

Our engagement for sustainable management of ray and skate stocks in the English Channel and the North Sea

SUMARIS NEWSLETTER 4 - November 2019



Improving scientific knowledge of the ray and skate stocks in the Channel and the North Sea, in order to propose a sustainable management and a cross-border strategy, is a major conservation challenge for our valuable resources.

That is the reason why NAUSICAA decided to become part of the SUMARIS project funded by the INTERREG 2 Seas programme.

Unwanted rays captured by fishermen during sea trips are brought to and housed in NAUSICAA where a team of animal keepers watch them and measure their survival rate and vitality.



Improving the knowledge of species that are still relatively unknown is an integral part of our mission aiming at ensuring a future of the human race living in harmony with nature.

Our engagement in the project consists of studying the key life traits of those species (reproduction cycle, fertility, egg development stages, survival rate in the case of discarding) and thus contribute to the improvement of the biological knowledge of rays and skates in the Channel and the North Sea.

NAUSICAA is also in charge of communicating about the project and its findings to the visitors of our National Sea Experience Centre but also during general public events such as the Berck Kite and the Sea Festivals in Boulogne-sur-Mer.

Philippe VALLETTE, Managing Director of Nausicaá and President of International Aquarium Network



To obtain accurate landing data on rays and skates and more sustainable fisheries, correct identification of ray and skate species is essential, both aboard commercial vessels and at fish auctions. Mistaken identity is a real concern as many of these species look quite similar. Naming of rays and skates can also be a source of confusion. Therefore, it is essential that professional fishermen (crew and skipper), future fishermen and auction staff can distinguish different species and learn their common name. Correct handling of rays and skates is also important for the safety of fishermen as well as for the survival of the discarded rays in the framework of the Landing Obligation.

OUTREACH AND EDUCATIONAL TOOLS

To ensure correct identification, naming and handling of rays and skates, the SUMARiS project has developed tools for fishermen and fish auction professionals: an identification guide, training courses, a PowerPoint presentation and a video tutorial. They show how to identify and handle the skates and rays fished in the North Sea and the Channel. All those tools are in English, Dutch and French.



Training sessions for fishermen and auction staff

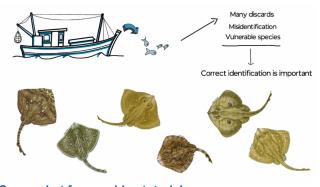
The participating POs have been carrying out training sessions for fishermen and auction staff. In March 2018, ILVO held a teach-the-teacher training session to all POs in the fish auction of Zeebrugge in Belgium. During these sessions, the fishermen were taught how to use the identification guide and other identification tools on board.

Until the end of the project the POs Rederscentrale, FROM Nord and KEIFCA will organise training sessions for more local fishermen and auction staff.



Identification Guide for fishery and auction professionals

Developed by Rederscentrale, FROM Nord and Nausicaà, the identification guide describes the 6 most common ray and skate species (thornback ray, spotted ray, blonde ray, undulate ray, smalleyed ray and cuckoo ray) and explains their characteristics. The guide also demonstrates how to handle the rays and skates safely, how to store them in tanks and how to release them. **The guide is distributed to fishery and auction professionals by the Producer Organisations** (POs) participating in the SUMARiS project.



Screenshot from a video tutorial



Correspondent from a DouverDoint Dresountation

Educational materials for fishermen to be

The SUMARiS partners believe that young fishermen to be should be taught how to identify and handle rays and skates correctly. Therefore, a PowerPoint presentation and a video tutorial have been created. These educational materials are in English, Dutch and French. They are used during the training sessions for students in the fishing schools in Belgium. The first training session took place in the fishing school in Ostend at the beginning of December 2018. More than 30 students participated.

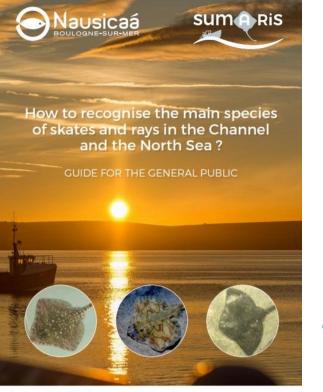
Screenshot from a PowerPoint Presentation

Educational materials for the general public and children

A guidebook for the general public *How to* recognise the main species of skates and rays in the Channel and the North Sea? and a chatterbox were produced and distributed on occasions such as the Sea and Kite Festivals in France and the European Maritime Day stakeholder conference in Lisbon in 2019. Those tools are available in English and French and can be downloaded on the **website of Nausicaá**



Chatterbox



Chatterbox zoom

Interreg in the project has received fundings by the interreg 2 Seas programme 2014-2020 co-financed by the European Funds of Regional 2 Seas Mers Zeeén Developpement in virtue of the subvention contract n² 250-250

Guide for the general public



MANAGING RAY AND SKATE STOCKS TOGETHER IN A SUSTAINABLE WAY

On the 16th and 17th of May 2019, KEIFCA, supported by the SUMARIS partners, assembled stakeholders to share their points of view on the management of rays and skates in the Channel and the North Sea during an international conference in Canterbury. Around fifty professionals from different sectors attended the meeting (14 fishermen and members of the fishing industry, 19 scientists, 6 fisheries managers, 8 other organisations such as SeaFish, SharkTrust, Nausicaà, NGO representatives, marketing professionals, etc) from 6 countries (Ireland, United Kingdom, France, Belgium, Netherlands and Italy).

