

# Thorny Skate (2013) - Response Statement

*January 3, 2013*

**Common Name:** Thorny Skate

**Scientific Name:** *Amblyraja radiata*

**Status assessment by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC):**  
Special Concern

**How the Minister of the Environment intends to respond to the assessment:** The Minister of Fisheries and Oceans will undertake consultations with the governments of Quebec, Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and Nunavut, the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board, the Hunting, Fishing and Trapping Coordinating Committee, the Torngat Joint Fisheries Board and the Nunavik Marine Region Wildlife Board, Aboriginal peoples, stakeholders, and the public on whether or not the Thorny Skate should be added to the List of Wildlife Species at Risk (Schedule 1) under the Species at Risk Act as Special Concern. The Minister of the Environment will forward the COSEWIC assessment of the Thorny Skate to the Governor in Council upon completion of consultations.

Once a species has been assessed as at risk by COSEWIC, further steps must be undertaken before it is added to Schedule 1 of the Species at Risk Act. For more information on this process, please view The Species Listing Process Under SARA.

**Reason(s) for status designation provided by COSEWIC:** These slow-growing, late-maturing fish have undergone severe population declines over the southern part of their distribution, including range contractions. The southern declines have continued in spite of 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 surveys (mid-1970s). Thus, while the species as a whole does not meet the criteria for a Threatened status, declines and range contractions in the south are causes for concern.

**Occurrence:** Quebec, Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Nunavut, Arctic Ocean, Atlantic Ocean

**Competent Minister(s):**

Minister of Fisheries and Oceans

Minister responsible for the Parks Canada Agency

**Province(s) and territory (territories) to be consulted:**

Quebec, Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Nunavut

**Applicable federal legislation:** When the species is found within national parks of Canada or other lands administered by the Parks Canada Agency, it is protected or managed under the Canada National Parks Act or through measures or management tools available to the Parks Canada Agency under other legislation.

***Conservation activities underway:*** Skates are managed as a group rather than by species. There is a NAFO managed stock in 3LNO with a total allowable catch in place. There are directed skate fisheries in 3NO and 3Ps with management measures in place such as competitive quotas, season dates, gear restrictions (e.g. minimum mesh size, hook size), trip limits, at-sea observer coverage, dockside monitoring and by-catch limits. In all other areas or in fisheries targeting other species there are by-catch limits and skates may be returned to the water. All discards must be recorded in logbooks, and additionally when at-sea observers are present, skate discards are also recorded by the observers. Beginning in April 2013, license conditions will require all thorny skate caught in NAFO divisions 4VWX+5 to be returned to the water. DFO conducts annual research vessel surveys to monitor the abundance and distribution of numerous marine species, including thorny skate. These surveys form the basis of monitoring their status. Landings and data collected by fishery at-sea observers form the basis of monitoring fishing activities.