

Shark, ray, and chimaera populations are in crisis,

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.

For immediate release:

December 2, 2024

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.*

Brazil is one of the world's biggest shark and ray fishing nations. Industrial fishing fleets are at risk of driving the region's incredible shark, ray, and chimaera diversity into extinction, and artisanal fisheries (especially in the north and northeast of the country) are also major contributors to declines in sharks and rays. But despite the significance of Brazil – and the South American region generally – to shark, ray, and chimaera populations, there are still huge challenges to achieving sustainable fisheries management here.

“South American marine and freshwater environments are some of the most important shark, ray, and chimaera biodiversity hotspots in the world,” says Dr. Patricia Charvet, one of the IUCN SSC SSG South America Regional Vice-Chairs. “Sharks, rays, and chimaeras are found in a variety of habitats in South America, ranging from deep-sea trenches to vast river basins. This diversity of habitats is reflected in a rich species biodiversity, comprising globally distributed and strictly endemic species.” Dr. Charvet focuses on understanding and conserving this incredibly important diversity from her base at the Programa de Pós-Graduação em Sistemática, Uso e Conservação da Biodiversidade (PPGSis), and Marine Vertebrate Evolution and Conservation Lab (EvoVe), at the Centro de Ciências, Universidade Federal do Ceará (UFC) in Fortaleza, Brazil.

Her research has been combined with insights from 353 scientific experts from around the world, captured in extraordinary country-by-country detail in a report that consolidates the biology, fisheries, trade, conservation efforts and policy reforms for sharks, rays, and chimaeras across 158 countries and jurisdictions.

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.

'South America is home to the Amazon River, the largest river in the world, whose significant freshwater discharge creates the unique Amazon Coast. This region is one of the last strongholds for critically endangered sawfishes and other rare sharks and rays. It boasts one of the highest diversities of sharks, rays, and chimaeras globally, thriving in various habitats crucial for conservation efforts,' says Dr. Vicente Vieira Faria, an IUCN SSC Shark Specialist Group South America Regional Vice-Chair and colleague also based at UFC in Fortaleza. "Fishery management of sharks, rays, and chimaeras in South America faces challenges such as weak regulation enforcement, shark product trade, and inadequate fishery statistics. However, many countries in the region are taking proactive steps to conserve these remarkable species."

And two decades of research and major policy changes means that the solutions can guide governments to implement conservation action and make fisheries sustainable.

"This report is a call to action so we can work together and make each of the country's 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.

-----END-----

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.

Contact

Jade Schultz
Global Communications Manager
Save Our Seas Foundation
Rue Philippe Plantamour, 20
CH - 1201 Geneva
jade@saveourseas.com
+41 22 900 10 54