

# Countries push to protect sharks, rays

August 15 2019

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Upwards of 100 million sharks are fished every year, mainly for their valuable fins, which can fetch as much as \$1,000 per kilo

Dozens of countries will push at a global meeting for regulations on trade in 18 types of shark and ray, with conservationists warning Thursday of looming extinction for many species.

"Sharks and rays are pretty much unmanaged still in fisheries around the world and are disappearing before our eyes," Luke Warwick of the Wildlife Conservation Society told reporters in Geneva.

His warning came ahead of a global meeting of conservationists and policymakers in the Swiss city set to evaluate changes to regulations and protection listings under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES).

Among the 56 proposed changes on the table are three calling for 18 shark and ray species to be listed under the treaty's Appendix II, under which trade in a plant or animal is subject to oversight and guarantees of sustainability.

About 30 countries back the three proposals concerning species of mako shark and a range of critically endangered ray species in the guitarfish and wedgefish families.

Observers hailed the record support, pointing out this is the biggest number of sponsors ever to back a proposal under the four decades-old treaty.

Abdulla Naseer, the environment minister of the Maldives which co-sponsored the proposals, told reporters that listing the species would help their "populations recover before it is too late."

## Sharks of the ocean

Selected shark species that are vulnerable, threatened with extinction or endangered

*Illustrations not to scale*

### Angel

*Squatina squatina*  
**Critically endangered**



Maximum length 1.8 m

An ambush predator that buries itself in sand in the temperate waters of the European and North African continental shelves

### Broadfin

*Lamiopsis temminckii*  
**Endangered**



1.7 m

Once thought common, now rare. Found inshore on the continental shelves of the Indian Ocean and West Pacific. Harmless to humans, eaten by humans

### Great Hammerhead

*Sphyrna mokarran*  
**Endangered**



6 m

Their wide-set eyes give them a broad visual range. An organ inside their head allows them to detect the electric field of buried stingrays

### Great White

*Carcharodon carcharias*  
**Vulnerable**



6 m

Species most commonly found to attack humans. New borns immediately try to swim away from their mother, which might try to eat them

### Greenland

*Somniosus microcephalus*  
**Near Threatened**



6.5 m

Native to the cold, deep waters of the North Atlantic. Believed to live for at least 272 years, possibly as long as 500

### Pondicherry

*Carcharhinus hemiodon*  
**Critically endangered**  
(Possibly even extinct: IUCN)



2 m

Also known as the long-nosed shark. Last recorded in India in 1979. Little known about their size or breeding habits

### Scalloped Hammerhead

*Sphyrna lewini*  
**Endangered**



3.3 m

They can dive up to 1,000 m but are mostly found near the surface. Small individuals known to migrate in large schools, but larger adults tend to be solitary

### Tiger

*Galeocerdo cuvier*  
**Near Threatened**



5.5 m

Named for distinct black stripes found on juveniles. Second only to great whites in attacking people. Stomach contents have included plastics, metals, tire scraps, almost anything dumped in the sea

### Whale

*Rhincodon typus*  
**Endangered**



17 m

Biggest fish in the world. The gentle giants swim with their mouths open to swallow up floating plankton or small fish that happen to be passing by

### Zebra

*Stegostoma fasciatum*  
**Endangered**



2.5 m

Shocked scientists in 2017 when a captive female hatched eggs with three viable pups, despite not having contact with a male for at least three years, thereby switching from sexual to asexual reproduction

Source : Sources IUCN/WWF/NationalGeographic/AdFree.org/EAD/shark-references/5sharkwaters.com

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Selected shark species that are vulnerable, threatened or endangered.

"We want to see these species protected for health oceans and future generations," he told reporters.

