

Orkney Skate Trust



TAGGING INSTRUCTIONS



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Front Page picture shows a female Flapper Skate (*Dipturus intermedia*)

1. Introduction

Thank you for helping with the Orkney Skate Trust (OST). The tag and release fishing programme will provide vital information on the critically endangered skate, for which Orkney waters provide a last stronghold.

What are Skate?

Skate are a bottom dwelling species in the shark family. They are characterised by flattened bodies caused from greatly enlarged pectoral fins and have a pointed snout.

Skate have a large mouth with rows of small angular teeth making them formidable predators, hunting a variety of prey species on the seabed such as crustaceans and molluscs. They also feed on other fish species, both on the bottom and in mid water.

Common Skate is a common name that describes what is now known to be two separate species. These are the Flapper Skate (*Dipturus intermedius*), the largest skate in the world reaching a maximum length of 2288 mm, and the Blue Skate (*Dipturus flossada*), which is smaller in length reaching up to 1432 mm.

Glasgow Museums has been co-ordinating a tag and release programme for Common Skate (and Tope) off the west coast of Scotland for over 30 years, with tagged skate returned unharmed to the sea. It is this crucial research that has already led to key scientific discoveries about skate biology, ecology and distribution. Orkney needs to start a similar programme to provide more information to help skate conservation.

Skate have now been tagged at many locations, although most have been done around the Sound of Mull, where there appears to be a relatively small, localised and mainly resident population of skate. This means that, in theory at least, it should be possible to tag a high proportion of the population. Orkney, at the time of this edition, has only 1 tagged fish, however, numerous diver reports of skate sightings shows that Orkney may well also have its own resident population of breeding skate.

By summer 2008, over 1,420 Skate had been tagged around Scotland with the vast majority tagged around the Sound of Mull. Of these, 401 have later been recaptured, (some several times) giving vital information about their movements, growth rates and other aspects of the fish's ecology. The major conclusion that must be drawn from all the data gathered so far is that most common skate live their whole lives in static populations, which remain in relatively small geographical areas.

The 'Common' Skate Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) forms the framework for the conservation of the species. The work of the tagging schemes forms an

important part of the conservation plans for the species. The results from tagging studies are an important element of this work.

This pack should contain all the information you need to be able to tag any Skate (or other species) which you may catch. Please take a few minutes to read through all the information.

2. Fishing Code: Best Practice Guide

By Davy Holt

The purpose of this "Guide" is to give the relevant factual information required for the capture and safe return of Skate caught by anglers.

Skate are one of the few fish species where local populations can suffer as badly from poor angling practices as from commercial fishing pressure. The once prolific grounds off the Northern & Western Coasts of Scotland were wiped out in the 1970s, this was partly due to the now frowned upon practice of anglers bringing skate ashore to be weighed and photographed, before their carcasses were ignominiously dumped off the end of the local pier!

Thankfully times have changed and now anglers practice catch and release, and now Orkney's anglers can help further by taking part in the tagging programme.

Tackle

When angling for Skate, use appropriate tackle. IGFA 30lb Class gear should be regarded as the absolute minimum to use. Ideally 50-80lb Class should be used. This is as much to combat the 'inhospitable' conditions in the areas where skate are targeted, i.e. deep water and strong tides. The use of heavier gear allows the skate to be landed more quickly, i.e. not exhausted, allowing it to be released in better condition. You can land Skate on lighter gear but you are not doing yourself, or the fish, any favours. Personally when Skate fishing I don't use anything less than 50lb class, with 80lb being the norm. This way when I hook a fish I know the odds are on my side and the fish will be boated with the minimal chance of a hook being left in the fish.

Terminal tackle needs to be strong and is best kept simple. A single 12/0 bronzed hook (e.g. Mustad 3406), preferably with the barb crushed down is best. Never use stainless or plated hooks, as these will not biodegrade if they have to be left in a skate. Keep hook links short (maximum of 24"/60cm). Short hook links are necessary to minimise the chances of deep hooking your skate. These should be made up of 150lb (minimum) breaking strain monofilament (there is absolutely no need for wire) crimped to a quality 200lb rated swivel. This hook link should then be attached to an 8' (2.4m) rubbing leader or 'wind on leader' made of 150lb b.s. monofilament. This is to protect the mainline from the sharp thorns on the skate's tail. This leader also helps when bringing the skate to the side of the boat.

The weight boom runs on the heavy mono of the rubbing leader / wind on leader. The main reason for this is to avoid it damaging the mainline and also to assist in keeping the mainline well away from the Skate's sharp tail thorns.

