



THORNY SKATE

Information summary

Consultations

Let your opinion be heard

Canada's *Species at Risk Act* (SARA) provides legal protection for wildlife species at risk to conserve biological diversity. It also acknowledges that all Canadians have a role to play in the conservation of wildlife species.

Before deciding whether Thorny Skate (*Amblyraja radiata*) will be added to the List of Wildlife Species at Risk, we would like to hear your opinion, comments, and suggestions regarding the possible ecological, cultural, and economic impacts of listing or not listing this species under SARA.

Adding a species to the List of Wildlife Species at Risk...

The process of listing a species under Canada's SARA consists of several steps: it begins with a status assessment by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) and ends with a Government of Canada decision on whether or not to add a species to the List of Wildlife Species at Risk. Public consultations are conducted to gather the opinions of Canadians and are an important step in this process.

Facts about Thorny Skate

Thorny Skate is a flattened fish with a disc-shaped body covered in thorns and a slender tail (Figure 1).

It belongs to the Class Chondrichthyes, which includes all shark and skate species. Thorny Skate is native to the North Atlantic Ocean, and it is the most widely distributed and abundant skate species. In Canadian waters, it is continuously distributed from Baffin Bay, Davis Strait, Labrador Shelf, Grand Banks, Gulf of St. Lawrence, Scotian Shelf, and Bay of Fundy to Georges Bank (Figure 2), in a wide range of depths. The highest concentrations in these waters are found along the southern Grand Banks off Newfoundland and on the eastern portion of the Scotian Shelf.

Thorny Skate is distinguished from other skates in Canadian waters primarily by a row of 11–19 large thorns on the midline of its back and tail. This skate grows slowly, matures late, and produces only a few surviving hard-shelled egg cases (Mermaid's purses) each year. Average age at maturity is 11 years, and it lives at least 20–30 years.



Figure 1. Thorny Skate.



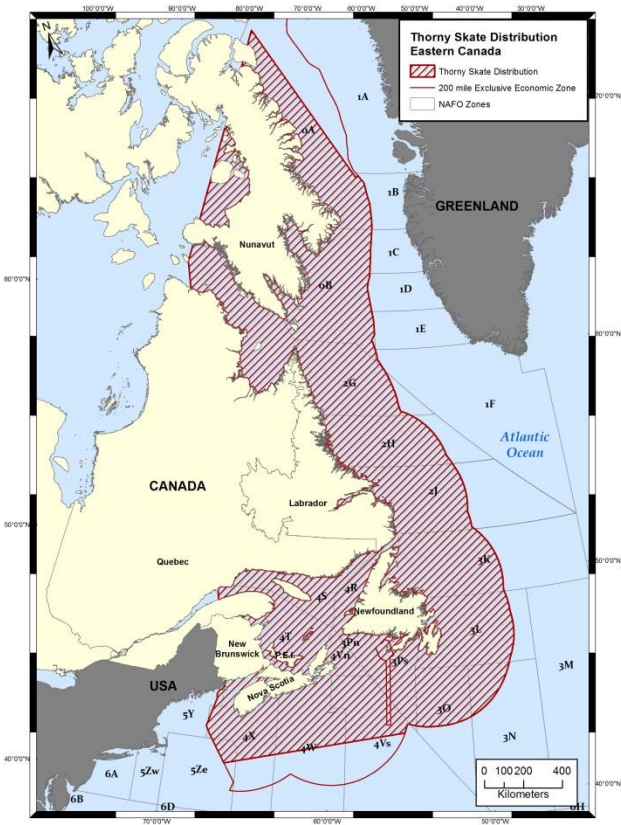


Figure 2. Canadian distribution of Thorny Skate (map was adapted from COSEWIC 2012).

Who assigned the Special Concern status to Thorny Skate?

COSEWIC is an independent committee of experts that assesses which wildlife species are in some danger of disappearing from Canada and assigns a status to these species. It conducts its assessments based on the best available information including scientific data, local ecological knowledge, and Aboriginal traditional knowledge. COSEWIC assessed Thorny Skate in Atlantic Canada in May 2012 and designated it as Special Concern.

Why is Thorny Skate at risk?

COSEWIC concluded that threats to Thorny Skate include directed fishing and bycatch. These slow-growing, late maturing fish have undergone severe

population declines over the southern part of their distribution, including a decrease in the extent of the distribution area. These declines have continued, despite a reduction in fishing mortality. In contrast, the abundance of mature individuals in the northern part of their range has been increasing, approaching abundance levels observed at the beginning of DFO research surveys (mid-1970s). Thus, while this species as a whole does not meet COSEWIC criteria for a Threatened status, declines and a decrease in the extent of the distribution area in the south are cause for concern.

If a species is listed under the *Species at Risk Act*...

If Thorny Skate is listed, given the Special Concern status, the prohibitions of SARA (for example, prohibitions against killing, harming, and capturing) would not apply. However, listing would result in the development of a SARA management plan that will include conservation measures for this species in Canadian waters.

We would like to receive your comments on the potential impacts of adding or not adding Thorny Skate to the List of Wildlife Species at Risk under SARA, designated as Special Concern.

Your comments are important.

A copy of the 2012 COSEWIC Assessment and Status Report on the Thorny Skate and other information can be found on the SARA Registry at www.sararegistry.gc.ca.

References

COSEWIC. 2012. COSEWIC assessment and status report on the Thorny Skate *Amblyraja radiata* in Canada. Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada. Ottawa. ix + 75 p

Aquatic Species at Risk

Unclassified - Non-Classifié



Fisheries and Oceans
Canada

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Canada

Canada