

(3) Magnitude: Not more than 180 N.

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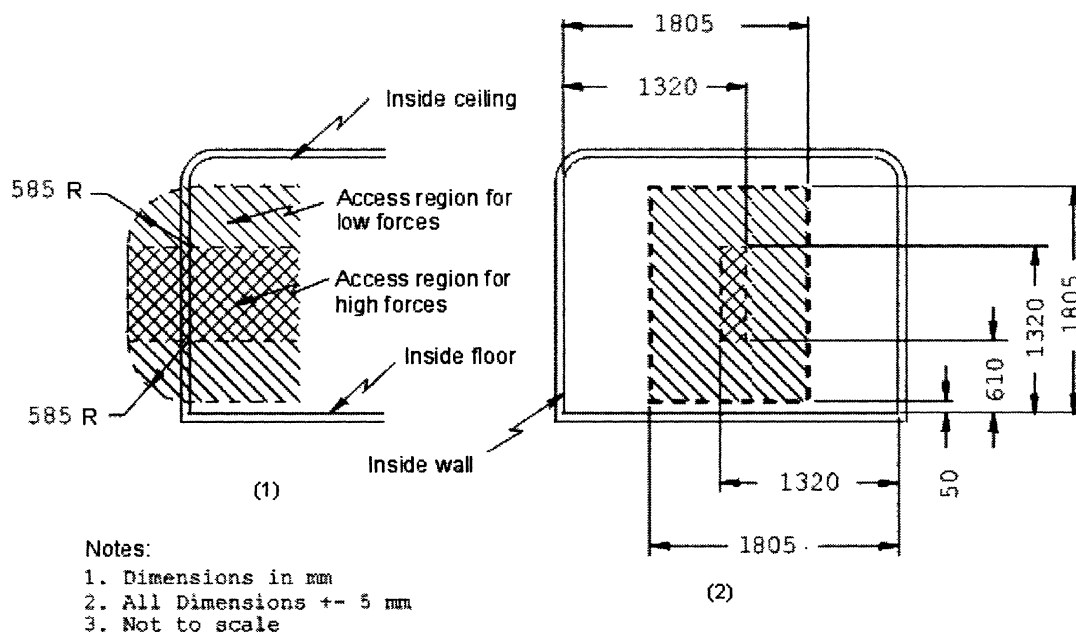


Figure 3D- REAR EMERGENCY EXIT WITHOUT REAR OBSTRUCTION

Issued on: December 11, 2009.

Stephen R. Kratzke,

Associate Administrator for Rulemaking.

[FR Doc. E9-30324 Filed 12-24-09; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 648

RIN 0648-AW30

Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act Provisions; Fisheries of the Northeastern United States; Northeast Skate Complex Fishery; Amendment 3 to the Northeast Skate Complex Fishery Management Plan

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Notice of availability of a fishery management plan amendment; request for comments.

SUMMARY: NMFS announces that the New England Fishery Management Council (Council) has submitted Amendment 3 to the Northeast Skate Complex Fishery Management Plan (FMP) (Amendment 3), incorporating a

Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and an Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analysis (IRFA), for review by the Secretary of Commerce. NMFS is requesting comments from the public on Amendment 3, which was developed by the Council to rebuild overfished skate stocks and implement annual catch limits (ACLs) and accountability measures (AMs) consistent with the requirements of the reauthorized Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act). Amendment 3 would implement a rebuilding plan for smooth skate and establish an ACL and annual catch target (ACT) for the skate complex, total allowable landings (TAL) for the skate wing and bait fisheries, seasonal quotas for the bait fishery, reduced possession limits, in-season possession limit triggers, and other measures to improve management.

DATES: Comments must be received on or before February 26, 2010.

ADDRESSES: An FEIS was prepared for Amendment 3 that describes the proposed action and its alternatives and provides a thorough analysis of the impacts of proposed measures and their alternatives. Copies of Amendment 3, including the FEIS and the IRFA, are available from Paul J. Howard, Executive Director, New England Fishery Management Council, 50 Water Street, Newburyport, MA 01950. These

documents are also available online at <http://www.nefmc.org>.

