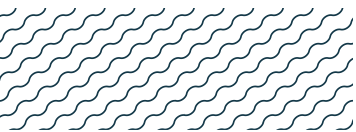


PRESS RELEASE

65 Important Shark and Ray Areas identified in the Mediterranean and Black Seas

September 5, 2023. The IUCN Species Survival Commission Shark Specialist Group (SSG) has released a compendium of Important Shark and Ray Area from the Mediterranean and Black Seas ([view document here](#)). These areas range in size from just 0.09 square kilometers to 219,000 square kilometers, encompassing shallow coastal waters to habitats more than 2,000 meters deep. They are important for species including the Critically Endangered Blackchin Guitarfish (*Glaucostegus cemiculus*) and the Endangered Rough Skate (*Raja radula*), as well as commonly fished species like the Common Smoothhound (*Mustelus mustelus*). These habitats are used by these species as mating or aggregation sites, nursery areas, feeding locations, or migratory pathways. More than 50% of shark and ray species in the Mediterranean Sea are considered threatened with extinction, and these newly identified areas should be considered for protection.

In May of 2023, our team held a regional workshop in Thessaloniki, Greece to bring together regional experts. More than 160 experts working on sharks, rays, chimaeras, and ecosystems of the region contributed in person or virtually. We considered 110 proposed Areas of Interest, resulting in 85 candidate Important Shark and Ray Areas. Each was submitted to our expert independent review panel, and the finalized list of approved areas are now included in the Compendium and in the freely accessible eAtlas (<https://sharkrayareas.org/e-atlas/>).



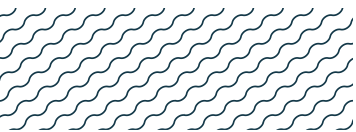
Our next region of interest is the Western Indian Ocean, and with financial support provided by the Shark Conservation Fund, the workshop will take place in Durban, South Africa in a few weeks. Over the next 5 years, we will be holding a series of workshops to cover 13 global regions. A previous compendium of Important Shark and Ray Areas from the Central and South American Pacific region was released earlier this year

(<https://sharkrayareas.org/download/central-and-south-american-pacific-a-regional-compendium-of-important-shark-and-ray-areas/>)

Now that these important areas have been identified, they can be prioritized for the protections they need or considered in other area-based management measures by local governments. “Since ancient times, fisheries have played an essential role in the Mediterranean region’s economy, culture, and traditions,” said Professor Alen Soldo of the University of Split Department of Marine Studies and Regional co-Vice Chair for the SSG for the Mediterranean and Black Sea region. “Nowadays, the jurisdictions of the Mediterranean are shared by 23 countries, and inadequate fisheries management has resulted in many depleted stocks, especially for sharks and rays, where the Mediterranean is considered one of the worst places in the ocean. Identifying ISRAs through a scientific process that is completely independent from any national or regional political issues can help us strengthen the frameworks of fisheries regulations and support the development of plans to help conserve the sharks and rays of the Mediterranean.”

“Standard management measures used for sustainable fisheries often do not work for sharks and their relatives, which are one of the most threatened groups of animals in the world” said Dr Fabrizio Serena, the Regional co-Vice Chair for the SSG for the Mediterranean and Black Sea region. “Identification of nursery areas, as well as areas important for mating, is a top priority for conservation. These areas can then be closed to fishing during important times of the year.”

“We are proud and excited to be leading the ISRA project. By delineating 130 critical habitats in our first two regions, we have brought together over 250 experts that have generously shared their knowledge and experience to ensure we have the best available information.”



added Dr Rima Jabado, Chair of the IUCN Species Survival Commission Shark Specialist Group. “We now have an opportunity to ensure these areas are incorporated into area-based management approaches, especially as countries start implementing their commitments to protect 30% of their waters by 2030 under the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. By protecting areas for sharks, rays, and chimaeras, we can reverse population declines and safeguard aquatic biodiversity.”

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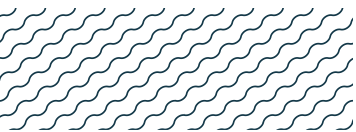
ORGANIZATIONAL INFORMATION

Important Shark and Ray Areas project - 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

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.

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