminent extirpation (the species no longer exists in the wild in Canada) or extinction (the species no longer exists in the wild anywhere).

Why is ESSN Winter Skate assessed as endangered?

According to the 2015 COSEWIC assessment, the mature portion of ESSN Winter Skate declined by approximately 98% since the early 1970s, and is now at an historically low level. Although fishing mortality likely caused the initial decline, the main threat is from unsustainably high levels

Aquatic Species at Risk



of natural mortality. There are presently no directed fisheries for ESSN Winter Skate; however, this population continues to be caught as bycatch in other Canadian fisheries.

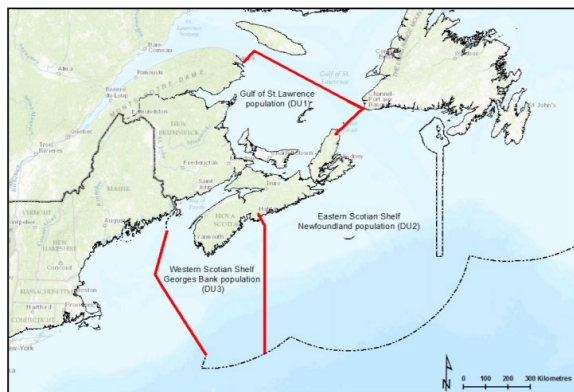


Figure 2. Geographic boundaries of the Gulf of St. Lawrence (DU1), Eastern Scotian Shelf and Newfoundland (DU2), and Western Scotian Shelf Georges Bank (DU3) Winter Skate Designatable Units in Atlantic Canadian Waters as defined by COSEWIC (2017). This figure was extracted from COSEWIC (2017).

What happens if Winter Skate is listed under SARA?

If Winter Skate is listed as endangered, the prohibitions of SARA would immediately come into effect in Canadian waters. It would be illegal to kill, harm, harass, capture, possess, buy, sell, or trade Winter Skate unless the associated activities can be allowed through permit, exemption or regulation. A recovery strategy and subsequent action plan(s) would be developed to identify measures to address known threats. Critical habitat – the habitat necessary for the survival and recovery of Winter Skate – would need to be identified, to the extent possible, in a recovery strategy or action plan. Destruction of any part of its critical habitat would be prohibited under SARA.

How would listing under SARA benefit Winter Skate?

The prohibitions implemented under SARA would offer legal protection for the species in Canadian waters and would trigger recovery planning in collaboration with key partners. There may be increased funding for scientific research and public stewardship activities aimed at recovering the species.

How would listing Winter Skate impact fishing activities?

Food, social and ceremonial (FSC) Fisheries

FSC fisheries may be allowed provided that they are compatible with the objectives outlined in the recovery

strategy for the species. SARA provides two mechanisms, permit or exemption* to allow the continuity of these activities.

Commercial and Recreational Fisheries

Bycatch fisheries, if not negatively impacting the survival or recovery of Winter Skate, may be exempted or permitted under SARA. Winter Skate bycatch must be returned to the water in the manner that causes the least harm. Other fleet or fishery specific measures could also be implemented.

* Permitting allows for the authorization of an activity provided that certain pre-conditions are met as defined by SARA. Alternatively, activities may be exempted from SARA prohibitions in a recovery strategy as long as they do not jeopardize the survival and recovery of the species. Under both mechanisms, mitigation and alternatives may be considered and applied.

Your comments on the potential impacts of adding or not adding ESSN Winter Skate as endangered to the List of Wildlife Species at Risk under SARA would be appreciated.

Your comments are important!

Please fill out the [online survey](#).

Related links

- [COSEWIC assessment and Status Report \(2015\)](#)
- [Recovery Potential Assessment for Eastern Scotian Shelf and Newfoundland Winter Skate \(2017\)](#)

Thank you for completing this survey.

For more information, please contact:

Species at Risk Program, DFO, Maritimes Region
1 Challenger Drive, PO Box 1006
Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, B2Y 4A2
SpeciesatRisk.XMAR@dfo-mpo.gc.ca

