

IUCN/SSC
Shark Specialist Group



Species Survival Commission



INFORMATION PAPER

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of a draft Action Plan for the conservation of
Mediterranean species of cartilaginous fish.
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THE IUCN RED LIST PROGRAMME AND THE STATUS OF MEDITERRANEAN CARTILAGINOUS FISH

IUCN Shark Specialist Group (SSG)

The IUCN's Shark Specialist Group (SSG) launched recently (September 2002) a red list assessment for the Elasmobranchs of the Mediterranean sea. This is the first regional assessment the SSG undertakes.

What is the Red List?

The IUCN Red List is the world's most comprehensive inventory of the global conservation status of plant and animal species. It uses standardised criteria to evaluate the extinction risk to thousands of species and subspecies. The Red List is recognized as the most authoritative guide to the status of biological diversity. Its overall aim is to convey the urgency and scale of conservation problems to the public and policy makers, and to motivate the global community to try to reduce species extinctions. Red List assessments have no legal status, but are often used by governments and management bodies to set priorities for conservation action.

Some uses of the Red List

- ? Identifies and documents those species most in need of conservation action
- ? Establishes a baseline from which to monitor the future status of species
- ? Provides information to help establish regional and local conservation priorities and guide conservation action
- ? Helps influence national and international policy, and provides information to international agreements

Cartilaginous fishes and the Red List

To date, the IUCN Shark Specialist Group (SSG) has assessed the threatened species status of over 100 sharks, rays and chimaeras (the cartilaginous fishes) for the Red List. These assessments can be found on <http://www.redlist.org>. In order to assess all 1,000+ species, the SSG is focusing on regions of the world in turn, beginning with the Mediterranean, where it is hoped that RL assessments will be able to contribute to the development of the UNEP Mediterranean Action Plan for cartilaginous fish. RL assessments will enable species of particular conservation concern to be highlighted, and help to inform the development of priorities for action for their research, conservation and management.

Table 1. Existing global RL assessments for cartilaginous fishes known to occur in the Mediterranean

RL Category	No. of species
Critically Endangered (CR)	1
Endangered (EN)	3
Vulnerable (VU)	7
Lower Risk (LR)	17
Data Deficient (DD)	4
Not Evaluated (NE)	56

Regional Red List Assessments: Cartilaginous fishes in the Mediterranean Sea

In September 2002, the SSG held a short meeting during the international NAFO symposium "Elasmobranch fisheries: managing for sustainable use and biodiversity conservation" (Santiago de Compostela, Spain). This meeting, attended by about 50 experts (including non-SSG members), initiated a process of drafting assessments of the Red List status of Mediterranean sharks.

Preliminary discussions during this meeting indicate it is highly likely that many of the species will be confirmed as being 'Data Deficient' (DD – inadequate information to assess extinction risk). This assessment does not mean that these taxa are not of conservation concern – indeed in many cases the lack of knowledge of their distribution and/or population may be because of their rarity. Rather, it highlights the lack of scientific and fisheries research that could provide data on these poorly known fishes. The SSG has now launched an initiative to create a Mediterranean regional subgroup to help address these information needs.

Table 2. Preliminary regional RL assessments for cartilaginous fishes in the Mediterranean.

(NB: none are official at this stage*).

RL Category	No. of species
Critically Endangered (CR)	5 (2 may even be regionally extinct)
Endangered (EN)	13 (in Italian seas, elsewhere possibly DD)
Vulnerable (VU)	30 (in Italian seas, elsewhere possibly DD)
Lower Risk (LR)	10 (in Italian seas, elsewhere possibly DD)
Data Deficient (DD)	20
Not Applicable (NA)	10
Not Evaluated (NE)	All*

Conclusion

The biological vulnerability of the cartilaginous fishes is now widely acknowledged. Concerns over their status have led to the establishment of the IUCN Shark Specialist Group, the adoption of a Resolution and several Decisions of Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), the development of the FAO International Plan of Action for the Conservation and Management of Sharks (IPOA-Sharks), the listing of some species under the Barcelona, Bern and Bonn Conventions and national legislation and, most recently, to the preparation of a draft Action Plan for the conservation of cartilaginous fish in the Mediterranean Sea.

The elaboration of this Action Plan for the Conservation of Cartilaginous Fish is particularly important in that it represents the first regional contribution to the FAO IPOA-Sharks known to the SSG; this ground-breaking initiative of UNEP's Mediterranean Action Plan is most welcome.

Initial efforts to produce Red List Assessments for Mediterranean cartilaginous fish species have, however, confirmed that there is a significant lack of information on the status of most species. There is an urgent need, through the Mediterranean Action Plan, to promote and encourage research on this group in order to provide a clear and reliable assessment of the status of their stocks (including the establishment of a baseline from which to monitor future progress with conservation and management under MAP), to identify stocks and species that are most in need of conservation and management action, and hence to guide future management priorities.

Finally, despite frequent reference to the limitations of available data, enough is known about shark biology and the dynamics of shark fisheries to begin implementing basic management measures wherever these fisheries exist. That is, lack of data must not be used to justify lack of management. Increased human-induced pressures are rapidly intensifying the risk of shark population collapse, species endangerment and even extinction. Increased commitment to shark research, management and conservation at the national, regional and international levels is crucial to the future viability of these exceptionally vulnerable animals (Camhi *et al*, 1998).

Reference

Camhi, M., Fowler, S.L., Musick, J.A., Brautigam, A. and Fordham, S.V. (1998) Sharks and their Relatives – Ecology and Conservation. IUCN/SSC Shark Specialist Group. IUCN, Gland, Switzerland and Cambridge, UK. iv + 39pp.