

Protecting threatened sharks and rays in the Western Indian Ocean

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Abstract

Overexploitation of shark and ray species can have direct impacts on their populations and indirect impacts on their ecosystems and food webs. Thousands of people living in coastal communities within the WIO are dependent on marine resources, including sharks and rays, for their income and livelihoods, making this both a social and ecological issue. However, the catches of shark and ray species are currently poorly recorded and true catch statistics, particularly in artisanal, small-scale and IUU fisheries, remain unknown. Furthermore, human populations and the demand for marine resources are increasing throughout the WIO, with evidence of human migrations to coastal areas in search of improved food security and livelihoods. There is thus a continued threat to WIO shark and ray species, the severity of which is increasing. As a consequence, there is a critical need for corrective management and improved conservation of the WIO shark and ray species, particularly those that are already threatened or likely to become threatened. This paper responds to these issues, as they relate to the WIO member states of the Nairobi Convention. The paper is intended to encourage the listing of appropriate species on the Annexes of the Nairobi Convention Protocol concerning Protected Areas and Wild Fauna and Flora in the Eastern African Region and urges member states to similarly protect and regulate relevant species at national level.

Recalling Decision CP7/12: Conservation of Sharks, Article 4 of the Nairobi Convention Protocol on species of wild fauna requiring special protection and Article 5 on harvestable species of wild fauna, we urge the Conference of Parties to take the following steps, to reduce impacts on shark and ray populations in the WIO, to improve their conservation status:

1. List appropriate shark and ray species on the respective Nairobi Convention Annexes, as proposed in Annex I to this document: Recommendations for Shark and Ray Listings in the Annexes of the Nairobi Convention Protocol Concerning Protected Areas and Wild Fauna and Flora in the Eastern African Region.
2. Urge member states to implement their binding commitments in terms of species protections and trade controls at national level, as imposed by the multilateral agreements to which they are party.
3. Encourage member states to voluntarily implement species protections and catch restrictions for threatened species and species subject to trade controls, i.e., those not already required to be protected under other multilateral agreements.