## **Looming extinction?**

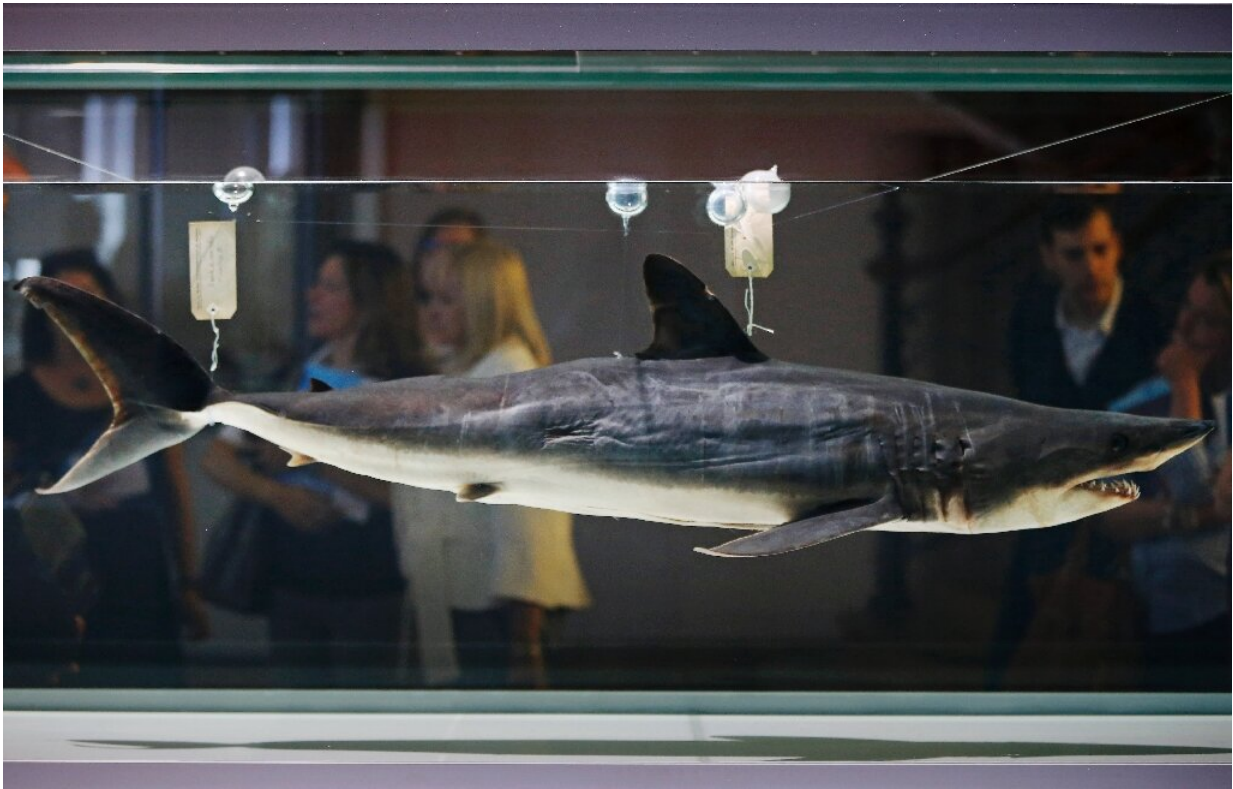
Sharks have stalked the oceans for more than 400 million years but are now under threat from a devastating predator—humans.

Upwards of 100 million sharks are fished every year, mainly for their valuable fins, which can fetch as much as \$1,000 per kilo.

Of the 59 species of rays and sharks evaluated by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), 17 are classified as being at risk of extinction as overfishing and habitat destruction continues apace.

But until 2013, none were listed under CITES, which has traditionally focused on land-based plants and animals.

Fishing nations have in the past voiced strong opposition to CITES listings of fisheries species, which are already covered by a number of international treaties.



About 30 countries back proposals to better protect species of mako shark (such as the one pictured) and a range of critically endangered ray species in the guitarfish and wedgefish families.

But proponents maintain that the convention, which is legally binding and has a powerful enforcement mechanism, has proven far more effective at pushing countries towards better species management.

Conservationists hailed the strong support for the shark and ray proposals to be debated and voted on at the 12-day meeting opening Saturday, but stressed their approval would only be the first step.

Sharks and rays mature slowly and have few young, so it takes a long time for threatened populations to recover.

If fishing of mako sharks were to stop immediately, "scientists estimate that it will be 2070 before the population recovers even to the base level, where fishing would be advisable again," Warwick said.

Scientists looking for guitarfish and wedgefish in places where they used to be abundant are now lucky if they spot one a week, said Rima Jabado, founder of the Elasmobranch Project.

"If we don't start doing something very quickly, the inevitable is actually extinction very, very quickly," she warned.

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