

Shark rules need teeth, groups tell IUCN

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At the IUCN World Conservation Congress this week, WCS and other groups are calling for more protection of several shark and ray species, including hammerheads. Credit: Stacy Jupiter/WCS

The Wildlife Conservation Society and over 35 government agency and NGO partners participating in IUCN's World Conservation Congress this week are urging the world's governments to take urgent steps to save the world's sharks and rays from the relentless pressure of over-fishing for international trade.

WCS and others are specifically calling on the world's governments and the IUCN membership of NGOs, governments, and government agencies to advocate for the listing of sharks and rays under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), the 175-member treaty that regulates international trade in animal and plant species.

"Sharks and rays have traveled the Earth for more than 400 million years," said Dr. Cristián Samper, President and CEO of the [Wildlife Conservation Society](#) and keynote speaker at the Jeju congress. "Yet, in only recent decades, many of these species have become threatened from overfishing and, in some instances, have disappeared entirely from major portions of their range. The potential loss of one of only two groups of the world's living fishes is a crisis the world community must take decisive action to address. We are calling for governments around the world to vigorously support CITES international trade regulations and strengthen fisheries management and protection measures for shark and ray species. We cannot continue to allow the destruction of these wonders of evolution."

The upcoming efforts by WCS and partners could triple the number of sharks and rays that are afforded protection under CITES. Currently, only a handful of shark and ray species—the [whale shark](#), [basking shark](#), [great white shark](#), and sawfishes—are listed. Yet, numerous other species are considered to qualify for CITES listing, including several that have been proposed to CITES before.

Priority species for CITES listing in March 2013 are:

- Porbeagle shark
- Oceanic whitetip shark
- Scalloped [hammerhead shark](#)
- Giant manta ray and reef manta ray
- Devil rays

"The international trade in shark and ray products, including fins, meat, and other body parts, is driving shark and ray fisheries around the world, and most of these are unmanaged or only minimally managed," said Dr. John Robinson, WCS's Executive Vice President for Conservation and

Science. "Lack of controls on fisheries and [international trade](#) puts species at risk but also jeopardizes sustainable fisheries, ecosystems, and food security. A commitment by the international community is crucial. We ask all concerned to join us in ensuring the right actions are taken on behalf of sharks and rays at CITES in March 2013."

In addition to efforts to enlist support for CITES listings, WCS and others have sponsored several motions at the congress—the world's largest conservation event—calling for a range of measures to improve [fisheries management](#) and conserve sharks and rays. Unlike many bony fish species, most of these cartilaginous fishes are long-lived, late-to-mature, and produce few young, which makes them particularly vulnerable to overfishing and their populations slow to recover once depleted.

WCS is a co-sponsor of a motion to limit catches of mako sharks and hammerhead sharks. A third motion calls for review of all shark and ray species on IUCN's Red List of Threatened Species for possible CITES regulation.

"We estimate that many millions of sharks are killed annually through both legal and illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing for the trade in fins, the prime ingredient in shark fin soup," said Dr. Rachel Graham, director of WCS's Gulf and Caribbean Sharks and Rays Program. "The high price for fins has caused the global shark fishery to expand far beyond what is sustainable. The need for international regulation and enforcement has never been greater."

WCS is committed to saving sharks as part of a global commitment to promote recovery of depleted and threatened populations of marine species, halt the decline of fragile marine ecosystems, and improve the livelihoods and resilience of coastal communities throughout the world's oceans.

WCS invests in a diverse array of long term, seascape-scale and species-focused conservation strategies across the waters of 20 countries and all five oceans. We inspire millions to take action for the oceans through the New York Aquarium and all our parks in New York City. To achieve our long-term conservation goals, WCS marine conservationists work with local and national governments, as well as an array of partners to improve management of coastal fisheries, mitigate key threats to marine species, expand effective marine protected areas, enhance ocean industry sustainability, and help people and wildlife adapt to climate change. Collectively, these efforts by WCS build a broader and deeper public understanding, advance scientific knowledge, and strengthen political commitment to our oceans.

Provided by Wildlife Conservation Society

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