CITES CoP18

Sharks & Rays:  
The Road to Recovery

Vote Yes for mako sharks, giant guitarfish and wedgefish in CITES Appendix II
Species in Critical Decline

There are more than 1,000 species of sharks and rays, but only about 100 species are found in the international fin trade. Of those 100, approximately 1/3 are threatened with extinction.

Over the past two Conferences of the Parties (CoPs), Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) began to recognize that the international fin trade driving these declines required closer management in order to prevent population collapses of some of the most heavily traded and vulnerable shark species.

A seminal study on the global shark fin trade indicates that between 11.8% and 15.5% of the global shark fin trade is now listed on CITES Appendix II. A recent study on fins on sale in Hong Kong provides a separate index, and confirms the significance of these species in trade, with the study finding that between 3.9% and 17.8% of fins sampled were from CITES listed species.

Following six years of dedicated implementation efforts for sharks and rays by CITES Parties, the Secretariat, IGOs and NGOs; effective management of shark species and their trade has become a global priority. For many species and for too long, measures by Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs) and domestic management had been piecemeal and failed to cover large parts of their range. CITES listings for these species sparked governments across the world to develop a wide range of effective implementation tools and to host workshops and trainings on the importance of shark conservation to roll out these tools. Such efforts have in turn driven the establishment of domestic regulations to better manage CITES listed species within their waters.

It is clear that CITES works for sharks and rays, and that there are ample, effective tools available, and strong benefits from CITES Appendix II listings. Such listings should be extended to other at risk shark and ray species in order to encourage similar protections or sustainable fisheries management.

Noting this progress, a wide range of governments have worked together to identify 18 additional shark and ray species whose populations are threatened by international trade, and have proposed that they too benefit from CITES Appendix II listing.

Giant guitarfish (Family Glaucostegidae), shortfin mako shark (Isurus oxyrinchus, with Isurus paucus as look-alike species), and wedgefish (Family Rhinidae), are all proposed for Appendix II of CITES, meaning that if listed, catch and trade in these species must be legal and sustainable. Several populations of these species have suffered declines of over 70%, and in some areas have even been driven to localized extinction due to inadequate management measures, poor enforcement of existing measures, and lack of control over fisheries or international trade.

Healthy shark populations help maintain balance in marine ecosystems. When their populations decline, this balance is disturbed and unpredictable consequences in the marine environment may result, including the possible collapse of commercially important fisheries.

The guides and genetic protocols created for the proposed shark and ray species, as well as the implementation tools that have been created for the species already listed on CITES, can be found at: www.CITESsharks.org.

Enforcement of New Listings

As with the listings at CoP16 and CoP17, tools and resources are already available for countries to properly implement the proposed listing of these new species.

VISUAL IDENTIFICATION GUIDES: Two visual identification guides have been created to recognize these highly distinctive species, both when caught whole in fisheries, and in their most commonly traded form: dried and unprocessed fins.

GENETIC PROTOCOLS FOR THE PROPOSED SHARKS AND RAYS: In addition, genetic protocols that have been developed and trialed for the currently listed sharks and rays can be applied to these species to aid enforcement action and to complement the visual identification guides.

NDF TUTORIALS: A wide range of Non-Detriment Finding (NDF) tools newly tailored to sharks and rays are now available, including eNDF training, and can be readily applied to the newly proposed species to assist Parties in determining if the proposed listings are best implemented via protections or sustainable management and trade.

Through these publications, Parties have a multitude of tools that can be used to legally and sustainably trade these species in the same way as previously listed shark species.
Shortfin Mako Shark

Isurus oxyrinchus

IUCN RED LIST: Endangered

SPONSORS
Bangladesh, Benin, Bhutan, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Chad, Côte d’Ivoire, Dominican Republic, Egypt, European Union, Gabon, Gambia, Jordan, Lebanon, Liberia, Maldives, Mali, Mexico, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, Palau, Samoa, Senegal, Sri Lanka, Sudan and Togo

Mako sharks meet the CITES Appendix II listing criteria, with declines of 60–96% worldwide. As many as one million mako sharks are caught each year, an unsustainable number driven by high international demand for their fins and meat and inadequate management.

In the early 2000s, mako sharks comprised approximately 2.7% of all shark fins in international trade. By 2015, the proportion of mako shark fins in this market had declined to 0.2–1.2% of all shark species represented. These declines in documented trade could be due to a number of factors, including sampling differences in studies that analyze products in trade. However, given that little to no improvement in global mako shark management was created in this time frame and a continued increase in fishing pressure, these significant declines in market composition should be considered as additional evidence of significant mako declines globally.