Bait

Skate are not fussy eaters and have a very varied menu; this covers most shellfish and fish species. As a top predator, Skate are deceivably agile when it comes to hunting and can easily catch fast swimming species like Herring & Mackerel. More common fodder fish species are Rays, Dogfish and Whiting with Edible Crabs, Prawns, Squat Lobsters and Scallops making up the bulk of the shellfish fodder species. The most commonly used baits are Mackerel and Coalfish around the 1lb to 1.5lb mark

Striking a take

Always 'hit' a take as quickly as possible – never wait for a run to develop as this will almost always result in a deep-hooked fish. Don't worry about missing a bite; Skate can and do swallow very big baits in seconds, and if you do miss one, they almost always come back for a second, third or even fourth attempt at a bait.

A lot has been said about the "lack of" fight from Skate, this usually comes from people that have either never caught one or have been using mono rather than braid as the main line. With mono the stretch takes most of the fight out of the encounter, giving the angler very little "feel" as to what is happening at the other end of his line. However with braid you are in full contact with the fish at all times, making the fight rather more interesting.

Handling

When a Skate is brought to the side of the boat, it can be held quite easily by holding the trace and then getting a firm handhold at the cheek area of the skate. Large specimens may require to be gaffed to aid holding the fish. This needs to be done with great care. The gaff should be used only in the area outside the halfway point of the leading edge of the wing and no more than 3" from the leading edge. This gives a secure hold and poses no danger to internal organs.

While on the subject of handling the Skate, be very wary of the tail. The large thorns on the tail are razor sharp and the Skate have a habit of putting the tail where you don't want it to be. Another danger area, only found on male Skate, is a rough patch of razor sharp thorns on the leading outer edge of the wings. Lastly is the mouth - a skate can easily crush a wayward hand, so it pays to be very careful when unhooking the fish.

If the fish is deep hooked, **DO NOT** attempt to remove the bronzed hook; simply cut the hook link as near to the hook as possible and release the fish. You can do more damage by trying to retrieve the hook and a living Skate returned is worth more than the cost of a hook! Deep hooking can and does cause fatal injuries to skate. **TRY TO AVOID IT AT ALL COSTS!**

3. Captured Skate

3.1 Identification Guide

Research in 2009 has resulted in the re-classification of the species known as the Common Skate (*Dipturus batis*) into two separate species of the same Genus. The Flapper Skate or *Dipturus intermedia* and the Blue Skate *Dipturus flossada*. Both species look very similar and therefore without the careful use of genetics it may be extremely hard to distinguish between the two species in the field. However, the Flapper Skate is by far the largest, reaching a maximum length of 2288mm and the smaller Blue Skate reaching a maximum length of 1432 mm. Other key diagnostics are the eye colour, with the Flapper Skate having a dark green to olive coloured iris and the Blue Skate having a pale yellow coloured iris. It may be useful to obtain a photo of the eye of any captured skate for later verification of species.

3.2 Landing a Fish

If you can, try to avoid bringing the skate into the boat. They can be measured and the tag (if any) checked at the side of the boat. If the skate has to be brought onboard, for whatever reason, have everything to hand before doing so in order to release the fish back into the water as quickly as possible. Measure the wingspan and the length, check the sex and then obtain the weight from charts available in the Appendix.

In order to avoid harm to the fish, please take great care. If the skate becomes overly stressed it will take on a pink colouration, indicating a risk to its survival. It is essential to reduce the stress caused through capture by minimising the capture and tagging process, and especially time spent out-of-the-water.

If bringing the fish aboard is necessary, the best choice for landing a fish onboard would be using a cut-off section of trawler fishing net under the fish, and then, with help, lifting the fish using the net. After tagging, the fish is then put back into the sea easily using the net. Should gaffing be required it should not be necessary to use more than one gaff, and the fish should be gaffed in the wing - not close to vital organs such as the gills. There will be no point in bringing the fish aboard the vessel unless the vessel is equipped with the appropriate sling weighing system, and thought should be given to solely using the Glasgow Museums weight tables available within this pack whilst leaving the fish in the water.

3.3 Previously Tagged Fish

Check to see if the fish is already tagged. The tags may be either white, yellow or orange in colour, but may be covered in algae and can resemble skate leeches at first glance.

1. **Record the tag number,**
2. Measure it (length and width),
3. Weigh it (If you have suitable equipment) or later estimate the weight using the tables supplied (Appendix). In the case of large skate, only attempt to weigh the fish if you have suitable equipment to avoid harming the fish,
4. Record the sex (claspers only on male fish),
5. **Photograph** the fish and **include a photo of the eye,**
6. Note down all appropriate information on the tagging form,
7. Return the fish to the water as soon as possible,

Please do not keep the fish out of the water for longer than is necessary.

