

Skates and rays of Ireland

IDENTIFICATION AND CATCHING REGULATIONS FOR IRISH WATERS

There are 16 species of skates and rays that (typically) are regularly caught in Irish waters, some of which can be fished commercially under quota restrictions while others are partially or totally prohibited. To ensure long-term sustainability of these skate and ray stocks and healthy marine ecosystems, it is essential that they are fished in strict accordance with Irish and EU regulations. Depending on what the skate or ray is, the requirements include:

1. Rays and skates subject to control regulations in Irish Waters
2. Species with some restrictions in some Irish ICES areas
3. Total prohibition in Irish Waters
4. Additional, rare skates and rays which may be occasionally encountered (with no prohibitions in Irish Waters).

This guide details how to identify these fishes, what three letter codes to use to record all these species.

1. Rays and skates subject to control regulations in Irish Waters

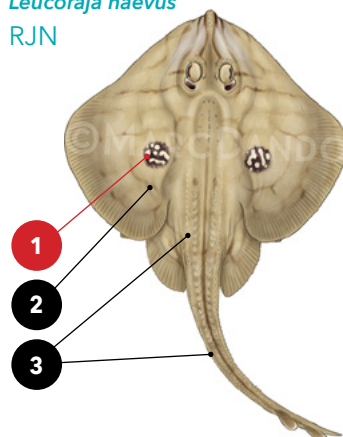
These six ray species are currently subject to catch limits (quotas) by Irish vessels in Irish waters. EC Regulation 1224 of 2009, as well as the annual TAC and Quota Regulations, require that these six rays must be recorded accurately and separately in logbooks, sales notes, transport documents, weigh records, etc.

Note: There are various rays and skate species not targeted for commercial purposes nor have specific restrictions but may be by-catch in catches in Irish waters e.g. Long-nosed Skate (RJO), Starry Skate (RJR), Atlantic Torpedo (Electric) Ray (TTO), Common Stingray (JDP), etc. You must use the species specific code not a generic code. For example, use RJC to record Thornback Ray not SRX (all skates and rays). Rather than recording these species as SRX, RAJ, etc., accurately recording each species of skate and ray caught will enable more accurate stock assessments – the building blocks of clear, unambiguous scientific advice¹. Failure to record species accurately can result in inaccurate: stock; conservation status; distribution range; and may result in reduced quotas, etc.

¹ Field Guide to Sharks, Rays & Chimaeras of Europe and the Mediterranean, by David A Ebert and Marc Dando, 2021.

Cuckoo Ray

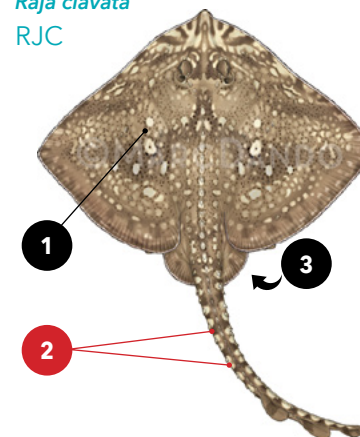
Leucoraja naevus
RJN



1. Top-side light grey to brown with **large black and yellow eye spot on each wing.**
2. Dorsal surface prickly/entirely spinulose.
3. 3-5 rows of thorns along tail, joining 2 median rows of thorns on trunk.

Thornback Ray

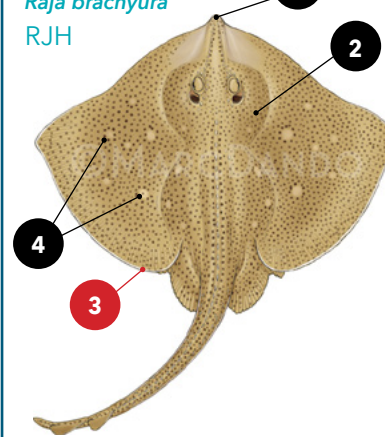
Raja clavata
RJC



1. Top-side dark brown to light grey with marbled pattern. Highly variable patterning and colouring.
2. **Tail with alternating light and dark crossbars.**
3. Under-side white with dark margins.

