



IFAW

International Fund for Animal Welfare

Silky Sharks, Thresher Sharks and Devil Rays

(*Carcharhinus falciformis*), (*Alopias superciliosus*, *A. vulpinus*, *A. pelagicus*), (*Mobula spp.*)



PROPOSALS:

1. COP17 PROP. 42 REPUBLIC OF MALDIVES

Inclusion of Silky Shark (*Carcharhinus falciformis*) in Appendix II in accordance with Article II paragraph 2(a) of the Convention.

1. SILKY SHARK (*CARCHARHINUS FALCIFORMIS*)

Biology and Distribution

There are multiple distinct populations of silky sharks worldwide, with some stocks growing larger and maturing later than others. There is limited information on their life history and biology, however, it is believed that their generation time is between 11-14 years, with females maturing at >12 years old with a longevity of 36 years. Litters average six pups (1-16, positively correlated with maternal size) after a 9-12 month gestation, with one resting year (or possibly more) between litters.

Silky sharks live in a variety of habitats throughout their lives and migrate, regularly and cyclically, across international borders and may cover large distances in short periods of time. They are found in the oceanic and coastal-pelagic habitats of tropical waters, often associated with seamounts. They often inhabit continental shelves and slopes from the surface to 500 meters of depth. Juveniles are often found near floating debris.

IFAW RECOMMENDATION: SUPPORT

2. COP17 PROP. 43 SRI LANKA

Inclusion of Thresher Sharks (*Alopias superciliosus*) in Appendix II based on criteria adopted in Resolution Conf. 9.24 (Rev.Cop16) Annex 2a, Criterion A, and *Alopias vulpinus* and *Alopias pelagicus* based on criteria adopted in Resolution Conf. 9.24 (Rev.Cop16) Annex 2b, Criterion A.

IFAW RECOMMENDATION: SUPPORT

3. COP17 PROP. 44 REPUBLIC OF FIJI

Inclusion of Devil Rays (*Mobula japanica* and *Mobula tarapacana*) in Appendix II based on criteria adopted in Resolution Conf. 9.24 (Rev.Cop16) Annex 2a, Criterion A, and *Mobula mobular*, *Mobula thurstoni*, *Mobula eregoodootenkee*, *Mobula kuhlii*, *Mobula hypostoma*, *Mobula rochebrunej*, and *Mobula munkiana* based on criteria adopted in Resolution Conf. 9.24 (Rev.Cop16) Annex 2b, Criterion A.

IFAW RECOMMENDATION: SUPPORT



Due to their slow growth, late maturity, and production of few young, silky sharks are vulnerable to over-exploitation by fishing and have experienced significant and ongoing population declines throughout their range. Worldwide, *C. falciformis* have declined by over 70% in almost every area they are found and for which data, ecological risk assessments, and stock assessments are available. The Atlantic population is believed to have declined by 90% since the 1950s, the Indian Ocean population by 50 to 90% over 20 years, and the Pacific Ocean population by 67% in less than 20 years.

2. THRESHER SHARKS (*ALOPIAS* SPP.):

ALOPIAS SUPERCILIOSUS, *A. VULPINUS*,
A. PELAGICUS

Biology and Distribution

The Bigeye thresher (*Alopias superciliosus*) gives birth to fully developed young, usually two pups per litter. Females reach sexual maturity at around 12-14 years (332-341cm) and males between 9-10 years (270-288cm). They have a lifespan of 20-21 years and a 12-month gestation. A female bigeye thresher shark will, therefore, produce fewer than 20 pups in its lifetime. *Alopias superciliosus* has the lowest fecundity and rate of population increase of the three thresher species. It has a meager capacity to recover from even low levels of exploitation, with a population doubling time estimated at about 25 years. *Alopias* spp. are



highly migratory pelagic sharks, with an almost worldwide circumglobal distribution in tropical and temperate oceanic and coastal seas.

3. DEVIL RAYS (*MOBULA* SPP.):

MOBULA JAPANICA, *M. TARAPACANA*,
M. MOBULAR, *M. THURSTONI*, *M.*
EREGOODOOTENKEE, *M. KUHLII*, *M.*
HYPOSTOMA, *M. ROCHEBRUNEI*, AND
M. MUNKIANA

Biology and Distribution

The genus *Mobula* comprises nine currently recognized species with a disc width (DW) ranging from 1-3.7 m. *Mobula japonica* grows to a maximum of 310 cm DW, with males maturing at 201.6 cm DW and females at >207 cm. *M. tarapacana* grows to a maximum of 370 cm DW, with males maturing at 234-252.2 cm wingspan. Size at maturity for females is unknown, but is likely to be >270 cm. Scientific data on the life history strategies of these species are severely lacking. *Mobula japonica* and *M. tarapacana* are slow-growing, large-bodied animals that exhibit the lowest fecundity of all elasmobranchs, giving birth to a single pup every two to three years, and have a generation period greater than ten years.

