

Prop. 12. 35 (India and the Philippines) List the whale shark (*Rhincodon typus*) in Appendix II.

SSN VIEW: Support Adoption of Proposal

- The life history of the whale shark (longevity, late maturity, low fecundity) combined with its high commercial value, makes it especially vulnerable to over-fishing and to over-exploitation for international trade in its parts.
- Targeted whale shark fisheries have been undertaken in the Maldives, China, Chinese Taipei, India, Pakistan, Japan, Indonesia, the Philippines and Senegal, and some recent fisheries have arisen to meet international markets for their meat.
- Directed shark fisheries have been shown to follow a strong trend of harvest expansion followed by population collapse. Over-exploited shark populations have generally shown little evidence of recovery even decades after exploitation ceases. Whale sharks appear to be vulnerable to this trend.
- Records show declining catches and, where data are available, declining catch-per-unit-effort. Declines reported from different locations range from 30% to 80% per decade, and 20-30% annually in some very short-lived fisheries.
- In areas where no whale shark fishery exists, reported decreases in sightings and strandings are indicative of declining abundance.
- Stocks are being fished unsustainably in some Range States, while they are protected in others. However, even in areas where there is no fishery for the species, such as South Africa, decreased sightings suggest that unsustainable fisheries elsewhere may be having a negative impact on unfished populations of this highly migratory species.

TRADE THREATS TO WHALE SHARKS

Chinese Taipei is currently believed to be the largest consumer of whale shark meat in the world. A total of 71 whale sharks were landed in Chinese Taipei during 2001.

The volume of whale shark meat sold at Taipei's Central Market increased during the four-year period from February 1998 to August 2001.

During this period, analysis of 52 specimens revealed that the range of body length of landed whale sharks was between 2m and 9m. It is known that a fully-grown whale shark can reach 20m in length. Although the minimum length at maturity is not known, it is believed to be approximately 7.5m. These measurements of landed specimens indicate that many have not yet had a chance to reproduce and that larger, more mature individuals may already be seriously depleted. The harvesting of immature individuals has serious implications for the future regenerative potential of this long-lived, late-maturing species.

Surveys among commercial fishermen suggest that over half of the whale shark meat consumed in Chinese Taipei is imported illegally from outside. An intercepted shipment of illegal whale shark meat from the Philippines, where whale sharks are protected, tends to support this.

Trade records show that two tonnes of whale meat were exported from Chinese Taipei to Spain between March and November 2001, in a single shipment.

Under local law, it is highly likely that a CITES listing in Appendix II would result in better protection in Chinese Taipei, since internal trade in species listed on CITES Appendix II is prohibited until a management plan is in place.

THE NEED FOR PROTECTION IS WIDELY ACCEPTED

Whale sharks are listed in Appendix II of the Bonn Convention for the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals, which identifies the species as having unfavourable conservation status that would benefit from the implementation of international cooperative Agreements for its conservation and management.

The species is also included in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea Agreement on Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks as a highly migratory species, recognizing that coordinated management and assessment of shared migratory populations would promote an understanding of the cumulative impacts of fishing effort on the status of shared populations.

Inclusion in CITES Appendix II would also facilitate the implementation of the Food and Agriculture Organization's International Plan of Action for the Conservation and Management of Sharks (IPOA-Sharks) by

improving trade data on the species and requiring countries to make sustainability determinations prior to authorizing trade.

The global status of the Whale shark is assessed as Vulnerable in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Animals (2000), on the basis of declining populations.

The whale shark is fully protected in India, Honduras, the Maldives, the Philippines, Thailand, and in Australia, where it is listed as threatened and protected as a migratory species under the Australian Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act. The species is also protected in parts of the United States.

RATIONALE

The whale shark meets the criteria in Resolution Conf. 9.24, Annex 2(a), B(i), in that “it is known, inferred or projected that harvesting of specimens from the wild for international trade has, or may have, a detrimental impact on the species by exceeding, over an extended period, the level that can be continued in perpetuity”. The species also meets criterion in Annex 1, C(I) and (ii), in that “a decline has been either observed as ongoing or as having occurred in the past, and is inferred and projected on the basis of levels or patterns of exploitation”.