You may submit comments, identified by 0648-AW30, by any one of the following methods:

- **Electronic Submissions:** Submit all electronic public comments via the Federal eRulemaking Portal: <http://www.regulations.gov>.

- **Fax:** (978) 281-9135, Attn: Tobey Curtis.

- **Mail:** Patricia A. Kurkul, Regional Administrator, NMFS, Northeast Regional Office, One Blackburn Drive, Gloucester, MA 01930. Mark the outside of the envelope, "Comments on Skate Amendment 3."

Instructions: All comments received are a part of the public record and will generally be posted to <http://www.regulations.gov> without change. All personal identifying information (for example, name, address, etc.) voluntarily submitted by the commenter may be publicly accessible. Do not submit confidential business information or otherwise sensitive or protected information. NMFS will accept anonymous comments. Attachments to electronic comments will be accepted in Microsoft Word, Excel, WordPerfect, or Adobe PDF file formats only.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Tobey Curtis, Fishery Policy Analyst, (978) 281-9273; fax: (978) 281-9135.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

In 2003, NMFS implemented the Skate FMP to manage a complex of seven skate species in the Northeast Region: winter (*Leucoraja ocellata*); little (*L. erinacea*); thorny (*Amblyraja radiata*); barndoor (*Dipturus laevis*); smooth (*Malacoraja senta*); clearnose (*Raja eglanteria*); and rosette (*L. garmani*). The FMP established biological reference points and overfishing definitions for each species based on abundance indices in the Northeast Fisheries Science Center bottom trawl survey. In February 2007, NMFS informed the Council that, based on trawl survey data updated through 2006, winter skate was considered overfished. The Council was therefore required to initiate a rebuilding plan for winter skate, consistent with the Magnuson-Stevens Act.

At the time the amendment was initiated, the objectives of Amendment 3 were to rebuild winter skate and thorny skate (a species that has been overfished since FMP implementation) to their respective biomass targets, and to implement ACLs and AMs for the skate complex, consistent with the reauthorized Magnuson-Stevens Act. However, over the course of developing the amendment, the objectives were modified to reflect more recent scientific information. Primarily, this includes the results of a new stock

assessment completed in December 2008 by the Northeast Data Poor Stocks Working Group (DPWG). This assessment updated the minimum biomass thresholds and biomass targets for six of the seven skate species in the complex, resulting in a change in status for some species.

These new biomass reference points, as well as the most recent trawl survey data, indicate that winter skate is not overfished; however, thorny skates remain overfished, and smooth skates are now also considered to be overfished. Thorny skate was also determined to be experiencing overfishing in 2007 (but not in 2008); therefore, under the requirements of the reauthorized Magnuson-Stevens Act, the Skate FMP must be amended to establish a rebuilding plan for smooth skate and establish ACLs and AMs by 2011. The final objectives of Amendment 3 are to rebuild smooth and thorny skate, promote biomass increases in other skate stocks, and implement ACLs and AMs for the skate complex.

Amendment 3 includes the following management measures: New biological reference points reflecting the results of the DPWG; a new ACL framework that includes an ACT (22,982 mt per year) and TAL (9,427 mt per year) allocated to the skate wing (66.5 percent) and bait (33.5 percent) fisheries; reduced possession limits for the skate wing and bait fisheries; in-season possession limit

triggers to slow the rate of landings as the TAL is approached; AMs for ACL and TAL overages; and new annual review and specifications procedures.

Public comments are being solicited on Amendment 3 and its incorporated documents through the end of the comment period stated in this notice of availability. A proposed rule that would implement Amendment 3 will be published in the **Federal Register** for public comment. Public comments on the proposed rule must be received by the end of the comment period provided in this notice of availability of Amendment 3 to be considered in the approval/disapproval decision on the amendment. All comments received by February 26, 2010, whether specifically directed to Amendment 3 or the proposed rule for Amendment 3, will be considered in the approval/disapproval decision on Amendment 3. Comments received after that date will not be considered in the decision to approve or disapprove Amendment 3. To be considered, comments must be received by close of business on the last day of the comment period.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*

Dated: December 22, 2009.

Alan D. Risenhoover,

*Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries,
National Marine Fisheries Service.*

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