Mako sharks have also long been highlighted as species in need of better management. However, despite being listed on the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) a decade ago and heavily caught in RFMOs, there has still been limited management progress for these species.

Even with a robust stock assessment showing population declines that exceed the CITES Appendix II listing criteria, ICCAT (International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas) has not met the clear advice to prohibit mako retention in the North Atlantic, and reduce mortality elsewhere, meaning that overfishing is likely to continue in the Atlantic. The Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission has shown steady declines in catch rates of mako sharks over the past decade and yet no management action has been taken, despite their high vulnerability and susceptibility to overexploitation.

A CITES Appendix II listing for the shortfin mako and the look-alike longfin mako shark (Isurus paucus) will ensure that international trade is supplied by sustainably managed, accurately recorded fisheries that are not detrimental to the status of the wild populations they exploit, with the management of mako sharks prioritized throughout their range.

DECLINE DATA TABLE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ocean basin</th>
<th>Estimated Declines</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Atlantic</td>
<td>60% (1950-2015)²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>40% (1986-2000)²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>38% (1992-2005)²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>43% (1986-2005)²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediterranean</td>
<td>&gt;96% from baseline¹¹</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>80% over the last 3 generation periods¹⁴</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Pacific</td>
<td>50% decline (1990 – 2003), 80% from baseline¹³</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>69% (1996-2009)⁶</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Range Map

Photo Credit: Steve De Neef

ENDANGERED
Giant Guitarfish
Family Glaucostegidae

IUCN RED LIST: Critically Endangered – all 6 species

SPONSORS
Bangladesh, Benin, Bhutan, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Chad, Côte d’Ivoire, Egypt, European Union, Gabon, Gambia, Maldives, Mali, Mauritania, Monaco, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, Palau, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Togo and Ukraine

Decline Data Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ocean basin</th>
<th>Estimated Declines</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North Western Indian Ocean</td>
<td>50-80% over the past three generation periods[5]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Atlantic</td>
<td>Over 50% decline in three generation periods[29]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>80% decrease in landings in seven years[60, 23]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediterranean</td>
<td>Likely extirpation[24]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian Ocean</td>
<td>86% decline over five year period (less than one generation)[25]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Range Map

Species Richness

1  2  3  4
Wedgefish
Family Rhinidae

**IUCN RED LIST:** Critically Endangered – 9 of 10 species, with the 10th Endangered

**SPONSORS**

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Without a CITES Appendix II listing driving better management for these species, wedgefish may soon suffer from extinctions.

Wedgefishes have been identified as the third most threatened family of chondrichthyans globally.

Whitespotted wedgefishes are especially vulnerable because of their use of coastal habitats, susceptibility to multiple fishing gear types, large size, and value in trade – all underpinned by little to no management to mitigate these risks. These species hold the highest value of all fins found for sale in the global trade and retail hub of Hong Kong. The combination of these factors has caused population declines up to 86% in some areas over a period of only 5 years – exceeding the CITES criteria for an Appendix II listing, and actually qualifying for Appendix I.

Recognizing that severe population declines and localized extinctions are already occurring, an Appendix II listing will encourage coordinated management of the international trade in these species, and drive domestic action, which is needed to prevent them meeting the same fate as their Appendix I listed relatives, the sawfishes. In many places it is already too late to allow continued trade in wedgefish, and strong protections are needed – however in some locations sustainable fisheries management could still allow continued trade. In either case, the momentum towards proper management that a CITES listing will bring is essential to safeguard their survival.

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<table>
<thead>
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<th>Ocean basin</th>
<th>Estimated Declines</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Southeast Asia - Oceania</td>
<td>Significant – degree uncertain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Asia</td>
<td>86% in less than one generation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persian/Arabian Sea</td>
<td>50-80% over three generations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Africa</td>
<td>Declines noted – degree uncertain</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Range Map

**SPECIES RICHNESS**

1 2 3 4
Endnotes


2 Ibid


4 Ibid


7 Ibid

8 A.T. Fields et al., “Species composition of the internal shark fin trade assessed through a retail-market survey in Hong Kong.”


14 F. Ferretti et al., “Loss of Large Predatory Sharks from the Mediterranean Sea.”


26 Ibid


28 R.W. Jabado, “The conservation status of sharks, rays, and chimaeras in the Arabian Sea and adjacent waters.”