The main objective of the conference was to discuss and evaluate potential skate and ray management options, propose recommendations for the future European fishery management strategy and consider next steps. Many subjects have been extensively discussed: "Skate and ray biology, life history and stocks dynamics", "Economics of the skate and ray fishery" or again "Skate and ray policy and management". The report on SUMARiS Skate and Ray Management Conference will be available soon.

Many thanks to KEIFCA for the organisation of the event and to the participants for all their positive and constructive exchanges.



Participants of the SUMARIS conference *Managing ray and skate stocks together in a sustainable way*, 16-17 May 2019, Canterbury, UK

SUMARIS PARTICIPATES IN THE PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON THE FISHERIES POLICY 2020

Last August, SUMARIS participated in the public consultation about the Fishing opportunities for 2020 under the common fisheries policy organised by the <u>Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and</u> <u>Fisheries (DG MARE)</u>. The aim of the consultation was to collect opinions on the way in which levels of fishing effort and quotas are set according to the new common fisheries policy and in relation to scientific advice about sustainable fishing. The redaction of the contribution was coordinated by FROM Nord and supported by SUMARIS partners. It has been published on: <u>https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/contribution-sumaris-consultation-on-fishing-opportunities-2020_en.pdf</u>

AWARENESS RAISING ACTIVITIES FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC

From the 11th to the 14th of July 2019, the SUMARIS project was presented by FROM Nord and Nausicaà at the Sea Festival in Boulogne-sur-Mer. During 4 days, the two partners worked together with local fishermen to teach the general public how to identify species of rays and skates in a playful way. They handed out ray and skate guide brochures and the chatterbox.

Nausicaá organised a drawing competition for children and put in place small tanks with live juvenile rays and eggs to explain key stages of ray and skate development. Fishermen showed adult rays and

skates while FROM Nord held quizzes and guessing games with prizes for children. The SUMARIS booth was visited by at least 3200 people and 150 children participated in the drawing competition.

Moreover, the ray and skate guide brochures and the chatterbox were handed out to the participants of the annual Kite Festival in Berk sur Mer in April and to the participants of the European Maritime Day Stakeholder Conference that was held in Lisbon last May.



SUMARiS booth at the Sea Festival in Boulogne-sur-Mer



Six species of rays and skates are landed more often than others: thornback ray, spotted ray, blonde ray, cuckoo ray, small-eyed ray and undulate ray.

In the previous newsletter, you learnt how to recognise three species: thornback ray, spotted ray and blonde ray.

Now, let's have a look to see how we can distinguish the other ones:

Cuckoo ray Leucoraja naevus FAO code: RJN

Easy species to recognise, the **cuckoo ray** has a large black and yellow eyespot on each pectoral fin. In France, it is known as **"raie fleurie"** (flowery ray) because of these two flower-shaped marks.

In addition to rows of midline thorns, this species has a triangle of thorns around the eyes.



Small-eyed ray Raja microocellata FAO code: RJE

Easy to identify, the small-eyed ray has a sandy colour and light lines running parallel to the margins of the body on the dorsal surface. This species seems to have small eyes, and a tail slightly shorter than its body.



Undulate ray Raja undulata FAO code: RJU

The undulate ray can be identified by its colour and patterns. This species has a lot of dark, wavy bands bordered by rows of white spots on its back.



What's up in 2019?

MORE TRAINING SESSIONS FOR FISHERMEN AND AUCTION STAFF

More training sessions will be planned in Belgium in the coming year. They will last between 30 minutes to an hour. The sessions will begin with the educational PowerPoint including the presentation of the SUMARIS project, the overview of ray and skate fisheries, and the different measures taken in the country. Then, the identification and the handling of rays and skates will be discussed with the help of the video tutorial. To finish, every session participant will receive an identification guide to use in their work.

ADVANCING FISHERY KNOWLEDGE

Since June 2018, IFREMER and ILVO have been working on key life traits to estimate the age of rays and skates with a focus on thornback rays (*Raja clavata*).

They created two databases of images. The first one uses internal and external images to estimate the gender and the sexual maturity staging of rays and skates and the second one is a database of images of vertebrates to estimate the age of an individual. They also created a synthesis of the data collected on the key life traits to estimate the key age and size at which rays and skates reach their sexual maturity. The results showed that the size at which 50% of the individuals are mature is 50cm for males and 60cm for females.

Both databases will be presented to the ICES (the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea) working group in charge of assessing elasmobranchs fisheries.

TESTING A SURVIVAL RATE – SEA TRIPS

Sea trips on commercial fishing vessels are still taking place in Belgium, France and England. So far, there have been 8 sea trips on a bottom trawler in Belgium, 5 on a fishing boat with gill nets and 2 on an otter trawler in England and in France there have been 6 on a trawler and 5 on a fishing boat with trammel nets.

Since July 2018, the teams of ILVO and Nausicaá have been hosting rays caught during sea trips. Their research on the survival rate has been focused mainly on thornback rays, but other ray species such as the undulate ray and spotted ray, are being studied as well.



Boat with gill nets Laurent Geoffrey BL



The SUMARiS project is online!

SUM A RIS













Photo credits: Nausicaà, FromNord



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