3.4 Un-Tagged Fish

1. Measure it (length and width),
2. Weigh it (If you have suitable equipment) or later estimate the weight using the tables supplied (Appendix). In the case of large skate, only attempt to weigh the fish if you have suitable equipment to avoid harming the fish,
3. Record the sex,
4. **Take a tag and note its number,**
5. **Tag the fish,**
6. **Photograph** the fish and **include a photo of the eye,**
7. Note down all other appropriate information as required on the tagging Form,
8. Return the fish to the water as soon as possible,

Please do not keep the fish out of the water for longer than is necessary.

4. Tagging Procedure

Please only tag skate that are over 550 mm wingspan.

Scottish Sea Angling Conservation Network Plastic Dart Tagging Guidelines

The Scottish Shark Tagging Programme (SSTP) is part of the Scottish Sea Angling Conservation Network A registered Scottish charity (No. SC039015)

If the health of the fish is at all in question, return it immediately.

Whilst Skate and sharks may look big and tough creatures, they are actually quite delicate, especially when out of the water, so when tagging it is necessary to return them to the water with the minimum of fuss and distress to the fish.

Please follow these few simple guidelines:

- ✓ **Strike early:** This is essential to avoid a deep hooked fish as gut hooked skate have a much lower survival rate than mouth hooked sharks.
- ✓ **Be Prepared:** Have T bars, pliers, wire cutters, tagging kits, weighing slings, cameras etc. on hand. Note the tag number before tagging the fish
- ✓ **Get wet:** Carry out as much of the measuring, tagging, hook removal as possible with the fish still in the water. See diagram below for where measurements should be taken. A flexible sewing measuring tape is the preferred option.
- ✓ **Support the fish:** When weighing or photographing the fish never lift a fish by the tail, lift it supporting the main body area as much as possible; only use weighing slings which fully support the whole fish.
- ✓ **Damaged fish:** Release damaged or bleeding Skate without tagging, as this gives them a better chance of survival.
- ✓ **Look after yourself:** Skate Skin is highly abrasive and tough and the spines will easily pierce your skin.

Do not weigh fish unless you have the appropriate weighing slings.

Inserting the tag

Do not be over anxious: By taking time to tag this will ensure secure anchorage of the tag and correct placement.

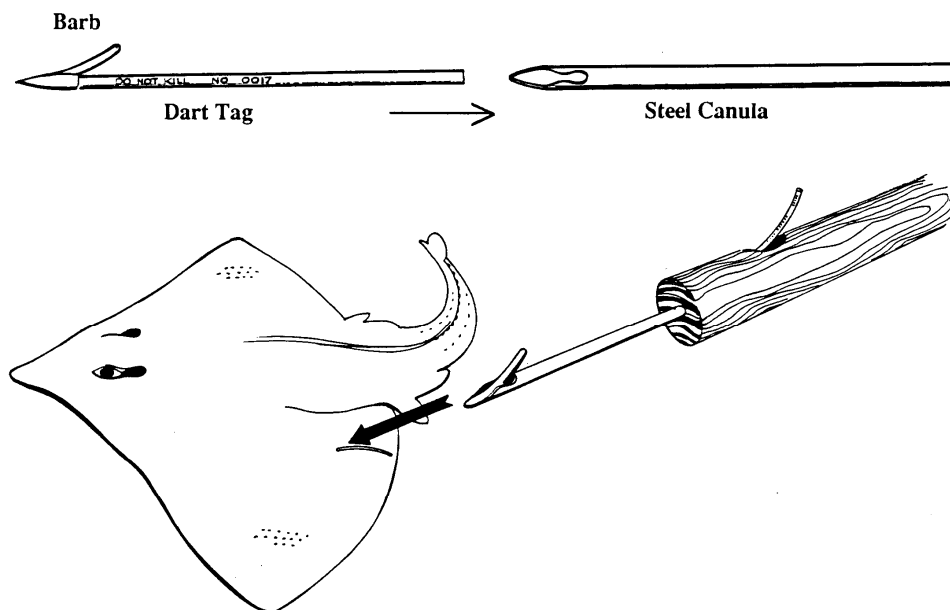
Write the tag number on the record card BEFORE inserting the cannula

- **Loading the cannula:** place the blunt end of the tag inside the pointed end of the cannula and line the tag up so only the anchor barb is showing.
- **Inserting the cannula:** push cannula firmly through the skin until the anchor barb just disappears under the skin approximately 1/3 of the way into the wing at its widest point.
- **Removing the cannula:** Give the cannula a slight twist and remove from fish. Tug the tag slightly to set the barb.

