

## **Overfishing is driving sharks, rays and chimaeras in Indonesia - and globally - to extinction**

*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.*

The Indo-Pacific around Indonesia is incredible: home to 64% of all shark and ray species known to science, at least 210 different species have been described. Fisheries in these rich and diverse waters also feed and support nearly six million Indonesians, 95% of these fisheries are small-scale in their nature. Indonesia is the world's second-largest fishing nation (coming in just after China, who sits at number one) and the biggest shark fishing nation on earth. And as shark and ray fins and meat have become more valuable in international trade since the 1980s, the incentives to target these animals are higher. The result is that, in these once abundant, diverse and important waters, sharks, rays, and chimaeras are being driven to extinction by overfishing.

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.

“As the world's most heavily exploited region, efforts to conserve sharks and rays in Asia are particularly challenging,” says Dr Fahmi, the IUCN SSC Shark Specialist Group Asia co-Regional Vice Chair who is based at the Research Center for Oceanography, National Research and Innovation Agency of Indonesia in Jakarta. “This global report provides the latest information on the region's shark and ray fisheries and related management efforts.”

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. Spain, and India join Indonesia as 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 Indonesia specifically, coastal development, pollution and changing land uses are also driving the loss of essential shark, ray and chimaera habitats. Mangroves are particularly at risk from aquaculture activities; these important habitats are nursery sites for sharks and rays. Studies from North Coast Java have recorded that several different shark and ray species that were known from elders' stories are no longer found in the area. Indeed, the Java Stingaree became the first shark, ray or chimaera species declared as Extinct on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.

But two decades of research and major policy changes also means that the solutions are now outlined country-by-country and 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 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](http://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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