

Hammerhead Sharks

Great Hammerhead *Sphyrna mokarran*

Scalloped Hammerhead *Sphyrna lewini*

Proposed action Inclusion on CMS Appendix II

Proponents Costa Rica & Ecuador



TERRY GOSS 2008 / MARINE PHOTOBANK

Overview

Great and Scalloped Hammerhead Sharks are endangered due to unsustainable targeted and incidental fishing in many regions around the world. Despite increasing safeguards, these exceptionally vulnerable, migratory species remain at great risk due to demand for their meat and highly valuable fins, as well as high rates of incidental mortality. CMS Appendix II listing is warranted to facilitate development of effective national and regional fishing restrictions, and to complement their listing under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), thereby enhancing the chances for recovery and sustainable use.



Biology and Distribution

Great and Scalloped Hammerheads are the largest species in the Sphyrnidae family, growing to more than three meters. These migratory, primarily coastal, semi-oceanic sharks are found to depths of around 300m in warm seas around the world. They are high-order predators, feeding primarily on smaller fish and invertebrates.

While Great Hammerheads are often solitary, Scalloped Hammerheads form large schools around seamounts and oceanic islands, making them vulnerable to targeting.

Hammerheads are inherently vulnerable to overexploitation due to slow growth, lengthy reproductive cycles (8–12 month gestation likely followed by a year-long resting stage), and long life (estimated at 44 years for the Great Hammerhead).

Population Status and Threats

Hammerhead sharks, particularly the Scalloped Hammerhead, are targeted and killed incidentally in coastal and pelagic fisheries around the world. For several regions, resulting population declines in excess of 80% have been documented. The IUCN Shark Specialist Group has classified Great and Scalloped Hammerheads as globally *Endangered* on the Red List, and has highlighted these two species as the most threatened species of the world's pelagic and semi-pelagic sharks. Degradation of nearshore coastal habitats, which Hammerheads use as migratory pathways and nursery grounds, also poses a threat to their long-term survival.

Uses

Hammerhead fins are prized for use in the Chinese celebratory dish shark fin soup, and can sell for more than 100 USD per kg. Because demand for Hammerhead fins greatly outweighs that for meat, these species are among the sharks most often subjected to "finning" (slicing off the fins and discarding the body at sea).

Hammerhead meat is consumed in much of Latin America, East Africa, Sri Lanka, Philippines, and China. In several countries, particularly the United States and Brazil, Hammerheads are popular species for recreational anglers. Tourism associated with diving and snorkeling offers substantial revenue to coastal economies, presenting viable alternative uses for sharks. Hammerhead Sharks rank among the top underwater attractions.

Conservation Measures

The listing of Great, Scalloped, and Smooth (*Sphyrna zygaena*) Hammerhead Sharks on CITES Appendix II came into force in September 2014.

The General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean agreed in 2012 to prohibit take of Great and Scalloped Hammerheads and other sharks listed on Annex II of the Barcelona Convention, but implementation plans remain unclear. In 2010, the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) banned retention of most Hammerhead species taken in ICCAT-managed

fisheries, with exemptions for developing countries that ensure Hammerhead fins are not traded. While several ICCAT Parties, including the US, European Union, and Ecuador, have prohibited retention of Hammerhead sharks in pelagic Atlantic fisheries accordingly, overall compliance reporting for this ICCAT measure has been lacking.

Several protected areas, such as Isla del Coco and the Galapagos Islands, provide important habitat for Hammerheads. Many range states, including French Polynesia, Palau, Maldives, Honduras, and Bahamas, have banned commercial shark fishing and/or trade. Elsewhere, there are few national, Hammerhead-specific fishing regulations. Spain and the United Arab Emirates have prohibited retention of all Hammerhead species. The US has listed Scalloped Hammerhead populations occurring primarily outside US waters under the Endangered Species Act, and imposes commercial fishing quotas and recreational size limits for Hammerheads taken from the Northwest Atlantic. Ecuador allows only artisanal fishers to take Hammerheads, and limits those catches to a small number of non-gravid females of a minimum size. All of these measures could benefit from improved enforcement and complementary actions for adjacent waters through which Hammerheads migrate.

While the number and quality of bans on finning is increasing worldwide, such measures are wholly insufficient to prevent shark depletion.

Expert Advice

The CMS Scientific Council's Fish Working Group has endorsed the Appendix II listing proposal for Great and Scalloped Hammerheads, while noting that these two species also meet the criteria for listing under CMS Appendix I.

CALL TO ACTION

Beneficial impacts from listing species under CMS Appendix II depend on concrete follow-up actions and specific regional agreements by range states. If properly implemented, listing Great and Scalloped Hammerhead Sharks on CMS Appendix II could:

- facilitate regional cooperation toward conservation of shared populations and key habitats;
- complement the CITES Appendix II listings for these species; and
- bolster and encourage national efforts to ensure recovery and sustainable fishing mortality.

We urge CMS Parties to support inclusion of Great and Scalloped Hammerhead Sharks on CMS Appendix II at CoP11

References

Information in this fact sheet is based on the CMS listing proposal, the relevant IUCN Red List assessments, and:

Camhi, M.D., Valenti, S.V., Fordham, S.V., Fowler, S.L. & Gibson, C. 2009. *The Conservation Status of Pelagic Sharks and Rays: Report of the IUCN Shark Specialist Group Pelagic Shark Red List Workshop*. IUCN Species Survival Commission Shark Specialist Group. Newbury, UK.