If the health of the fish is at all in question - return it immediately.

It is a good idea to practice this on a bait fish or similar before having to do it for real!

Note the tag number. Place the dart tag in the pointed end of the cannula. The barb will be left showing. Now push the cannula containing the dart tag into the fish at the appropriate position. The tag should be inserted on the upper side of the wing in the fleshy part adjacent to the body (see diagram). The barb should be forced completely out of sight. Give the cannula a half twist and remove from the fish. Tug the tag lightly to set. Return the fish as quickly as possible to the water.



5. Recording Scientific Information

It is important that we get accurate and complete information about each fish which is tagged. Please complete all sections of the recording form if possible.

An example of a completed form is shown. It is useful if as exact a locality as possible is given. Ideally exact co-ordinates should be recorded.

There is a section on the forms for 'Other useful information'. Please record any damage to the fish, distinctive features, condition of the tag, weather and tide etc.

If possible, please take some photographs, and include a photograph of the skate's eye.

Orkney Skate Trust example of a completed field log

Species Flapper or Blue Skate	FLAPPER	Date and Time	7/1/09 11:50
Taggers Name	DAN WISE	Tag Number	001
Taggers Email	daw@swin diving.com	Sex	MALE
Taggers Phone	07917 095 037	Length (CM)	201
Vessel Name	MV GIRL KILDA	Wingspan (CM)	161.3
Tagging Location	PETER SHEER/	Weight (KG) Real (R) Charts (C)	62.6
Latitude	58° 55.061 N	Bait	WHOLE FRESH MACKEREL
Longitude	003° 12.971 W	Fish Condition Excel/Good/Poor/Dead	EXCELLENT
Depth (metres)	12m	Parasites Isopods/Leeches	ISOPODS AT MOUTH
Time Started and ceased Fishing	10 30 - 14 30	Photos Taken?	YES
Number of Rods	3	More Tags Required?	NO
Other Information			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TIDE FLOODING HIGH AT 1530 (SPRINTS) • SKATE NOT PREVIOUSLY TAGGED 			

What do we do with the information?

The tagging information we obtain allows us to draw conclusions about growth rates, life spans, sex ratios etc. as well as the more obvious movements of the fish. This information has already proved useful to organisations such as the Shark Specialist Group of the World Conservation Union (IUCN), who are drawing up proposals for the conservation of elasmobranchs (sharks, skates

and rays). The data is also being used as part of the UK Common Skate Biodiversity Action Plan.

Data from the Glasgow Museum tagging scheme collected since 1974 on weight in relation to length and width has allowed the production of weight tables (Appendix) which are becoming widely accepted by anglers. This means that it is not necessary to remove large Skate from the water in order to weigh them, so reducing the risk of harming the fish.

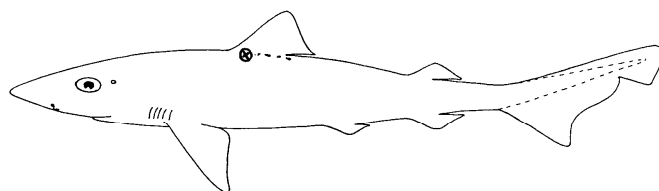
All data from the OSCS will be used in a Geographical Information System (GIS) to produce maps that graphically display all data generated. This allows the information to be searched in a variety of ways. It also means that we can usually quickly inform anglers of where and when a tagged fish was originally tagged and released and any subsequent history. In order to do this, we rely on taggers to let us have release information on a regular basis.

6. Other Interesting Species

There are other interesting species that you may catch during fishing for Skate, some of these species are also suffering population decline and are the focus of other studies that may include tag and release. A good website to consult for a list of current marine fish species that are the focus of conservation is:

<http://www.tagsharks.com/>

Please feel free to use the Orkney Skate Trust (OST) tags and equipment for this purpose after consulting this website for further information. As a general guide for sharks such as **Blue Shark** *Prionace glauca*, **Porbeagle** *Lamna nasus*, **Thresher** *Alopias vulpinus* or **Six-gilled Shark** *Hexanchus griseus*, **Tope** *Galeorhinus galeus* and **Spurdog** *Squalus acanthias* the tag should be inserted with the same method as for skate and in the position shown below:



Do not forget to make a note of the species concerned on the tagging form.