Blonde Ray

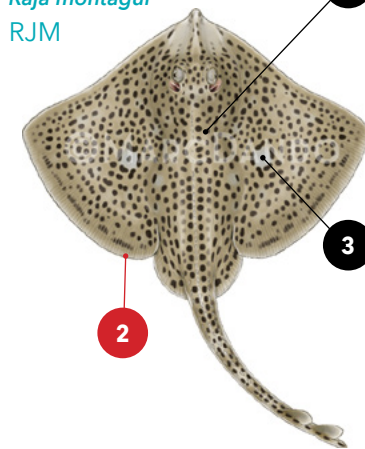
Raja brachyura
RJH



1. Short snout.
2. Top-side pale brown to grey-brown covered in dark spots.
3. **Spots extend to very edge of wings.**
4. Larger, paler spots often scattered symmetrically on disc.

Spotted Ray

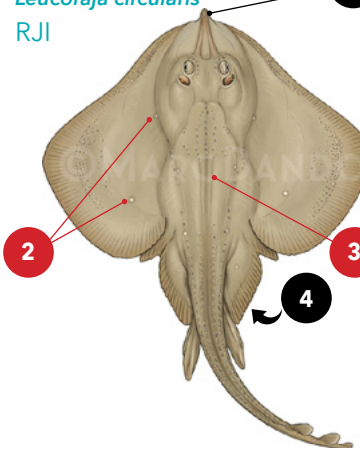
Raja montagui
RJM



1. Top-side pale grey-brown to yellow.
2. **Numerous dark spots which do not extend to very edge of disc.**
3. Ring of dark spots on each wing giving the appearance of an 'eyespot' sometimes present.

Sandy Ray

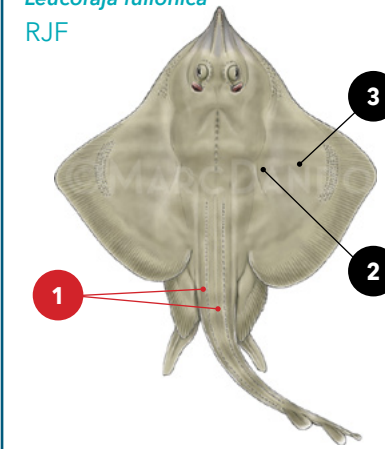
Leucoraja circularis
RJI



1. Short snout with bluntly angled tip.
2. 4-6 symmetrical creamy spots on each wing.
3. **Top-side light brown (sandy) to red brown.**
4. Under-side white.

Shagreen Ray

Leucoraja fullonica
RJF

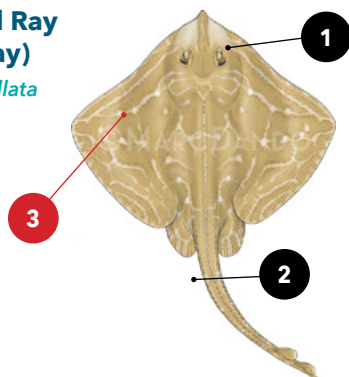


1. **2 rows of approximately 50 large thorns either side of the midline to first dorsal fin.**
2. Top-side solid ash/grey brown.
3. Inconspicuous darker lines may be visible across body.

2. Species with some restrictions in some Irish ICES areas

Small-eyed Ray (Painted Ray)

Raja microocellata
RJE



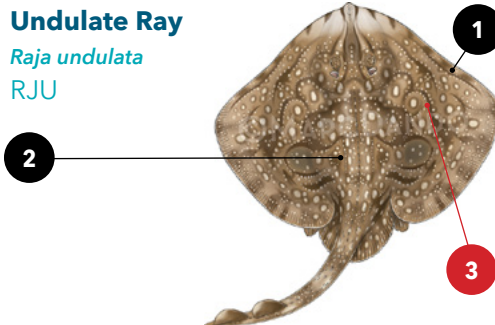
1. Noticeably small eyes.
2. Top-side pale sandy brown to olive grey.
3. Light bands running almost parallel to margins of disc with lighter streaks and spots in regular patterns.

