

Interim set of questions sent to NatureScot about flapper skate eggs

Marine Scotland received advice from NatureScot about flapper skate eggs in the Inner Sound of Skye of 26 October 2020.

Following the first response from NatureScot, Marine Scotland sent the list of questions below to NatureScot on 13 November 2020.

These questions were subsequently addressed within further advice received from NatureScot on 18 December 2020.

Request sent from Marine Scotland to NatureScot on 13 November 2020

Further to your advice of 26 October we have a number of queries that require to be addressed prior to Marine Scotland providing advice to Scottish Ministers on the most appropriate action in response to the discovery of flapper skate eggs in the Inner Sound.

Potential threats (relevant to completion of table below)

- What human activities give rise to the pressures highlighted?
- Your advice focuses on dredging. Do other fishing activities have any effect?
- Your advice states dredging is happening in the vicinity. What is the definition of vicinity in this case? Can any advice be provided on the frequency of dredging in the vicinity?
- How has the conclusion that dredging is the activity which is considered to have the greatest potential to have a negative impact on skate eggs been reached?
- The document says no evidence of damage but then suggests that fishing is constraining egg laying. Can we have clarity and any evidence on this as this seems somewhat contradictory? Is it your advice that evidence of damage is necessary as a justification for adopting any of the potential management tools?
- What are the risks associated with recreational diving disturbing the eggs? (for example moving them).
- Are there other activities (e.g. anchoring) that the skate eggs are at risk from unless there is appropriate management at this site?

Evidence relating to the eggs (ensuring the response is supported by the evidence)

- What is “potential skate egg-laying habitat”? How confident are we that the location is skate egg-laying habitat? What information is there on the likely extent of that habitat?
- You advise that the site is important in a Scottish context. Is there sufficient evidence already to conclude the site is of national importance?
- What would a proposal for a more comprehensive survey look like, costs, timescale for delivery and reporting? Can you confirm this could be carried out as essential work under Covid-19 advice?
- What work would be required to assess / develop the case for the area being a possible MPA?
- Can you confirm how much confidence we have that these are flapper skate eggs rather than blue skate or any other species? What evidence is this based on? How would your advice change if the species is proven to not be flapper skate?
- Given the extent of the survey work carried out, the distribution of the locations confirmed as having eggs in the Inner Sound and the evidence of suitable habitat in the area what is your advice regarding the size of area that requires protection specifically for flapper skate eggs?

Urgency of introducing measures

- Do you consider there are sufficient measures already in place to prevent significant negative impact?

Table

Please populate the first three columns of the table below (pressures, associated activities and potential severity). Include identification of what human activities do / and could take place in and around this area

Table of possible measures

Pressure	Associated activities	Severity of potential effect	Likelihood of occurrence	Potential management tools
Surface abrasion				
Sedimentation				
Contaminants / water quality				
Etc.				