7. Contacts

Orkney Skate Trust please contact:

Orkney Skate Trust

Daniel Wise
14 Hillside Road
Stromness
Orkney
Kw16 3AH

07917 095 037
01856 850 285 (SULA Diving Offices)

Website : www.orkneyskatetrust.org.uk
Email: mail@orkneyskatetrust.org.uk

West Scotland Tagging Project please contact:

Richard Sutcliffe
Glasgow Museums
Kelingrove
Glasgow
G3 8AG

Richard.sutcliffe@csgglasgow.org
www.catchalot.co.uk

Scottish Sea Angling Conservation Network please consult:

<http://www.ssacn.org/>

Local fishing equipment and tackle:

WILLIAM SHEARERS EST 1857.
71 VICTORIA STREET
KIRKWALL

01856 873189 FAX 01856 870892
W.SHEARER375@BTINTERNET.COM

8. Appendices

8.1 Further Information

8.1.1 General

At the end of your trip, it is a very good idea to make a copy of the release data for you to keep, so that if any of the information needs checking at a later date you have something to refer back to. Taggers have occasionally lost completed forms in the past, so that we have no release data for some fish.

Please remember to send any completed forms to Orkney Skate Trust at Orkney Biodiversity Records Centre as soon as possible.

Please do not pass any of the tags allocated to you onto anyone else without letting us know - otherwise we will be hounding you for information about tags you do not have! If you need more tags telephone OSCS, rather than borrow somebody else's.

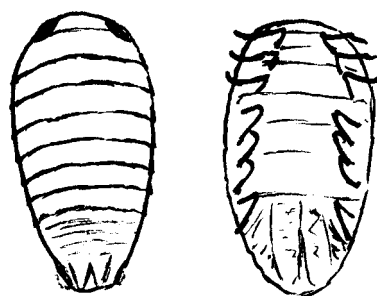
8.1.2 Skate Parasites

Common Skate are often found with parasites - mainly Skate Leeches *Pontobdella muricata*. Some marine isopods such as *Aega tridens* are also found. These 'crispies' as some anglers refer to them, are also frequently found feeding on bait when it is brought back to the surface. Some of the parasites have been collected and deposited in Glasgow Museum's collections. Further examples would be welcome. Contact the Museum for instructions.

If parasites are present on a Skate, please make a note of the kind of parasite (if known), the number present and their position on the fish in the 'Other Useful information' section of the tagging form.



Skate Leeches



Isopod - viewed from above (left) and below (right)

8.2 Common Skate Biodiversity Action Plan

Note: This plan predates the recognition that “Common Skate” actually is made up of two species – making the conservation position of both these species even worse than was previously thought to be the case for “Common Skate”

Published Action Plan from UK Biodiversity Group Tranche 2 Action Plans (Volume V – maritime species and habitats) 1999.

Common skate (*Dipturus batis*) Species Action Plan

1 Current status

- 1.1 The common skate is the largest European batoid fish. Females can reach lengths of 285 cm and males 205 cm. They are found in the north-east Atlantic from Madeira and northern Morocco to Iceland and northern Norway. However, tagging records indicate that the majority of fish spend their entire life within a relatively small coastal area.
- 1.2 It is a demersal, i.e. bottom dwelling, species, usually found in shallow coastal waters and shelf seas to 200 metres, but occasionally down to 600 metres. They hunt crustaceans and fish both in mid water and on the sea bed. Males mature at a length of 125 cm (over 10 years old). Size and age at maturity for females is unknown. Longevity is estimated at 50 years. Mature females can produce up to 40 large eggs (14-24 cm long) per year, deposited in spring and summer. The young hatch at a length of up to 21-22 cm.
- 1.3 The common skate is widely distributed, but very scarce throughout European waters. It has probably been fished to extinction in the Irish Sea and is extremely rare in the central and southern North Sea, the western Baltic and western Mediterranean.
- 1.4 The status of the stocks is unknown (too few are caught in research cruises to make analysis possible). However, its life-history makes it extremely vulnerable to fisheries, compared to other faster growing rays. Immature fish (<125 cm and <10 years old) are vulnerable to capture in many fisheries and very few juveniles can survive to maturity. Estimates of current fishing pressure on North Sea rays indicate that populations of such a slow-reproducing fish would decrease by about 35% per year, explaining the disappearance of the species here and in many other areas. Nevertheless, it is a relatively robust fish that occasionally survives the rigours of capture in fishing gear and release. It is a popular target for recreational anglers in areas where it still occurs.
- 1.5 The provisional IUCN Red List assessment for the species is *Endangered*.

