



SMOOTH SKATE (FUNK ISLAND DEEP AND LAURENTIAN-SCOTIAN POPULATIONS)

Submit your comments here: for the [Funk Island Deep population](#); for the [Laurentian-Scotian population](#)

Information summary and surveys for the consultations on adding the Funk Island Deep and the Laurentian-Scotian populations of Smooth Skate to the List of Wildlife Species at Risk as Endangered and Special Concern, respectively – **Please provide your input by July 23, 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 the Funk Island Deep population and/or Laurentian-Scotian population of Smooth Skate (*Malacoraja senta*) 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 these populations under SARA.

Adding a population 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 Smooth Skate

Smooth Skate is a flattened fish with a disc-shaped body, opaque cartilage on its snout, and long tail (Figure 1). It belongs to the Class Chondrichthyes, which includes all shark and skate species. Smooth Skate is native to the Northwest Atlantic Ocean and much of its distribution is in Canada. It is found from southern Georges Bank (south of Cape Cod) north to the Labrador Shelf (Hopedale Channel). It usually lives at depths between 70 and 480 m and in water temperatures of 2.7–10 °C. Densest concentrations of Smooth Skate occur in troughs surrounding shallower

banks, where seawater is warmer.

Smooth Skate is one of the smallest skates in the Northwest Atlantic Ocean, growing up to 66 cm and weighing up to 1.2 kg. This species is easily distinguished from other Northwest Atlantic skates because it has one of the longest tails relative to its total length (tail is equal to its body length) and has 2 "triangles" of thin, opaque cartilage on its snout. Smooth Skate less than 1 year old can be distinguished from other young Northwest Atlantic skates by 1–4 irregular pale "crossbars" or "half-bars" on its tail. Like most skates, Smooth Skate grow slowly, mature late, and females produce 40–100 hard-shelled egg cases (Mermaid's purses) each year. Average age and length at maturity is 11 years and 47 cm, respectively, and they live at least 15–25 years.

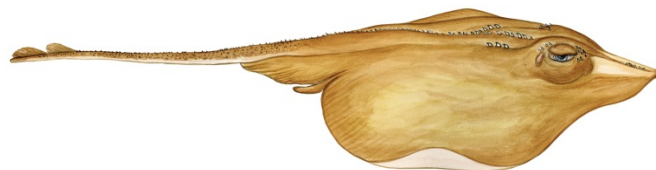


Figure 1. Smooth Skate.

Who assigned the Endangered and Special Concern status to these Smooth Skate populations?

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 the Funk Island Deep population and Laurentian-Scotian population of Smooth Skate in Atlantic Canada (Figure 2) in May 2012 and designated them as Endangered and Special Concern, respectively.



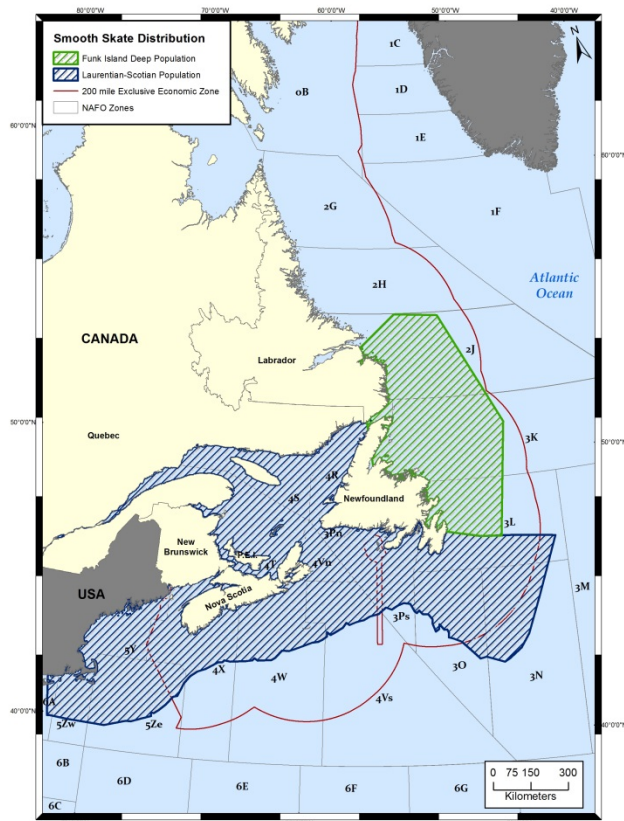


Figure 2. Distribution of the Funk Island Deep and Laurentian-Scotian populations of Smooth Skate (delineated by green diagonal lines and blue diagonal lines, respectively; map adapted from COSEWIC 2012).

Why is Smooth Skate at risk?

COSEWIC concluded that threats to Smooth Skate populations include lower than normal temperatures where this species is living at its coldest thermal fringe (Funk Island Deep population), increased predation on adults (particularly in the Southern Gulf of St. Lawrence), and fishery bycatch.

COSEWIC designated the Funk Island Deep population as Endangered because there have been steep declines in abundance of both adult and young individuals since the early 1980s. Despite slight increases in the number of adults in the last 5 years, overall abundance remains very low. These trends in abundance are matched by strong reductions in area of occupancy. COSEWIC designated the Laurentian-Scotian population as Special Concern because

trends in abundance and area of occupancy vary among regions for this large population, but overall numbers have likely been increasing in recent years. Although the Scotian Shelf used to be the center of abundance for this species, it has had steep decreases in abundance and area of occupancy since the 1970s, and numbers remain low. It is not clear why both trends differ among regions.

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

If the Funk Island Deep population of Smooth 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 Smooth Skate from this population. A recovery strategy and subsequent action plan(s) would be developed to identify measures to address known threats. Critical habitat – habitat necessary for the survival and recovery of Smooth Skate (Funk Island Deep population) – would be protected once it is identified in a recovery strategy or action plan. If the Laurentian-Scotian population 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 would 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 the Funk Island Deep and/or Laurentian-Scotian populations of Smooth Skate to the List of Wildlife Species at Risk under SARA, designated as Endangered and Special Concern, respectively.

Your comments are important.

Please fill out the [Smooth Skate Funk Island Deep](#) and/or the [Smooth Skate Laurentian Scotian](#) population surveys: we want to hear from you.

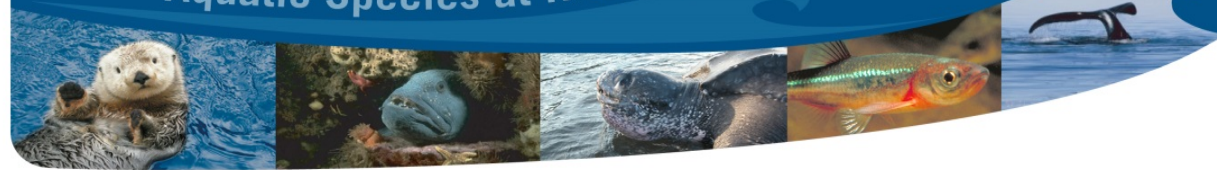
A copy of the 2012 COSEWIC Assessment and Status Report on the Smooth Skate and other information can be found on the SARA Registry at www.sararegistry.gc.ca.

References

COSEWIC. 2012. COSEWIC assessment and status report on the Smooth Skate *Malacoraja senta* in Canada. Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada. Ottawa. xix + 77 pp.



Aquatic Species at Risk



Thank you for completing
this survey.

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