Control regulation

- When accidentally caught in ICES areas 6 and 7a-c, 7e & 7h-k should be **promptly released**.
- Allowed from **areas 7f and 7g only**.

Undulate Ray

Raja undulata
RJU



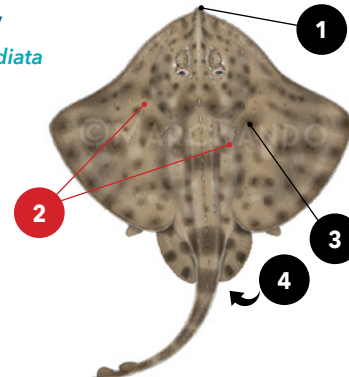
1. Undulating anterior disc margin.
2. Top-side greenish yellow to greyish brown.
3. Pattern of dark wavy bands bordered by rows of small white spots.

Control regulation

- Designated a PROHIBITED SPECIES for all EU vessels in ICES areas 6 and 10, and for third country vessels in ICES areas 6, 9 and 10.
- It is **prompt release** from Irish waters in area 7.

Starry Ray

Amblyraja radiata
RJR



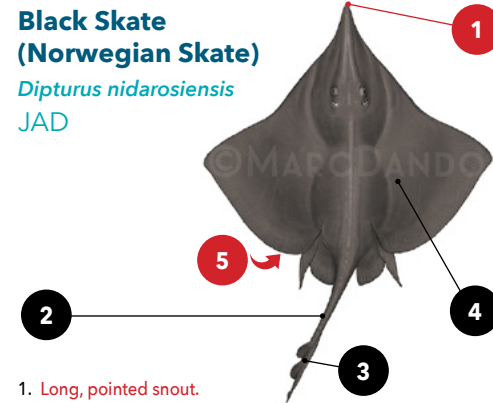
1. Short, blunt snout.
2. Top-side covered in rough dermal denticles and large thorns with star shaped bases.
3. Top-side grey-brown with dark and occasionally pale blotches.
4. Under-side white with dark blotches and margins.

Control regulation

- **Prohibited species** in ICES Area VIII (which is not in Irish waters).

Black Skate (Norwegian Skate)

Dipturus nidarosiensis
JAD



1. Long, pointed snout.
2. Short, solid tail.
3. 1-3 thorns between dorsal fins.
4. Top-side dark grey-brown with black spots marking pores.
5. Under-side dark brown-black, darker than top-side and often covered in mucus.

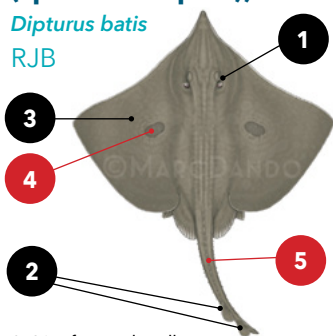
Control regulation

- Designated a **prohibited species** for all EU and third country vessels in ICES areas 6, 7a-c, 7e-h and 7k.
- May be caught from area **7j only**.

3. Total prohibition in Irish Waters

Blue Skate (formally common skate (species complex))

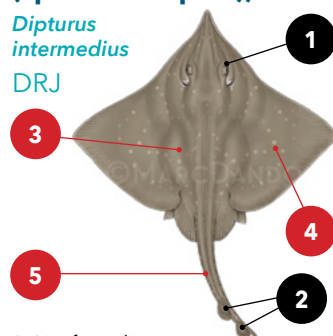
Dipturus batis
RJB



1. Iris of eye pale yellow.
2. Two small dorsal fins with short space between them.
3. Top-side brownish, often with pale spots and streaks.
4. Oval eyespot on inner wings with yellowish outer margin and darker centre.
5. Median row of 12-31 thorns along tail.