2 Current factors causing loss or decline

- 2.1 The common skate is vulnerable to capture by many static and towed fishing gear; it is taken both in target fisheries for rays and as bycatch in other fisheries. Its slow growth and large size at maturity mean that juveniles have little or no chance of surviving to maturity in heavily fished areas. Although no longer targeted where it is very scarce, the common skate continues to be caught as bycatch in fisheries for other species, including more fecund rays. Under these conditions commercial extinction can readily be followed by biological extinction.

- 2.2 It is doubtful that habitat constraints and food availability are of significance in the decline of this species, compared with fishing pressure.

3 Current action

- 3.1 In 1997, the EU Council of Ministers agreed a precautionary Total Allowable Catch for all skates and rays (combined) in the North Sea. This does not distinguish between species, and is not based on any analytical stock assessments.
- 3.2 In response to the increasing rarity of the species, the Irish Specimen Fish Committee has removed the species from listings. This has reduced the incentive for anglers to land and kill large individuals in order to enter the record book. UK recreational anglers are encouraged to return skate live to the sea by their national representative organisations.
- 3.3 The Glasgow Museum tagging programme targeting a resident population in the Sound of Mull area encourages visiting anglers to return tagged common skates unharmed to the sea.

4 Action plan objectives and targets

- 4.1 In the short-term (up to five years), stabilise refuge populations by minimising fishing mortality and legally protecting the species in at least five key centres of abundance.
- 4.2 In the long-term: facilitate the migration of common skate from refuge populations to areas within which they are either scarce or have been fished out by minimising fishing pressure on the species. Inevitably, this will take not less than one or two decades due to the species' slow rates of reproduction and growth.

5 Proposed actions with lead agencies

Fishing for common skate is subject to the EU Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) and there is nothing that the UK can do unilaterally to conserve this, or other commercial fish stocks that are of interest to both the UK and other EU fleets. Even within the 6 nautical mile coastal zone, where the UK fishes exclusively and can exercise greater autonomy, most fishery management measures would be of limited value as common skate is not confined to the inshore area. Effective measures must be aimed mainly at modifying the way fisheries are managed under the CFP. Nevertheless, some unilateral action by the UK is possible. In particular, there is a need for increased knowledge of the skate's biology and exploitation, and for improved fisheries statistics. Most existing data are derived from commercial fisheries statistics collected during the period that the species was fished to near extinction from UK waters. These data now need to be augmented by fisheries-independent research data.

5.1 Policy and legislation

- 5.1.1 Make all skate and ray landings 'skin on' to facilitate species identification and record all species in landing statistics. (ACTION: DANI, MAFF, NAW, SE, SFCs)
- 5.1.2 Ensure that the necessary research and monitoring programmes are undertaken to provide the basis for analytical stock assessments. (ACTION: DANI, MAFF, NAW, SE, SFCs)
- 5.1.3 Obtain European Union approval for the introduction of sea fisheries committee bye-laws and Scottish Executive legislation banning landings or imposing minimum landing

sizes for common skate taken in UK coastal waters. (ACTION: DANI, MAFF, NAW, SE, SFCs)

5.1.4 Investigate alterations required in European legislation which would enable commercial fish species to be listed under Appendix II and III of the Bern Convention. (ACTION: JNCC)

5.2 Site safeguard and management

5.2.1 Designate at least five refuge areas (see 5.5.1) within which skate are given legal protection from commercial fishing and deliberate killing or retention by anglers (ACTION: CCW, DANI, EN, MAFF, NAW, SE, SNH).

5.3 Species management and protection

5.3.1 Seek protection of the species within UK coastal waters under appropriate fisheries legislation (see 5.1.4) (ACTION: DANI, MAFF, SE, SFCs).

5.3.2 Investigate opportunities for the management or protection of the species within European waters by listing on the appropriate Annex of the Bern Convention. (ACTION: DETR, JNCC).

5.3.3 Protect the species within at least five designated refuge areas using appropriate legislation (see 5.2) (ACTION: CCW, DANI, EN, MAFF, NAW, SE, SNH).

