

Pale Tropical Skate, *Dipturus apricus*

Report Card assessment	Sustainable		
IUCN Red List Australian Assessment	Least Concern (Endemic to Australia)	IUCN Red List Global Assessment	Least Concern
Global Assessors	Rigby, C.		
Australian Assessors	Kyne, P.M., Heupel, M.R., White, W.T., Simpfendorfer, C.A. (Shark Action Plan) & Rigby, C.L.		
Report Card Remarks	Fishing pressure low and significant spatial and depth refuge.		

Summary

The Pale Tropical Skate is a medium-sized deepwater ray endemic to tropical northeast Australia where it occurs in a relatively restricted range. It is common and one of the most abundant upper slope rays in its range. The species is incidentally caught in trawl and possibly line fisheries. It may be caught in the Line Sector of the Coral Sea Fishery (CSF), though its range overlaps only marginally with the CSF in which the Line Sector has low effort and trawling is no longer permitted. It is caught in the Queensland deepwater eastern king prawn sector of the East Coast Trawl Fishery (ECTF) and released as elasmobranch retention is prohibited. Post-release mortality is unknown, however the ECTF only operates to a maximum depth of 300 m and is at the southern margin of the Pale Tropical Skate's range providing the species significant depth and spatial refuge; it is estimated that trawling occurs in less than 1% of the species range. It also receives significant refuge in the Coral Sea Marine Park. Therefore, the Pale Tropical Skate is assessed as Least Concern (IUCN) (Kyne et al. 2021) and Sustainable (SAFS).



Distribution

The Pale Tropical Skate is endemic to tropical northeast Australia (Last et al. 2016). It has a relatively restricted range in Queensland where it occurs from Hinchinbrook Island to Gladstone (Last and Stevens 2009).

Stock structure and status

There is currently no information on population size, structure, or trend for the species. However, it is common and is one of the most abundant upper slope rays in its range (Last and Stevens 2009).

Fisheries

The Pale Tropical Skate is incidentally caught in trawl and possibly line fisheries. It may be caught in the Line Sector of the Commonwealth Coral Sea Fishery (CSF), although the CSF overlaps only marginally with the species range and the Line sector has low effort with only two vessels active in recent years and trawling, which had historically low effort, is no longer permitted (Patterson et al. 2022). The species is likely released if caught as it has no commercial value and though post-release mortality (PRM) is unknown, the CSF has implemented chondrichthyan handling practices to maximise post-release survival (AFMA 2010). It has been reported from the Queensland deepwater eastern king prawn sector of the East Coast Trawl Fishery (ECTF) and released as elasmobranch retention is prohibited (Rigby et al. 2016). Although bycatch reduction devices (BRDs) have been mandatory since 2002, their effectiveness is limited at excluding medium-sized rays such as this species (Griffiths et al. 2006). It was assessed at high risk from the ECTF based on its estimated intrinsically low productivity and high PRM, and low BRD effectiveness (Pears et al. 2012). However, a subsequent risk assessment found trawling in this fishery occurred in less than 1% of the species range; the ECTF only operates in the southern part of the species' range and to a maximum depth of 300 m, providing the Pale Tropical Skate significant refuge at depth and in the northern part of its range (Rigby et al. 2016, Campbell et al. 2018). The species has also received significant protection since 2014 with the implementation of the Coral Sea Marine Park, which includes zoning and gear restrictions (Patterson et al. 2022, Parks Australia 2021).

Habitat and biology

The Pale Tropical Skate is demersal on the outer continental shelf and upper slope at depths of 195–605 m, though mainly at 300–500m (Last et al. 2016). Maximum size is at least 77 cm total length (TL) and males mature at 55–66 cm TL (Last and Stevens 2009). Little else is known of its biology.

Longevity and maximum size	Longevity: unknown Max size: at least 77 cm TL
Age and/or size at maturity (50%)	Males: 55–66 cm TL Females: unknown

CAAB Code: 37 031032

Link to IUCN Page: <https://www.iucnredlist.org/species/195445/68620232>

Link to page at Shark References: <https://shark-references.com/species/view/Dipturus-apricus>

References

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