

# Global strategy to save sawfish

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The largest of the ray family, sawfishes have been driven to the brink of extinction by overfishing and habitat loss. Credit: Simon Fraser University Public Affairs and Media Relations

In an era when global solutions to massive problems like climate change seem elusive, a Simon Fraser University professor is relieved to see that a partial solution exists for rescuing sawfishes from extinction.

At the Sharks International Conference in Durban, South Africa, the Shark Specialist Group (SSG) of the International Union for

Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has just unveiled a global strategy to save and protect sawfishes.

"The sawfishes, revered for millennia by coastal cultures around the world, now face greater [extinction risk](#) than any other family of marine fish," says strategy lead Nick Dulvy. His involvement in this research exemplifies how SFU engages the world.

The IUCN SSG co-chair and SFU Canada Research Chair notes: "With this comprehensive strategy, we aim to reignite sawfish reverence and spark conservation action in time to bring these iconic fish back from the brink of extinction."

The largest of the ray family, these shark-like fish with long, toothed snouts have been driven to the brink of extinction by overfishing and habitat loss. One of the top predators in the world's marine ecosystems, the loss of these seven-metre long creatures will contribute to destabilizing and unraveling ecosystems.

The SSG's proposed strategy would:

- Complement an existing ban on commercial international sawfish trade;
- Implement national and regional actions to prohibit intentional killing of sawfish;
- Minimize mortality of accidental catches;
- Protect sawfish habitats;
- And ensure effective enforcement of such safeguards.



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The announcement in Durban of a strategy to save sawfishes coincides with that of another life-saving suggestion. Three African countries are proposing the listing of sawfishes under the Convention on Migratory Species, which would significantly boost their protection.

The SSG strategy is the result of a 2012 workshop where the world's sawfish experts developed a global sawfish conservation vision, goals

and prioritized actions. The document also includes information on sawfish biology, distribution, cultural value, exploitation history, current threats, regional status accounts and conservation policies compiled by leading authorities.

The strategy's fate depends entirely on new funding to finance its implementation.

Provided by Simon Fraser University

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