

Fast Facts:

IUCN Red List Assessment Report for Open Ocean Sharks & Rays

Findings

Experts from the IUCN Shark Specialist Group (SSG) examined the status of 64 species of open ocean (“pelagic”) shark and ray species against the IUCN Red List criteria and concluded:

- 32% are *Threatened* with extinction (categorized as *Critically Endangered*, *Endangered* or *Vulnerable*).
- 24% classify as *Near Threatened*
- the percentage of pelagic shark and ray species *Threatened* with extinction is higher for the sharks taken in high-seas fisheries (52%) than for the group as a whole.

Species classified as globally ***Endangered*** include the:

- great hammerhead shark (*Sphyrna mokarran*)
- scalloped hammerhead shark (*Sphyrna lewini*)
- giant devil ray (*Mobula mobular*)

Species classified as globally ***Vulnerable*** include the:

- smooth hammerhead shark (*Sphyrna zygaena*)
- porbeagle shark (*Lamna nasus*)
- oceanic whitetip shark (*Carcharhinus longimanus*)
- shortfin and longfin mako shark (*Isurus* spp.) and
- common, bigeye and pelagic thresher shark (*Alopias* spp.).

The blue shark (*Prionace glauca*), the most abundant and heavily fished pelagic shark, is considered *Near Threatened*.

Under-protected Species

- Sharks are very susceptible to overfishing because they typically grow slowly, mature late and produce few young.
- In most cases, pelagic shark catches are unregulated and/or unsustainable.
- Sharks are increasingly targeted due to new markets for meat and high demand for the Asian delicacy *shark fin soup*.
- Fins are often cut off sharks and the rest of the body is discarded at sea through a process known as “finning”.
- Finning has been banned in most international waters, but enforcement standards are lenient.
- The EU finning ban is among the weakest in the world.
- There are no international catch limits for sharks taken on the high seas.
- There are no EU limits on the catch of hammerheads, makos, threshers, oceanic whitetips or blue sharks.

Recommendations

The IUCN SSG report calls on governments to:

- set catch limits for sharks and rays based on scientific advice and the precautionary approach
- fully protect *Critically Endangered* and *Endangered* species of sharks and rays
- ensure an end to shark finning
- improve the monitoring of fisheries taking sharks and rays
- invest in shark and ray research and population assessment
- minimize incidental “bycatch” of sharks and rays
- employ wildlife treaties to complement fisheries management, and
- facilitate cooperation among countries to conserve shared populations.

Relevant meetings

This week an international group of scientists is meeting in Denmark to formulate management advice on Atlantic porbeagle sharks, a species classified as globally *Vulnerable* and *Critically Endangered* off Europe. Next week, Spain hosts an international summit for managers of high seas tuna fisheries which take significant numbers of sharks.