SUBMISSION TO THE NUNAVUT WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT BOARD

FOR
Information: X **Decision:**

Issue: Consultation report on the Thorny Skate.

Background:
As per 3.3 of the Harmonized Listing Process, In September of 2012 DFO informed the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board (NWMB) of the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada's (COSEWIC) assessment result for the Thorny Skate. During early 2015, this species was the subject of consultations in Nunavut and four DFO regions. As a possible species of Special Concern, if listed there are no automatic prohibitions or restrictions on harvesting, but a management plan will need to be developed to help ensure the population does not become more at risk in the future.

Consultations in Nunavut did not result in any comments agreeing with listing Thorny Skate. No Hunter and Trapper Organizations (HTO) responded to numerous emails and mailings of materials, perhaps because this species is not targeted for harvest by Inuit. The Department of Environment, Fisheries and Sealing, stated they did not believe Thorny Skate needed to be listed as they did not feel there was enough information presented by COSEWIC showing the species was at risk in Nunavut waters and that listing could perhaps hinder the development of the fishing industry. This was the only comment received directly from Nunavut.

The attached consultation report (as outlined in 3.8 of the Harmonized Listing Process), details the "when" and "what" of information on Thorny Skate sent to HTOs and others. Copies of this information will be given to the NWMB when the Minister of Environment provides details of what is being considered with respect to listing of this species, as per 3.9 of the Harmonized Listing Process.

Recommendations:
That the NWMB consider the information attached and proceed as per 3.8 of the Harmonized Listing Process.

Prepared by:
Sam A. Stephenson, Species at Risk Program, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Central and Arctic Region.

Date: December 20, 2015

Summary of consultations on the potential listing of Thorny Skate

The Nunavut Wildlife Management Board (NWMB) was notified of the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada's (COSEWIC) assessment of Thorny Skate in September of 2012 and, at the same time, DFOs intent to consult in Nunavut. The Board was notified of the upcoming consultation for Thorny Skate in August 2014 and this was reconfirmed in April 2015.

The following outlines all communication and results of consultation with the public, fishing industry, Nunavut Government and organizations created under the Nunavut Land Claim.

Nunavut Land Claim
Contact via: phone calls, emailing of materials and several hard copy mailings of materials beginning May 2015 and ending August 2015. All materials provided in English and Inuktitut. Ads in *Nunatsiaq News* in May 2015. Final email in August to HTOs notifying that consultations had ended, but that it was still possible to send comments to DFO. Follow up phone calls to all HTOs.

HTOs
No response: Cape Dorset, Clyde River, Iqaluit, Kimmirut, Pangnirtung, Pond Inlet, Qikiqtarjuaq.
Nunavut Inuit Wildlife Secretariat, Nunavut Tunngavik Inc., Qikiqtaaluk Wildlife Board: No comment, but materials primarily sent as information only.

Nunavut Government
Department of Environment, Fisheries and Sealing: Comments were made that listing was not required because the available data did not suggest any particular risk in Nunavut. It was stated that listing could hinder the development of the fishing industry in Nunavut and that the government had already supported means to reduce bycatch.

General Public
There were no comments received from the general public in Nunavut despite the ad in *Nunatsiaq News* advising them of the consultations and providing links to the SARA registry.

Fishing Industry
No response: Nunavut Offshore Allocations Holders Association, Qikiqtaaluk Corporation, Arctic Fishery Alliance, Cumberland Sound Fisheries; Umiat Corporation
Baffin Fisheries Coalition: Although the comments were sent directly to the Newfoundland & Labrador Region of DFO, those comments are applicable here. Baffin Fisheries Coalition stated Thorny Skate should not be listed, primarily because there has been very little research on Thorny Skate in northern waters (*i.e.*, Nunavut waters) and no one can assume it is at risk without proper assessments.

Summary:
There was no support for listing Thorny Skate in Nunavut. Despite sending information many times, there were no responses from HTOs. There was no interest in a face to face meeting from any HTO.

A list of materials sent, when and how, appears in Appendix A.

Appendix B presents information on responses received in five DFO regions (Central and Arctic, Quebec, Newfoundland and Labrador, Maritimes, Gulf) consulting on the listing of Thorny Skate.

APPENDIX A: Date of contact and materials sent to Nunavut.

CONTACT WITH HTOs:
May 2015 – Email advising that consultations would soon begin.
May 2015 – Email advising consultations had begun. Included link to SARA public registry and copies of fact sheet and questionnaire.
May 2015 – Express Post letter with information on Thorny Skate (fact sheet, questionnaire and link to species assessment) stating consultations were beginning and DFO would like their opinion on listing and that in person meetings could be arranged if desired. Included link to the SARA public registry where information was available in both English and Inuktitut.
June 2015 – Express Post letter with information on Thorny Skate including fact sheet, questionnaire and link to species assessment asking if these species were used by or considered important to the community. Included link to the SARA public registry where information was available in both English and Inuktitut.
June 2015 – Email to HTOs reminding them of the consultation on Thorny Skate. Included link to the SARA public registry where information was available in both English and Inuktitut.
July 2015 – Express Post letter with information Thorny Skate (fact sheets and questionnaire) again asking for an opinion on possible listing before the consultation period ended. Included link to the SARA public registry where information was available in both English and Inuktitut.
August 2015 – Email informing that the consultation period was over, but that DFO would still be accepting any comments on listing. Provided links and copies of information sent previously.
August 2015 – Phone calls to/messages left with HTOs to determine if they had looked at materials and had any comments regarding the possible listing of Thorny Skate.

