

Heavy fishing puts Brazilian sharks and rays in great trouble



Lead by the Chico Mendes Institute for Biodiversity Conservation from Brazilian Environment Ministry (ICMBio/MMA), all 169 shark and ray species known to occur in Brazilian waters were regionally assessed according to the IUCN Red List criteria and categories. This task was undertaken in two workshops - the first one in Brasília (from 7-12th November 2010), together with IUCN (Global Marine Species Assessment and the South America Office), when 79 species were assessed and the second in João Pessoa (from May 30th to June 3rd) when 90 species were assessed. The workshops brought together around 30 experts from government agencies, universities and non-governmental organizations. Dr. Patricia Charvet (SENAI-PR), Dr. Ricardo Rosa (UFPB), Dr. Carolus Vooren (FURG) and Dr. Rosangela Lessa (UFRPE) were the scientific coordinators, together with Dr. Monica Peres (ICMBio), who is coordinating the Brazilian Fauna Assessment.

Of the 169 species, 36% were assessed as Threatened - 17% as Critically Endangered (CR), 4% as Endangered (EN) and 14% as Vulnerable (VU). Two species are Regionally Extinct (RE), 9% are Near Threatened (NT) and 35% are Data Deficient (DD). These assessments will be submitted for to the ICMBio online journal "Biodiversidade Brasileira" (Brazilian Biodiversity) and should be published by the end of 2011.



The workshops have highlighted that taxonomic uncertainty and a general lack of past and present information are a clear conservation setback for the whole group. Heavy and unregulated fisheries is the main threat to marine species in Brazilian waters. As many species aggregate in known areas and seasons, they were targeted by directed fisheries until they reach very low population levels. Although those fisheries quickly collapse after a few years, species are still being threatened by incidental catches along the Brazilian Coast. These results are cause for concern and the experts wrote a plea to the Brazilian Government asking for urgent action concerning fishery management and several protected areas.