Flapper Skate (formally common skate (species complex))

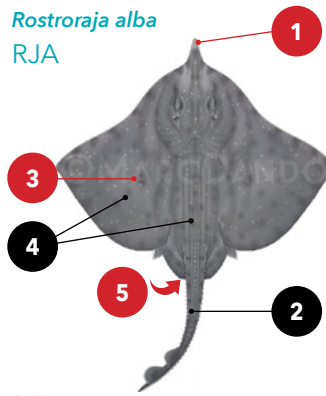
Dipturus intermedius
DRJ



1. Iris of eye olive-green.
2. Two small dorsal fins with long space between them.
3. Top-side dark olive-green with pale spots, becoming greyish brown with growth.
4. A circular marking on each wing made up of grouped pale spots.
5. Median row of 12-18 thorns along tail.

White Skate

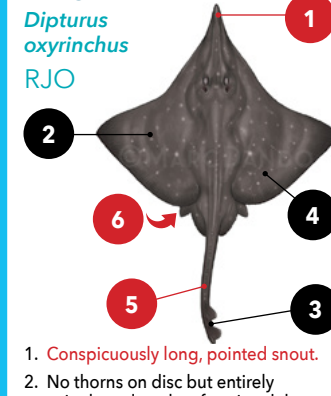
Rostroraja alba
RJA



1. Long, narrow snout.
2. Tail slightly shorter than body.
3. Top-side grey-blue in adults, reddish brown in juveniles.
4. Pattern of light and dark spots and blotches.
5. Under-side white with dark margins.

Long-nosed Skate

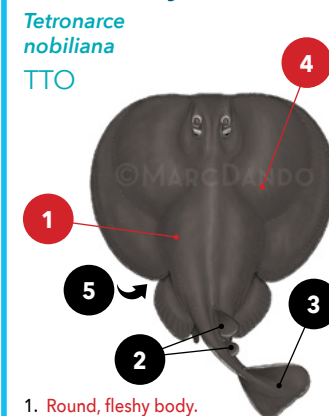
Dipturus oxyrinchus
RJO



1. Conspicuously long, pointed snout.
2. No thorns on disc but entirely spinulose dorsal surface in adults.
3. 0-1 thorns between dorsal fins.
4. Top-side pale brown, becoming darker brown/grey with growth; with pattern of light and dark spots.
5. Row of 4-11 thorns on tail, often worn off in adults.
6. Under-side pale brown, becoming darker brown to bluish grey with growth.

Atlantic Torpedo Ray (Electric Ray)

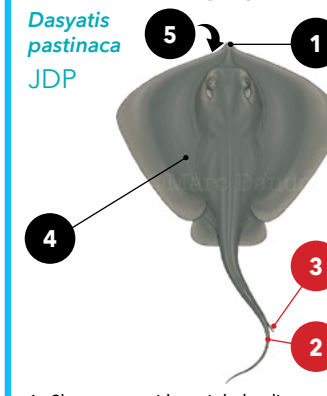
Tetronarce nobiliana
TTO



1. Round, fleshy body.
2. Two close-set dorsal fins.
3. Short, thick tail with large caudal fin.
4. Top-side dark grey to purple-brown.
5. Under-side creamy white with dark margins.

Common Stingray

Dasyatis pastinaca
JDP



1. Short snout with straight leading edges of disc.
2. Long, thin tail up to 1.5 times the length of the body.
3. Spine on tail up to 12cm long with serrations.
4. Dorsal surface uniform dark brown-grey to olive.
5. Ventral surface white with dark margins.

4. Additional, rare skates and rays which may be occasionally encountered (with no prohibitions in Irish Waters)