



David
Suzuki
Foundation



September 15, 2011

James Baird
Associate Regional Director
General Fisheries and Oceans Canada
P.O.Box 5667
St. John's, NL A1C 5X1



Dear Mr. Baird:

On behalf of our organizations, we are writing to encourage Canadian support for science-based limits on threatened thorny skates at next week's annual meeting of the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization (NAFO) in Halifax. Specifically, we urge the Canadian NAFO delegation to work to secure a reduction in the NAFO thorny skate total allowable catch (TAC) from 12,000 metric tons (t) to no more than the level recommended by the NAFO Scientific Council (5,000t), as a matter of priority.

We are seriously concerned about the status and management of thorny skate (*Amblyraja radiata*). This species has been classified by IUCN as *Vulnerable* globally and *Critically Endangered* off the U.S. east coast, and is currently under review by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC).

In the report from their June 2011 meeting, the NAFO Scientific Council states that:

- thorny skates have very low reproductive capacity due to slow growth and few offspring
- the Division 3LNO thorny skate population is still at a low level despite several years of reduced fishing mortality
- to promote recovery, 2012 skate catches should not exceed 5000t in NAFO Division 3LNO
- the EU-Spain Division 3NO index has been declining since 2006
- there is no indication of healthy, robust recruitment into the population
- thorny skate density in Division 3LNO is still predominately on the southern Grand Bank while, historically, thorny skate had been widely distributed throughout the Grand Bank.

As you will recall, NAFO Parties failed to heed similar skate advice at the 2010 annual meeting and instead pledged to adopt measures in line with Scientific Council recommendations in 2011.

As you know, Canada holds a significant share of the NAFO thorny skate TAC. Canada therefore has a key role in negotiating quota reduction as well as an important responsibility to work to ensure the sustainability of this vulnerable species. Moreover, adherence to scientific advice is integral to Canada's stated approach to fisheries management.

Setting the world's first Regional Fishery Management Organization (RFMO) TAC for a shark or ray was a major accomplishment for NAFO, and yet we maintain that this limit must be in line with scientific advice in order to rebuild the population and set a sound precedent for other RFMOs. We are hopeful that, with your leadership, this important step can be taken next week in Halifax.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



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President
Shark Advocates International



Robert Rangeley, Ph.D.
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