5.4 Advisory

5.4.1 Develop and publicise a code of conduct for the live release of immature common skate by all fishermen, both commercial and recreational. (ACTION: CCW, DANI, DETR, EN, JNCC, MAFF, NAW, SE, SNH)

5.4.2 Develop and publicise a code of conduct for the careful handling (including tag reporting) and live release of all common skate by sports anglers. (ACTION: CCW, DoE(NI), EN, JNCC, SNH)

5.5 Future research and monitoring

5.5.1 Initiate research programmes to monitor life cycles, growth, reproductive capacity and population dynamics (including immigration and emigration); identify centres of distribution of relict populations as locus for refugia; improve fisheries-independent research and data collection. (ACTION: DANI, DETR, JNCC, MAFF, NERC, NAW, SE, SNH)

5.5.2 Improve data collection from remaining commercial landings to improve knowledge of fisheries statistics and exploitation status. (ACTION: DANI, MAFF, NAW, SE, NERC)

5.5.3 Initiate new long-term tagging programmes for the species and DNA studies to determine the extent of exchange between populations. (ACTION: NERC)

5.5.4 Promote research into the survival of common skate released after capture by commercial fishing gear (e.g. trawls). (ACTION: DANI, JNCC, MAFF, NAW, SE, NERC)

5.6 Communications and publicity

5.6.1 Publicise the vulnerability and threatened status of the common skate to commercial and sports fishermen, to minimise mortality in fisheries (ACTION: CCW, DANI, EN, JNCC, MAFF, NAW, SE, SNH).

5.7 Links with other action plans

5.7.1 Reference should be made to the Commercial Fish, Basking Shark and Marine Turtles Action Plans. These action plans are similar in their recommended conservation aims and objectives. Particular attention is drawn to the issue of bycatch in fisheries.

The **Common Skate Species Action Plan sub-group** was established in 2001.

It is responsible for providing advice to the UKBAP Fish Species Sub-Group on the implementation of the UK Species Action Plan for this species and for delivering certain specific areas of work under this plan.

It will report to the main UKBAP Fish Species Sub-Group on progress and the outcome of its work, and will ensure, through the Fish Species Sub-Group, that its work is effectively co-ordinated with that undertaken for the other UK fish SAPs (for the Basking Shark, Commercial Marine Fish and Deep-water Fish) and forms part of a single an integrated and practical strategy to achieve common objectives.

The Common Skate SAP Sub-Group will:

- Prioritise actions under the SAP by determining which need to be taken in the short, medium and long-term.
- Develop recommendations for a 3-year workplan to deliver actions under the Plan within the agreed, prioritised timescales. Actions will be carried out either under existing programmes of work or by the initiation of new, targeted ones.
- Identify any shortfalls in the resources needed to implement the workplan and seek to address these through the UKBAP Fish Species Sub-Group.
- Strive to achieve joint working where appropriate with other Fish SAPs, particularly on common issues, and the sharing of information.
- Report regularly to the UKBAP Fish Species Sub-Group on progress.

8.3 Weight Charts

Glasgow Museums Weight Charts for male Skate, Measure length and wingspan.

WINGSPAN

Approximate Weights of Common Skate by Length and Wingspan

Length (inches)	Wingspan (inches)		Weight (pounds)
	20	25	
20			
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25			
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(Length & Wingspan in Inches ~ Weight in pounds)

LENGTH

Note: (1 Inch = 2.5 cm) (1 cm = 0.4 Inch) (1 Pound = 0.45359 KG)

8.4 World Conservation Union (IUCN) current status

Critically Endangered

Critically endangered – extremely high risk of facing extinction in the wild”

