

## PRESS RELEASE

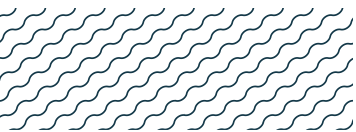
### **Important Shark and Ray Areas delineated in the Mediterranean and Black Seas**

Five-day workshop on ISRA concludes with 85 areas to consider.

**Thessaloniki, Greece. May 12, 2023.** This week marks the first time a team of global and regional experts have gathered to map critical habitats for sharks, rays, and chimaeras across the Mediterranean and Black Seas. The five-day workshop, organized by the IUCN Species Survival Commission Shark Specialist Group and hosted by iSea, allowed over 180 experts to contribute online and in person to the process of delineating Important Shark and Ray Areas (ISRA) in this region.

"We are very happy to host the ISRA workshop in Thessaloniki. The Mediterranean Sea is a hotspot of shark and ray extinction risk and the ISRA process will help us identify priorities for conservation and area-based management as well as understand gaps in knowledge. It has been an amazing week, everyone worked very hard, and we cannot wait to see the final results", said Ioannis Giovos, Director of iSea. This unique gathering brought together 26 participants in person from 16 countries to Thessaloniki to exchange information on how shark, ray, and chimaera species use habitats and to draw boundaries around such areas.

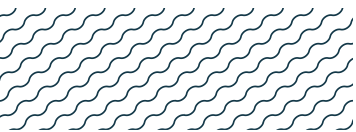
ISRAs are defined by the IUCN SSC Shark Specialist Group as 'discrete, three-dimensional portions of habitat, important for one or more shark species, that are delineated and have the potential to be managed for conservation.' While they are not protected areas, the delineation of these areas will allow policy-makers to consider the habitat use of sharks, rays, and chimaeras when developing and implementing management measures. Prof. Giuseppe



Notarbartolo di Sciara, co-Chair of the IUCN Marine Mammal Protected Areas Taskforce, stressed, 'I cannot say how excited I am today to work at the identification of areas that are important for sharks and rays in the same region - the Mediterranean Sea - where we started the Important Marine Mammal Area (IMMA) adventure 6 years ago. We are already seeing signs of how IMMAs are helping marine mammal conservation here, and there is such an urgent need for this to happen for sharks and rays as well'.

Participants worked through more than 110 Areas of Interest that had been submitted for consideration at the workshop. From these, 85 are now considered candidate ISRAs and will undergo an evaluation by an Independent Review Panel before they are finalized and included on the ISRA eAtlas ([www.sharkrayareas.org](http://www.sharkrayareas.org)). Another 17 areas were retained as Areas of Interest since, although the scientific evidence of their importance is limited, preliminary research indicates that they are likely to be important for multiple species. The ISRA project uses the best available science to identify regions across global waters most critical for the long term survival of sharks, rays, and chimaeras. These include places where species of concern mate, reproduce, feed, rest, or aggregate as well as key stopovers during a migration. The workshop also encouraged further collaboration between experts in the region to develop research projects and build knowledge of critical habitats in these bodies of water.

This ISRA workshop is the second of a series of 13 regional workshops to be organized around the world and has been supported by the Shark Conservation Fund. The first workshop was held in the Central and South America Pacific in 2022 and it is expected that the Western Indian Ocean workshop will take place in September 2023. Experts working on sharks, rays, and chimaeras around the world are requesting the convening of such meetings in their respective region to ensure these species groups are considered as countries begin to implement their commitment under the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework of protecting 30% of our oceans by 2030. All areas delineated will become a spatial layer for consideration of conservation measures by governments, intergovernmental organizations, conservation groups, and the general public.



‘We have learnt so much on the areas that are critical for the reproduction, feeding, aggregation and other life-history attributes of these species in the Mediterranean and Black Seas. However, this work has also highlighted the challenges in our understanding of important areas that need be considered for the conservation of these species as well as in the development of protected areas. We hope that by bringing together experts from the region, they can continue to work together to further the conservation of these species’, added Dr Rima Jabado, ISRA project leader and Chair of the IUCN Species Survival Commission Shark Specialist Group. Final results from the workshop are expected to be announced in August 2023 after they undergo a rigorous peer review process.

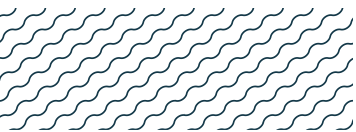
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## ORGANIZATIONAL INFORMATION

**Important Shark and Ray Areas project** - [www.sharkrayareas.org](http://www.sharkrayareas.org)

The Important Shark and Ray Areas (ISRAs) is an initiative led by the IUCN SSC Shark Specialist Group. ISRAs are “discrete, three-dimensional portions of habitat, important for one or more shark, ray, and chimaera species, that are delineated and have the potential to be managed for conservation”. The identification of ISRAs is an evidence-driven, purely biocentric process based on the application of ad hoc scientific criteria supported by the best available science. Any relevant management implication can only be subsequent to, and detached from, the ISRA identification process. The ISRA Criteria have been designed to capture important aspects of shark biology, ecology, and population structure and to encompass multiple aspects of species vulnerability, distribution, abundance, and key life cycle activities, as well as areas of high diversity. The ISRAs’ main purpose is to attract the attention of policy- and decision-makers on the need of maintaining the favourable conservation status of sharks, rays, and chimaeras in specific areas through the implementation of the most appropriate management measures, and this can include a protected area designation.

**IUCN Species Survival Commission Shark Specialist Group** - [www.iucnssg.org](http://www.iucnssg.org)



The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) is the world's largest global environmental network composed of both government and civil society organizations. It is a membership union with more than 1,400 member organizations and over 17,000 volunteer scientists in more than 160 countries. This diversity and vast expertise makes IUCN the global authority on the status of the natural world and the measures needed to safeguard it.

The Species Survival Commission (SSC) is a science-based network of over 9,000 experts from almost every country of the world, all working towards achieving the vision of: 'A just world that values and conserves nature through positive action to reduce the loss of diversity of life on earth'.

The IUCN SSC Shark Specialist Group (SSG) was established by the SSC in 1991 in response to growing awareness and concern of the severe impact of fisheries on shark, ray, and chimaera populations around the world. It is a global network of experts in the biology, taxonomy, use, and conservation of sharks, rays, and chimaeras. The SSG currently has more than 230 members from 82 countries collaborating to assess the status of all known species, collate knowledge, highlight species at risk, develop conservation plans, inform policy, and advise policy-makers on effective, science-based policies for sustainable use, and long-term conservation.

**iSea** – [www.isea.com.gr](http://www.isea.com.gr)

iSea is a Not for Profit Non-Governmental Organisation founded in March 2016, in Greece, with the aim to protect and restore the precious heritage of the aquatic environment by preserving its biodiversity and ensuring its vital functions that contribute to a clean, healthy, and productive ocean. The organisation develops projects around four main pillars: 1) Vulnerable species, 2) Citizen Science, 3) Aquatic litter, and 4) Human and Aquatic ecosystems. Since 2017, iSea has initiated or collaborated in a variety of initiatives and projects regarding shark and ray conservation in the Mediterranean.

**Shark Conservation Fund** – [www.sharksandrays.org](http://www.sharksandrays.org)

The Shark Conservation Fund (SCF) is a philanthropic collaboration focused on halting the overexploitation of the world's sharks and rays, preventing extinctions, and restoring populations.

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