



Fact Sheet: Maugean Skate Conservation under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999

September 2023



Maugean skate *Zearaja maugeana*. Copyright Jane Ruckert/IMAS

Why is EPBC Act conservation guidance being updated?

Macquarie Harbour in southwest Tasmania is home to the only confirmed known population of the Maugean skate. New research has found this population declined by approximately 47% between 2014 and 2021. These declines are largely due to environmental degradation of the harbour, principally very low levels of dissolved oxygen. The Maugean skate is therefore at high risk of extinction and urgent interventions are required to halt and reverse their decline. Reviews of the latest science are being incorporated into new conservation planning guidance to best direct recovery actions.

Current conservation status for the Maugean Skate

The Maugean skate is currently listed as Endangered under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act). The Commonwealth Threatened Species Scientific Committee (TSSC) is reviewing whether the species is eligible for uplisting to Critically Endangered. This assessment has a statutory due date of 30 October 2024. Listing in either of these categories means that developments or activities that could have a significant impact on the species may need Australian Government approval.

New Conservation Advice for the Maugean skate

Conservation Advices are provided to the Minister by the Threatened Species Scientific Committee, and represent the Committee's independent recommendations for effective conservation actions. The information in Conservation Advices are used to inform EPBC Act decisions and guide recovery actions.

A new [Conservation Advice for Maugean skate](#) was approved by the Australian Government Minister for the Environment on 6 September 2023. The TSSC decided to update the Maugean Skate Conservation Advice because the previous advice was approved in 2008 and no longer adequately reflected the current threats and conservation needs for the species. The new Conservation Advice includes the latest research, summarising the primary threats and the urgent actions that could prevent imminent extinction of the Maugean skate. It also outlines possible actions to remediate environmental conditions in Macquarie Harbour to restore the skate's natural habitat. The EPBC Act specifies that the Threatened Species Scientific Committee provide only its scientific opinion in its advice to the Minister. Other matters, such as socio-economic concerns, are excluded from the Committee's consideration.

The **Tasmanian Government** is also currently updating its Conservation Action Plan for Maugean skate, more information this process can be found here: [Maugean skate | Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania \(nre.tas.gov.au\)](#).

National Recovery Team

National Recovery Teams are a collaboration of partners brought together to develop and/or coordinate the implementation of a conservation plan or program. Best practice guidelines provide an overarching framework for establishing and operating effective recovery teams and set out a series of 'best practice' principles to guide and support recovery teams. Read more: [Recovery teams - DCCEEW](#). The National Recovery Team for the Maugean Skate formed in July 2023, and includes representation from all relevant stakeholders groups and an open invitation to the Tasmanian Aboriginal community.

When can I have my say?

The Threatened Species Scientific Committee is currently developing its draft threatened species listing assessment for the Maugean Skate. As part of this assessment the Conservation Advice will also be updated if relevant new information is available. Once that draft has been prepared it will be provided to the Recovery Team for review and comment. The due date for this assessment is 30 October 2024. There will also be a formal public consultation undertaken on the listing assessment. The Recovery Team will be informed of the timing of this consultation and it will be advertised at the following link: <https://www.dcceew.gov.au/environment/biodiversity/threatened/nominations/comment>.

Is there an active reconsideration of EPBC Act approvals for salmon farming?

The Australian Government is currently considering two requests from third parties to reconsider a 2012 decision governing salmon farming in Macquarie Harbour. These requests are being carefully considered in accordance with national environment law. The EPBC Act allows reconsiderations in limited circumstances - including where a change in circumstances or new information indicates a significant change in the impacts of a project on protected matters.

More information

Further information about conservation planning for the Maugean skate is available here: <https://www.dcceew.gov.au/environment/biodiversity/threatened/action-plan/priority-fish/maugean-skate>.