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briefing CITES Appendix II Requiem shark listing

overall proposal summary

Grey reef shark (*Carcharhinus amblyrhynchos*), dusky shark (*C. obscurus*), smalltail shark (*C. porosus*), Ganges shark (*Glyphis gangeticus*), sandbar shark (*C. plumbeus*), Borneo shark (*C. borneensis*), Pondicherry shark (*C. hemiodon*), smoothtooth blacktip shark (*C. leiodon*), sharptooth lemon shark (*Negaprion acutidens*), Caribbean reef shark (*C. perezi*), daggernose shark (*Isogomphodon oxyrinchus*), night shark (*C. signatus*), whitenose shark (*Nasolamia velox*), blacknose shark (*C. acronotus*), whitecheek shark (*C. dussumieri*), lost shark (*C. obsoletus*), Pacific smalltail shark (*C. cerdale*), Borneo broadfin shark (*Lamiopsis tephrodes*) and the broadfin shark (*Lamiopsis temminckii*) in Appendix II

Remainder of Family Carcharhinidae as lookalikes.

Cosponsored by: Panama, Bangladesh, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, European Union, Gabon, Israel, Maldives, Senegal, Seychelles, Sri Lanka, Syrian Arab Republic, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

▲ A dusky shark (*Carcharhinus obscurus*) in the Mediterranean Sea, January 30, 2021.





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Panama has proposed 19 species of requiem shark for listing in [Appendix II at CITES CoP19](#). All are assessed as [Endangered or Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species](#), as a result of unsustainable fishing mortality driven at least partly by international trade demand for their products. This categorization is based on evidence of population reduction due to fisheries exploitation, habitat deterioration, conservative life history characteristics and international trade demand for their products. Suffering population declines upwards of 70% to local extinctions, each of these species clearly meet the [CITES listing criteria](#), and trade management for these species and their lookalikes is urgently needed.

The proposal also includes an additional 35 species (two additional family members are already CITES-listed: silky and oceanic whitetip), all of which have been determined to be lookalikes in their most commonly traded forms, as fin and meat ID is simplest at the family level. Within the requiem shark Family alone, **21 species are Endangered or Critically Endangered – action to regulate trade in this family of sharks cannot be delayed.**

The world has made significant progress in its management of sharks and rays in recent years, but the actions taken have not been enough. Shark populations continue to decline rapidly worldwide. More than 50% of shark species are threatened or near threatened with extinction, and pelagic sharks (species of sharks found on the high seas) have declined more than 70% in only a 50-year period. Adding to the concern, a recent study found that shark populations were functionally extinct on 20% of reefs surveyed globally. Small or large, coastal or high seas—sharks are disappearing, with the piecemeal management efforts to date failing to stop their decline. Global shark declines are driven by international demand for shark fins and meat, coupled with widespread lack of management for both the catch and trade of shark species.

When adopted, this proposal would ensure that the vast majority of the global shark fin trade is managed via [CITES](#) (currently at about 25%), breaking this pattern for the world's sharks. While there are over 1000 species of sharks and rays, the global fin trade is comprised of approximately 100 species. The species found in trade are threatened with extinction at twice the level of chondrychthians writ large (70% Threatened for species in trade but 36% for chondrychthians as a whole). The core of this trade is found within the requiem shark family.



The inclusion of the rest of the entire Family Carcharhinidae is essential for several reasons. The fins and meat of requiem shark species (the most commonly traded products) are difficult to visually differentiate, and the listing of species at the Family level for sharks has proven more successful in the past than Families that have been listed piecemeal (i.e. documented implementation issues for partial listing of the Sphyrnidae family vs. listings of mobulid and wedgefish at Family level). [Panama](#) has provided documentation within their proposal of the significant similarity of fins across the family. Removal of any one of the proposed species, or the listing of a subset of the Family would create an identification and enforcement process that would be incredibly challenging—especially for lower capacity governments. To assist governments to better implement this listing holistically, [Panama](#) has worked with established shark trade experts to create an ID guide that works to the family level. It is available for review by Parties at this time.

meets criteria

according to CITES Secretariat

meets criteria

according to IUCN/TRAFFIC

partially meets criteria*

according to FAO Expert Panel

- ▲ Grey reef sharks (*Charcharhinus amblyrhynchos*) in the Great Barrier Reef of Australia.
- ◀ A blue shark body on a stack of blue sharks with some ice. Captured with a surface longliner, the mark of the hook can be seen next to its mouth. Fins are naturally attached as they are sold fresh.

* additional information requested and has been submitted by Panama



Photo: © Vanessa Mignon



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Furthermore, while not relevant due to [CITES criteria](#) for lookalikes, 68% of the requiem shark species are suffering declines of 70% and above—the conservative interpretation to qualify for an Appendix II listing in their own right. For the remainder of the species found in this proposal and found in trade, they also qualify if the intent of [CITES Appendix II](#) ('species not yet threatened with extinction') holds true, especially for species so biologically conservative.

improving capacity and implementation

The identification of requiem sharks is easiest at the family level. With such a species rich proposal covering so much of the global shark fin trade, it will be easier for customs and enforcement staff to implement. Almost all shipments of shark fins would likely now have a CITES listed species within it, and would need the requisite paperwork. By only listing a few requiem species, the visual ID of requiem shark meat and fins in trade would be incredibly complex and require much higher number of staff, as well as staff time to sort through each shipment and differentiate between highly similar sets of fins between unlisted and listed ones.

It should also be noted that this is the same approach taken and adopted by proponents of other Family level shark proposals at [CoPs 17](#) and [18](#) for the wedgfish and mobula rays. Global governments and scientists agree that the comprehensive management of the main species in the fin and meat trade that this proposal will deliver is essential to the survival of the world's second most threatened group of vertebrates. Fin identification experts have weighed in on Panama's proposal, have verified the lookalike status across the family, and concluded that a Family level listing is the most efficient way forward to manage these Endangered and Critically Endangered species in trade.

global support for shark conservation

The proposal to list the Family Carcharhinidae on CITES Appendix II has been globally well received, with 40 cosponsoring countries, and Panama has made it clear that this proposal will be their top priority as CoP hosts. As seen at CoP18 and beforehand, these well-supported proposals tend to pass.

As with many other initiatives being globally discussed this year, governments have emphasized the global need to prioritize marine biodiversity and management. Supporting Panama and championing a proposal to list a Family where 68% of its species are threatened with extinction, would deliver tangible results and measurable successes towards the ambitious conservation and biodiversity management goals.

Such action is needed, as sharks are currently the second most threatened vertebrate group on the planet.¹ And within the requiem Family alone, 21 of the species are Endangered or Critically Endangered. Panama's proposal is a good middle ground between governments already concerned that shark trade is not sustainable for these vulnerable species ([Colombia](#), [Canada](#), and the [UK](#) enacting recent shark fin trade bans, as examples), and those who would like the trade to continue.

The proposal to list the Family Carcharhinidae under [Appendix II of CITES](#) is the logical next step in ensuring that global demand for shark fins and meat does not drive sharks to extinction. Given the overwhelming data showing how this trade is driving shark population declines, there is a critical need for governments to create a framework for sustainable trade—before [Appendix I](#) is the only option. This proposal is the best-case scenario unless governments aim to wait until trade is no longer possible at all.

◀ Spinner Shark with fishing line caught in mouth.

▶ Shark dorsal and pectoral fins drying for trade.

¹ *Nature*, Half a century of global decline in oceanic sharks and rays | *Nature*. <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41586-020-03173-9>



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