Mobula japonica and *M. tarapacana* are distributed worldwide in the tropical and temperate waters of the Pacific, Atlantic and Indian Oceans. Within this broad range, their populations are sparsely distributed and believed to be highly fragmented, with predictable aggregations in easily accessible areas, making them vulnerable to many target, bycatch, coastal and high seas fisheries.

Though global population numbers are unknown for *Mobula* spp., global genus-wide declines have been recorded and serious local declines observed in the Indo-Pacific over only 10 to 15 years. Dramatic declines in mobulid catches have been documented in some areas, suggesting serial depletions due to over-fishing. While there are no historical baseline population data, new research on the scale and



impacts of mobulid fisheries in Sri Lanka, India, Indonesia, the Philippines, Peru and Guinea -- and continued strong demand for mobulid gill plates in China -- strongly suggest recent, marked increases in rates of depletion for these species during the past decade. The FAO expert panel concluded that the available evidence supports inclusion in Appendix II.



Protection Status

In 1994, at CoP9, the Parties first expressed concern over the unsustainable levels of exploitation of some shark species. It was recognized that international cooperation was necessary to develop conservation and management mechanisms, and to monitor and control international trade. Since then, cooperation among CITES, the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) and other fisheries authorities has improved. Some of the most significant results were the development of FAO's International Plan of Action for the Conservation and Management of Sharks (IPOA-Sharks), adopted in 1999; the first CITES listings of shark species on Appendix II (whale shark, *Rhincodon typus*, and basking shark, *Cetorhinus maximus*) at CoP12; Appendix II listing for great white sharks (*Carcharodon carcharias*) at CoP13; Appendix I listing for all sawfish (*Pristidae* spp.) species at CoP14; and Appendix II listing for three species of hammerhead sharks (*Sphyrna lewini*, *S. mokarran*, *S. zygaena*), oceanic white tips (*Carcharhinus longimanus*), porbeagle sharks (*Lamna nasus*), and manta rays (*Manta* spp.) at CoP16.

To conserve sharks, species-specific shark trade data must be collected and adequate monitoring systems implemented. The World Customs Organization has noted that only through Appendix II listings of relevant shark species can such statistical trade data be collated. It is clear that CITES has a unique role to play in the conservation and ecologically sound management of sharks.

Consequences of Trade

About 100 million sharks are caught every year. Studies indicate that some shark species may have declined by as much as 80% in the past decade. Shark fins, meat,

teeth and jaws are some of the world's most profitable fish commodities, unregulated catches are common, and there are few monitoring and reporting systems in place to track them.

The demand for, and monetary value of, shark fins, meat and gill plates from these species has increased exponentially, resulting in over-exploitation in target fisheries and often under-reported bycatch. All shark and ray species proposed for CITES listing at CoP17 are especially vulnerable to overfishing because they generally grow slowly, mature late and produce few young. Each of these species is internationally traded, has recognized declining wild populations, is restricted in distribution, and is suffering from habitat degradation, poor management and global demand for live animals or their parts and products.

The greatest threat to the silky shark is unsustainable levels of fisheries mortality, in target shark fisheries, as a utilized bycatch (particularly of industrial tuna fisheries on the high seas), and a discarded bycatch species. Their fins are valuable and products from these fisheries enter international trade. The FAO expert panel concluded that the available evidence supports their inclusion in CITES Appendix II.

The very low intrinsic reproductive rate of thresher sharks make them among the most vulnerable of all shark species to anthropogenic mortality worldwide, whether as a target or bycatch species. Threshers are the family at highest risk of extinction of all pelagic sharks. Worldwide, the *Alopias* species complex has declined by over 70% in almost every area they are found, and the bigeye thresher shark has exhibited population declines throughout its range in every area where sufficient species-specific

historical and current population data exist. Bigeye thresher populations have experienced declines of 70-80% in the Atlantic Ocean and over 80% decline in the Indian and Pacific Oceans within the last three-generation period. Because threshers tend to be identified at family level only, there are few species-specific trend data available. The proportion of thresher shark fins appearing in the Hong Kong shark fin market has declined 77-99% in the past 10-15 years.

An Appendix II listing for *Alopias superciliosus* and the other 'lookalike' thresher shark species will ensure that international trade is supplied by sustainably managed, accurately recorded fisheries that are not detrimental to the status of the wild populations they exploit. The FAO expert panel concluded that the available evidence supports inclusion in Appendix II.

Mobula rays such as *M. japonica* and *M. tarapacana* are caught in commercial and artisanal, target and bycatch,

fisheries throughout their range in the Atlantic, Pacific and Indian Oceans. The high and increasing value of gill plates has driven increased target fishing pressure for all *Mobula* spp. in key range states, with many former bycatch fisheries having become directed commercial export fisheries. The gill plates, used by mantas and mobula rays to filter food from the water, are highly valued in international trade.

IFAW RECOMMENDATIONS

IFAW urges Parties to support any additional protections for silky sharks, thresher sharks and mobula rays that will help ensure that international trade data is accurately recorded, require exporting countries to undertake Non-Detriment Findings before specimens can be exported, and enable international trade monitoring at the species level for the above-mentioned species and therefore:

SUPPORTS listing Proposals 42, 43 and 44