

Australia's strong fisheries management is key, as report highlights overfishing of sharks, rays, and chimaeras worldwide.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Global Status of Sharks, Rays, and Chimaeras highlights new knowledge compiled by 353 experts from 115 countries and stresses the urgent need to address overfishing and bycatch in all countries.

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Summary: *The IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC) Shark Specialist Group (SSG) has published a status report on sharks, rays and chimaeras, nearly twenty years after their first report warned sharks were threatened but underrepresented in conservation. Today, we understand more about sharks, rays, and chimaeras than ever before, but the scale of their declines threatens to outstrip improvements made in research and policy.*

One quarter of the world's sharks, rays, and chimaeras are found in Australia's incredibly rich ocean ecosystems. Nearly half of those species are endemic; they are found nowhere else on Earth. And as global overfishing continues to send shark, ray, and chimaera populations around the planet into freefall, the comprehensive management of Australia's fisheries remains a national priority and an important contribution to global conservation. But with big domestic markets for shark meat, which is sold fresh or frozen as 'flake', and is the mainstay of many a fish and chip shop, there needs to be effort to reduce incidental catches (bycatch), and develop recovery plans for shark, ray, and chimaera populations.

This is the national-level message from a landmark global report that details country-by-country insights consolidating the biology, fisheries, trade, conservation efforts and policy reforms for sharks, rays, and chimaeras across 158 countries and jurisdictions.

"This report provides the most in-depth national overview of shark, ray, and chimaera fisheries, trade, and conservation management to date," says Dr Michael Grant, a Save Our Seas Foundation project leader based at James Cook University, and regional member of the IUCN SSC SSG's Oceania Group. "This report offers a resource for scientists, managers, and policy makers to easily access up to date information on shark, ray, and chimaera management across a range of nations, and for comparisons to be made between fisheries, trade, and management initiatives across these nations".

The 2,000+-page report follows on from the 2005 report, which highlighted a rise in the global fin trade and the low conservation profile of sharks, and especially rays and chimaeras.

Since then, the global demand for shark meat has nearly doubled: shark and ray meat are now valued at 1.7 times that of the global fin trade. Trade has diversified and products such as ray gill plates, liver oil, and ray skins are valued at nearly US\$1 billion annually.

Overfishing is driving most species to extinction. Indonesia, Spain, and India are the world's largest shark fishing nations, with Mexico and the USA adding to the top 5 shark catchers. But only 26% of species globally are targeted: most are caught (and retained) as bycatch. Huge population declines have been seen in the rhino rays (e.g., wedgefishes), whiptails, angel sharks, and gulper sharks.

In Australia, the greatest threats to sharks, rays, and chimaeras are from targeted fisheries and incidental bycatch. There are also risks from habitat loss related to development, resource extraction, and some types of fishing, especially for species in freshwater and estuarine habitats.

The overall extinction risk for Australian shark, ray and chimaera species is relatively low, with 70.4% classified as Least Concern on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. But even with a strong history of research that has informed shark, ray, and chimaera management and policy, the report identifies gaps in population trends for non-commercial species, improvements in bycatch mitigation and information on bycatch species, and expansion of knowledge about the impacts of habitat degradation and pollution on sharks, rays, and chimaeras.

"This report is a call to action so we can work together and make each of the country recommendations a reality, especially those related to responsible fisheries management. It is the only way these species will survive and continue to thrive in aquatic ecosystems," says Dr Rima Jabado, the IUCN SSC Deputy Chair and SSG Chair who led the 2024 report.

There have been incredible strides in research and policy; this hard work will only save species from extinction if the report's recommendations are implemented nationally.

"The message is clear: with the precarious state of many of these species, we can't afford to wait," says Dr Jabado.

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IUCN Species Survival Commission Shark Specialist Group - www.iucnssg.org

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) is the world's largest global environmental network composed of both government and civil society organizations. It is a membership union with more than 1,400 member organizations and over 17,000 volunteer scientists in more than 160 countries. This diversity and vast expertise makes IUCN the global authority on the status of the natural world and the measures needed to safeguard it.

The Species Survival Commission (SSC) is a science-based network of over 10,000 experts from almost every country of the world, all working towards achieving the vision of: 'A just world that values and conserves nature through positive action to reduce the loss of diversity of life on earth'.

The IUCN SSC Shark Specialist Group (SSG) was established by the SSC in 1991 in response to growing awareness and concern of the severe impact of fisheries on shark, ray, and chimaera populations around the world. It is a global network of experts in the biology, taxonomy, use, and conservation of sharks, rays, and chimaeras. The SSG currently has more than 230 members from 82 countries collaborating to assess the status of all known species, collate knowledge, highlight species at risk, develop conservation plans, inform policy, and advise policy-makers on effective, science-based policies for sustainable use, and long-term conservation.

About the Save Our Seas Foundation

Founded in Geneva, Switzerland, in 2003, the Save Our Seas Foundation (SOSF) is a philanthropic organisation whose ultimate goal is to create a legacy of securing the health and sustainability of our oceans, and the communities that depend on them, for generations to come.

Its support for research, conservation and education projects worldwide focuses on endangered sharks, rays and skates. Three permanent SOSF research and education centres reinforce its actions in Seychelles, South Africa and the USA.

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