CONTACT WITH NUNAVUT INUIT WILDLIFE SECRETARIAT, NUNAVUT TUNNGAVIK INC., QIKIQTAALUK WILDLIFE BOARD:
May 2015 – Express Post FYI notice of intent to consult from May to July along with information on Thorny Skate including fact sheet, questionnaire and COSEWIC reason for assessment (same information as sent to HTOs).

CONTACT WITH NUNAVUT GOVERNMENT:
May 2015 – Express Post of letter to Fisheries and Sealing, Department of Environment, with information on Thorny Skate including fact sheets and COSEWIC reason for assessment asking if there was any opinion on listing. Included link to the SARA public registry.

CONTACT WITH FISHING INDUSTRY:
May 2015 – Express Post of letter to Baffin Fisheries Coalition, Nunavut Offshore Allocations Holders Association, Qikiqtaaluk Corporation, Arctic Fishery Alliance and Cumberland Sound Fisheries; Umiat Corporation with information on Thorny Skate including fact sheets and COSEWIC reason for assessment asking if there was any opinion on listing. Included link to the SARA public registry.

CONTACT WITH PUBLIC:
Ad placed in *Nunatsiaq News* in May 2015 (English, French and Inuktitut) which advised people of public consultation period for Thorny Skate and identified the Species at Risk public registry website as a location with more information and a questionnaire on the listing process.

APPENDIX B: Total responses received in all DFO regions (including Central & Arctic – Nunavut) consulting on Thorny Skate. Not specified means some form of comments were received, but it was not stated if they supported listing or not.

Breakdown of Responses by Category

Provincial/Territorial Governments:
List - 0
Do not list – 1
Not responsible for species - 0

Aboriginal Organizations:
List – 2
Do not list – 1
Not specified – 0
No concerns – 1

Environmental Non-Governmental Organizations (*e.g.*, World Wildlife Fund, Sierra Club):
List – 0
Do not list – 0
Did not specify – 0

Stakeholders (including fishing industry)
List – 0
Do not list – 2
Not specified – 0

Public:
List – 1
Do not list – 1

Summary of responses
List – 3
Do not list – 5
Not specified, not responsible or no concerns with possible listing – 1

THORNY SKATE

Consultations on listing under the *Species at Risk Act*

Information summary and questionnaire for the consultations on adding Thorny Skate to the List of Wildlife Species at Risk as Special Concern – **Please provide your input by July 25, 2015**

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.

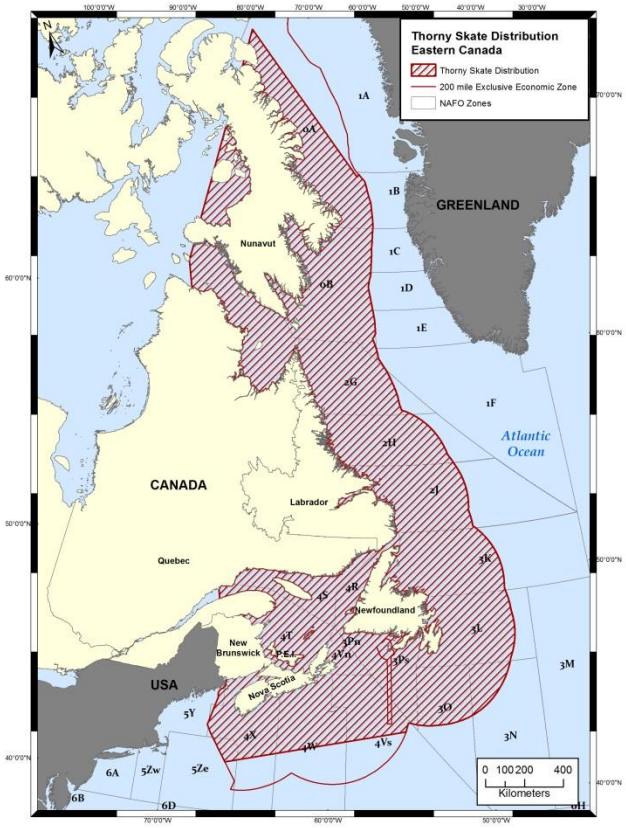

Figure 2. Canadian distribution of Thorny Skate (map was adapted from COSEWIC 2012).

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.

Please fill out the questionnaire: we want to hear from you.

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 pp.

Questionnaire: Your comments are important!

The purpose of this questionnaire is to obtain your comments on adding Thorny Skate to the List of Wildlife Species at Risk as Special Concern.

For more information, to obtain consultation materials, or to submit comments online, go to www.sararegistry.gc.ca under "Get involved" and then "Public Consultations".

1. Do you support listing Thorny Skate as Special Concern on the List of Wildlife Species at Risk under SARA?

   Yes or no?_____

   Why or why not?_____

   _____

2. What would be potential **positive impacts** of listing Thorny Skate on your activities, your community, your culture, the environment, and the economy?

   _____

   _____

   _____

3. What would be potential **negative impacts** of listing Thorny Skate on your activities, your community, your culture, the environment, and the economy?

   _____

   _____

   _____

4. Do you have any other comments on listing Thorny Skate as Special Concern on the List of Wildlife Species at Risk under SARA?

   _____

   _____

5. If you are answering on behalf of an Aboriginal community or organization, industry, small business[1], association, or organization, please indicate its name. _____

6. In what province or territory do you live? In what province or territory does your organization operate?_____

   Your name and contact information (*optional*): _____

   _____

Thank you for completing this questionnaire. Please send it by mail, fax, or email to:

Species at Risk Program
Fisheries and Oceans Canada
501 University Crescent
Winnipeg, MB R3T 2N6

Fax: (204) 983-5192
E-Mail: fwisar@dfo-mpo.gc.ca

[1] Defined as any business, including its affiliates, that has fewer than 100 employees or gross annual revenues of $30,000–$5 million.