

Securing a Safe Future for Sawfishes: Management and Conservation Recommendations

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Moderators

Cheri McCarty	Foreign Affairs Specialist, Office of International Affairs, National Marine Fisheries Service, USA
Harlan Cohen	Advisor on Ocean Governance and International Institutions, International Union for Conservation of Nature, USA

Speakers

Nicholas Dulvy	Co-Chair, IUCN Shark Specialist Group; Professor of Marine Biodiversity and Conservation, Simon Fraser University, Canada
Sonja Fordham	Deputy Chair, IUCN Shark Specialist Group; President, Shark Advocates International
Lucy Harrison	Programme Officer, IUCN Shark Specialist Group, Canada

Attendees

Monica Brick Peres	Aquatic Biodiversity and Fisheries Resources Department, Secretariat for Biodiversity & Forest, Ministry of the Environment, Brazil
Hamady Diop	Head of Department of Research and Information Systems, Sub Regional Fisheries Commission, Senegal
David Morgan	CITES Secretariat
Russell Smith	Deputy Assistant Secretary, Office of International Affairs, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association, US
Deidre Warner-Kramer	Senior Foreign Affairs Officer, US Department of State
Kwame Koranteng	Project Coordinator, FAO EAF-Nansen
Andrea Pauly	Associate Program Officer, Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals
Petri Suuronen	Fisheries Industry Officer, Fishing Operations and Technology Service, FAO
Johanne Fischer	Senior Fishery Resources Officer, Fisheries Management and Conservation Service, FAO
Sarah Valenti	Imperial College, UK
Gaoussou Gueye	Secretary General of the African Confederations of Professional Organisation of Artisanal Fishing
Elizabeth Wilson	Manager, Global Shark Conservation, Pew Charitable Trust
Irani Maia Pereira	Cape Verde Delegation
Toshikazu Miyamoto	Japanese delegation and Global Guardian Trust
Jaques Berney	IWMC World Conservation Trust

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the United States government, in partnership with the IUCN Shark Specialist Group were very pleased that participants from diverse backgrounds attended our 'Securing a Safe Future for Sawfishes' Side Event. Attendees came from the secretariats of the [Food and Agriculture Organisation](#), the [Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species in Wild Fauna and Flora \(CITES\)](#), the [Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals \(CMS\)](#), several sawfish range States, artisanal fishermen, and conservation NGOs. The discussions were engaging and covered a broad range of topics.

Cheri McCarty and Harlan Cohen opened the side event with a brief welcome and introduction to the speakers. Three presentations were given: 1) an introduction to sawfishes and the threats that they face (Lucy Harrison), 2) examples of international (CITES) and national (US) policies currently in place for sawfishes (Sonja Fordham) and 3) management and conservation recommendations developed during the [Sawfish Conservation Strategy Workshop](#) in London in May (Nicholas Dulvy).

After the informative and well-received presentations, the group discussion began with the suggestion that, in areas where sawfishes are common, it will be necessary to change the way that people catch fish, but that ensuring practical and profitable alternatives is key to success.

Attendees were also interested to hear whether CITES trade measures and U.S. Endangered Species Act listing for sawfish have improved the status of sawfish populations. Experts explained that, while scientists have reported stabilization and signs of rebuilding in spatial distribution of the U.S. smalltooth sawfish population (due partly to previously implemented state gillnets bans), the effects of inclusion in CITES Appendix I are more difficult to measure due to the lack of dedicated monitoring after such listings. There was interest in an independent study of CITES effects.

For countries where sawfishes are still present, participants suggested that range States should update their National Plans of Action for sharks and related domestic shark conservation measures with sawfish-specific catch reduction methods, while underscoring the urgent need for related technical and financial assistance for implementation. Attendees highlighted that the loss of sawfish populations should not prevent former range States from actively promoting sawfish conservation and adopting safeguards for sawfish in anticipation of their return. Given the low immediate impact, such action would likely face little opposition at present, and could serve to encourage similar measures in other countries that still have sawfishes within their waters.

Although identification guides for sawfishes have already been created by CITES and FAO, there was great interest among participants in collaborative efforts to produce regional sawfish identification guides, in local languages, for customs and enforcement officers, particularly for developing range States.

The group also discussed the high levels of sawfish bycatch and resulting discard mortality associated with different fishing gears. Sawfish can survive capture on longlines relatively well, at least in the U.S. Discard mortality is generally higher in gillnets, often due to the sawfish rostrum being cut off to facilitate release. Trawling is associated with particularly high mortality because of the tendency for sawfish to be dragged and drowned. Experts stressed that -- for all fishing gears -- prompt and careful release of sawfish is crucial to maximizing the chances of post-capture survival.

The discussion finished on a very positive note, with an attendee admitting that, prior to the workshop, he did not realize that sawfishes were present in his home country, even though sawfishes are featured on the local currency. The Sawfish Network shares his assertion that the global cultural importance of sawfishes should be highlighted and used to communicate the species' plight and the importance of the work that we are doing.

Overall, IUCN representatives welcomed participants' thought-provoking questions, ideas for collaboration, and expressions of support for the Global Sawfish Conservation Strategy initiative and related work of the SSG. We are eager to enhance both the Strategy and the Global Sawfish Network with the suggestions and insights we gained at this particularly fruitful side event.

Additional Coverage of Side Event

Inclusion of Sawfish Side Event in COFI daily summary: <http://www.iisd.ca/download/pdf/enb2908e.pdf>

Photos of Sawfish Side Event: <http://www.iisd.ca/FAO/cofi/cofi2012/10jul.html>

Additional Links

Side event details - <http://www.iucnssg.org/index.php/cofi-rome-2012>

Side event brochure

English: http://www.iucnssg.org/tl_files/Assets/pdf/Sawfish/COFI_sawfish_brochure_English_small.pdf

French: http://www.iucnssg.org/tl_files/Assets/pdf/Sawfish/COFI_sawfish_brochure_french_small.pdf

Spanish: http://www.iucnssg.org/tl_files/Assets/pdf/Sawfish/COFI_sawfish_brochure_spanish_small.pdf

Sawfish Conservation Strategy Workshop report - <http://www.iucnssg.org/index.php/sawfish-conservation-strategy-workshop>



From L to R: Cheri McCarty, Sonja Fordham, Lucy Harrison, Nicholas Dulvy



From L to R: Nicholas Dulvy, Sonja Fordham, Lucy Harrison
Photograph courtesy of IISD/Earth Negotiations Bulletin



Petri Suuronen, Fisheries Industry Officer, Fishing Operations and Technology Service, FAO
Photograph courtesy of IISD/Earth Negotiations Bulletin