



Red List of

Mediterranean Cartilaginous Fishes



Key Facts

- Nearly 7% of the world's cartilaginous fish (sharks, rays and chimaeras) live in the Mediterranean Sea, which represents only 0, 8% of the global ocean surface.
- Four species of Mediterranean rays are unique to these waters.
- Sharks play an important role in the Mediterranean Sea's food chain. As top predators, they feed by killing sick or weak prey and thus keep the marine ecosystem healthy.
- The Mediterranean is one of the most dangerous seas for these fishes as they are more seriously threatened and their decline is much faster inside the region than elsewhere globally.
- Accidental mortality in fishing nets or "bycatch" is the main cause of decline. Biological factors (like slow growth rates), intensive fishing activities, shark finning, habitat loss and pollution are also threatening the Mediterranean populations.
- Large coastal species that inhabit areas close to where humans develop fishing activities are more imperilled.
- Legal protection is urgently needed: only few of the threatened species are listed under relevant conventions or legal agreements and over 73% currently receive no form of protection in the Mediterranean.

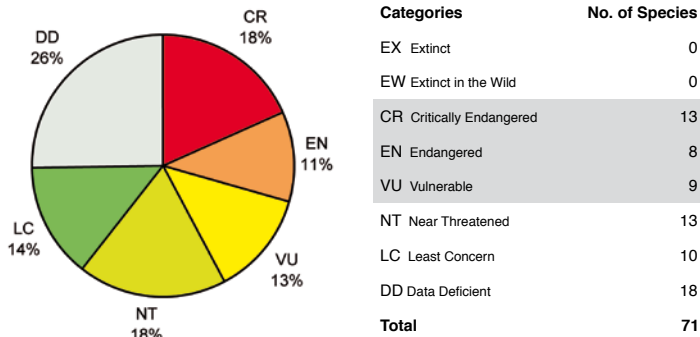
The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™



Conservation Status Assessment

Of the 71 species living and breeding in the Mediterranean Sea, 42% are considered threatened within the region. Of these, 18% are Critically Endangered, 11% are Endangered and 13% are Vulnerable.

Summary of conservation status for all Chondrichthyans of the Mediterranean Sea (2008)



Main Threats

All Mediterranean species are affected by accidental capture in trawls, also called "bycatch", which is considered the greatest threat. Other threats are pollution, habitat loss and degradation and human disturbance. Finning - when shark fins are cut and the animal discarded and dump in the sea - is a specific and destructive practice linked to the increasing value that fin soup is reaching in Asian cuisine. It threatens many shark stocks, the stability of marine ecosystems, sustainable traditional fisheries and socio-economically important recreational fisheries.

Conservation Actions

Out of the 71 species assessed, just 11% are granted with some form of protection. Increased legal protection at national and regional level is urgently needed, as well as enforcement of recently adopted fishing restrictions in the Mediterranean, such as no fishing beyond the depth limit of 1,000 m., no drift netting with nets greater than 2.5 km. in length and shark finning bans. Minimizing accidental captures is an absolute must to preserve the future of the Mediterranean Sea. Critical habitats also need to be identified and protected, and further research and monitoring programmes should be directed towards Data Deficient and threatened species.

Case Studies of Threatened Species

Maltese skate *Leucoraja melitensis* (CR). This species is almost extinct. It continues to be subject to heavy trawling activity. Urgent protection of this species and its critical habitats is required to prevent further decline.



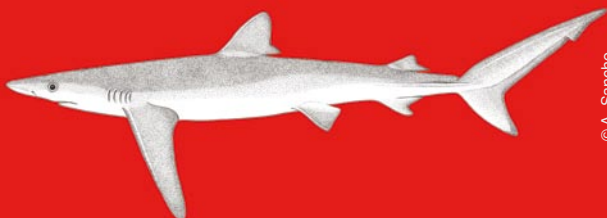
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Giant devil ray *Mobula mobular* (EN). A pelagic plankton feeder largely restricted to the Mediterranean Sea. Due to its large wings, it is at threat from illegal driftnetting and accidental capture by longlines, purse seines, trawls and fixed traditional tuna traps.



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Blue shark *Prionace glauca* (VU). Currently this species is only taken as bycatch, but increasing demand for meat and fins in the Northeast Atlantic fishery could result in the blue shark becoming a direct target species in the Mediterranean Sea.



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For More Information

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Overview of the Conservation Status of Cartilaginous Fishes (Chondrichthyans) in the Mediterranean Sea.

Download the report in English, French or Spanish from the Publications section.

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