

Enhance International Shark Conservation



Support Proposal 17 to include All Sawfish (Family Pristidae) in CITES Appendix I



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The Ocean Conservancy and the Shark Alliance urge CITES Delegates to: Support Proposal 17 to include all sawfish (Family Pristidae) in CITES Appendix I As proposed by the United States and Kenya.

ALL SAWFISH SPECIES ARE:

- exceptionally vulnerable shark-like rays of tropical and subtropical waters
- included on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species as “Critically Endangered” globally
- victims of severe overfishing and incidental catch worldwide
- susceptible to incidental entanglement of their tooth-studded snouts (“rostra”)
- often killed after capture for their valuable fins and rostra
- subject to international trade for their parts and as live specimens for aquaria
- inadequately protected in many countries, and
- not subject to bilateral or regional management measures

The strong case for listing sawfish under CITES Appendix I presented in the US and Kenyan proposal is bolstered by expert analyses of:

- TRAFFIC
- IUCN (World Conservation Union)
- The CITES Secretariat
- FAO Ad Hoc Panel on aquatic species proposed for CITES listing



A highly vulnerable species

Sawfish grow slowly, mature late, and produce few young. These characteristics make them especially vulnerable to overexploitation and slow to recover once depleted. Sawfish are thought to take 10-33 years to reach sexual maturity. Females give birth to fewer than 20 young, likely only every second year.

To make matters worse, the tooth-studded snouts (“rostra”) of sawfish easily become entangled in all types of fishing gear. The high value of their fins and rostra create an incentive to kill incidentally captured sawfish. Degradation of nearshore habitat through coastal development and pollution also poses a threat to sawfish recovery.

Seriously depleted populations

Sawfish are in serious trouble all around the globe. All species are classified as “Critically Endangered” under the 2006 IUCN (World Conservation Union) Red List of Threatened Species. In the U.S., the once wide-ranging smalltooth sawfish is found regularly only in a few protected areas of Florida. Scientists believe this sawfish population has declined by as much as 99%. The sawfish population in Lake Nicaragua never recovered after five years of targeted fishing in the 1970s.

Inadequate or non existent management

Sawfish are protected in some but not most range States. There are no regional or bilateral conservation programs for these species.

Valuable in trade

Sawfish fins are among the world’s most valuable for use in shark fin soup. Their saws (or “rostra”) are also valued for

traditional medicines, ceremonies, and as curios. Rostral teeth are highly prized for use as cockfighting spurs. Live sawfish are traded internationally for display in aquaria. International trade in sawfish has been documented worldwide, in countries including the US, Australia, Brazil, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Indonesia, Somalia, and Djibouti. Evidence suggests that as many as a thousand sawfish rostra enter international trade every year.

Valuable in ecosystems

Like closely related sharks, most sawfish are important predators in marine food webs. Unfortunately, given their severe depletion, they are not likely to be serving their role in the ecosystem in most areas.

Including sawfish in CITES Appendix I is:

- clearly justified under the CITES listing criteria
- needed to end international trade in these “Critically Endangered” species
- essential to reduce incentive to kill incidentally caught individuals
- complementary to existing national protective measures
- likely to spark enhanced conservation programs for populations worldwide
- important for improving international cooperation necessary for recovery, and
- consistent with the FAO International Plan of Action for Sharks.

IT’S TIME

CITES has been discussing sharks since 1994. Sawfish were first proposed for CITES listing in 1997. Since that time, all of the world’s sawfish species have been declared “Critically Endangered” by IUCN. Time is running out for these exceptionally vulnerable species. Measures to protect them from all types of threats are urgently needed to prevent extinction.



The Ocean Conservancy and the Shark Alliance urge CITES Delegates to vote in favor of Proposal 17 to include all species of sawfish under CITES Appendix I.