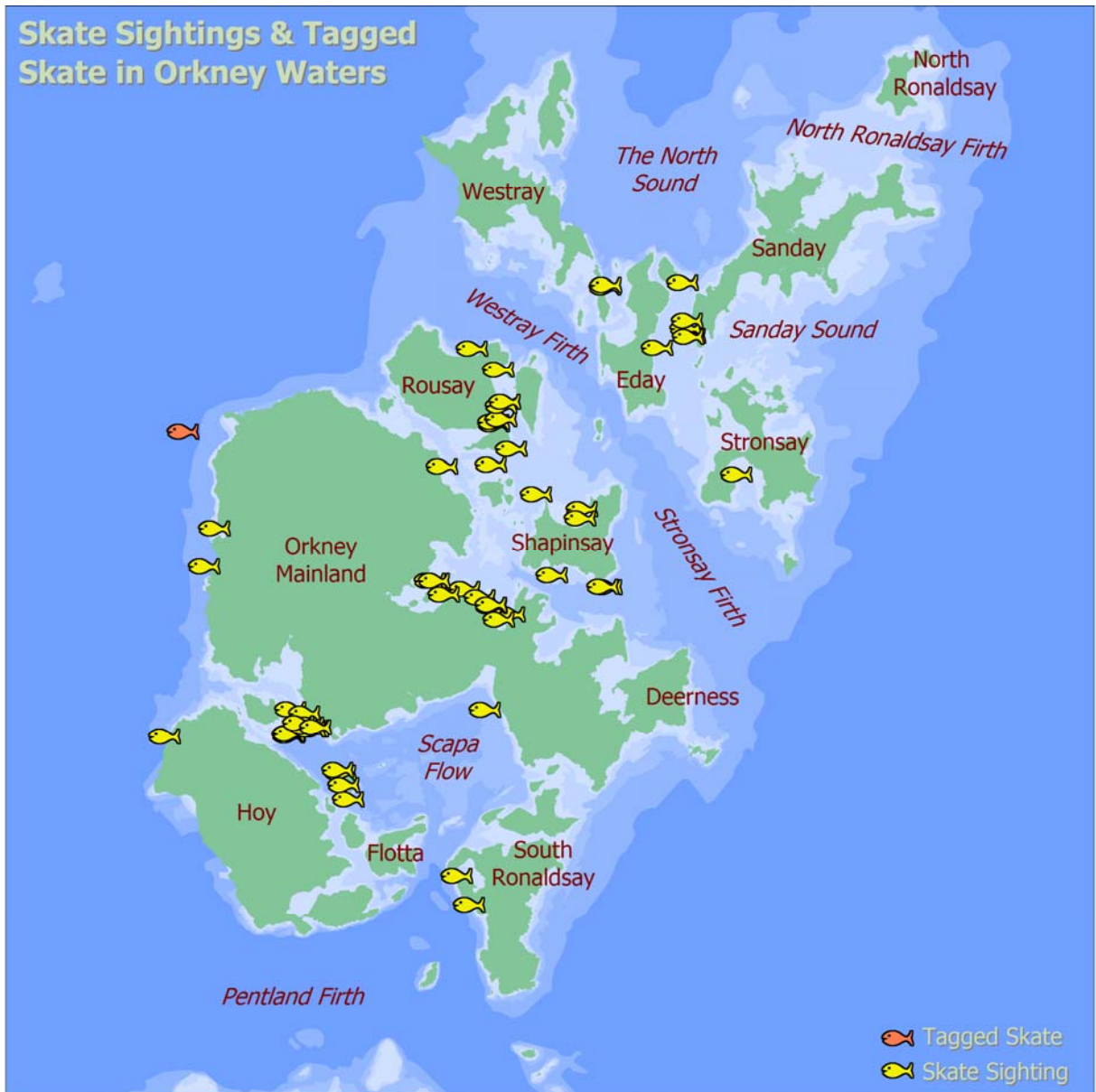
“An observed, estimated, inferred or suspected population size reduction of greater than 80% over the last 10 years or three generations, whichever is the longer, where the reduction or its causes may not have ceased OR may not be understood OR may not be reversible, based on an index of abundance appropriate to the taxon, a decline in area of occupancy, extent of occurrence and/or quality of habitat and actual or potential levels of exploitation”.

“An observed, estimated, inferred or suspected population size reduction of greater than 80% over the last 10 years or three generations, whichever is the longer, where the time period must include both the past and the future, and where the reduction or its causes may not have ceased OR may not be understood OR may not be reversible, based on an index of abundance appropriate to the taxon, a decline in area of occupancy, extent of occurrence and/or quality of habitat and actual or potential levels of exploitation”.

Justification:

This skate, the largest European rajid, was once an abundant constituent of the demersal fish community of north-western Europe. It formerly occupied the shelf and slope areas of the Mediterranean excluding North Africa west of Morocco but now appears to be virtually absent from much of this range. Caught as bycatch of multispecies trawl fisheries, which cover much of its shelf and slope habitat. Fisheries data indicate that populations of *D. batis* have undergone an extremely high level of depletion in the central part of its range around the British Isles since the early 20th century (the three generation period). It has been extirpated from most inshore areas, but is still caught in Scottish waters, especially around the Shetlands and off North-west Scotland, and also along the shelf edge and in the Celtic Sea. Fishing capacity and effort in the Mediterranean have also increased substantially over the later half of the 20th century. Accurate international species-specific landings data are lacking, although Icelandic landings have declined. French landings appear stable, though this is likely to be attributed to a re-direction of fishing effort from shelf seas (where common skate are now very rare) into deeper water. The life history and demography of this species allow little capacity to withstand exploitation by fisheries, its large body size renders it catchable by fishing gears even from birth. As fishing pressure on this species is unlikely to be reduced in the future, it is assessed as Critically Endangered throughout its range.

8.5 Orkney Skate Trust Distribution GIS Maps



Orkney Skate Trust GIS maps of diver sightings and angler records current to April 2010. Image copyright OST.