



“Working within CITES for the protection and conservation of species in international trade”

Sawfishes

***Pristidae* spp.**

Prop. 17 (Kenya and the United States of America) Include in Appendix I

SSN VIEW: SUPPORT Adoption of Prop. 17

IUCN LISTS ALL SAWFISH SPECIES AS CRITICALLY ENDANGERED.

The family Pristidae includes seven species of elasmobranch fishes, closely related to skates and rays, that were historically widespread in tropical to temperate, nearshore marine habitats, estuaries, large rivers, and some lakes. The shallow coastal habitats of these species are often associated with high levels of human activity. This has led to extensive habitat loss and degradation due to pollution and coastal development. Sawfish habitats are now severely fragmented, with the result that many populations have been extirpated from large parts of their former ranges. Remaining populations are seriously depleted. Annual global catch has dropped to 4–6% of historical levels; and observations from many regions suggest sawfish abundance has declined by over 90%.

Sawfish have very low productivity even compared to other sharks and rays. For some species, age at first reproduction is as high as 20 years.

LIVE SAWFISH AND SAWFISH PRODUCTS COMMAND HIGH PRICES ON THE INTERNATIONAL MARKET.

Because of their rarity, prices for sawfish and their parts on world markets can be very high: US\$2,000 – \$7,000 for individual rostra, and up to US\$3,000 for individual fins. Rostra, teeth, and fins are easily dried, powdered and transported for medicinal uses, facilitating international trade. Sawfish parts are also documented in internet trade, including dried rostra and dried whole specimens

Live specimens command US\$1000-\$1,750 per foot in the aquarium trade, with large specimens routinely commanding up to US\$5,000, and some aquarium specimens valued at US\$10,000. Live sawfish are exported from Indonesia to Germany, Taiwan and Japan; and an Australian exporter regularly sells sawfish to public aquaria worldwide. Because the trade in live specimens is a significant component of the international trade in this species, SSN strongly disagrees with the recommendation of the zoo and aquarium industry that Parties modify Proposal 17 to include the sawfish in Appendix II, rather than Appendix I, to allow continued trade in such specimens. All seven Pristidae species clearly meet the criteria for inclusion in Appendix I and warrant complete protection from all commercial trade, including the aquarium trade.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE IS AN IMPORTANT DRIVER OF SAWFISH EXPLOITATION.

Sawfish inhabit shallow waters where fisheries are conducted and are vulnerable to incidental harvest in fisheries targeting other species. The long, toothed rostrum characteristic of sawfishes penetrates easily through nets and makes them very vulnerable to entanglement in net-based fishing gear, and the majority of specimens in trade are believed to originate from bycatch. Nonetheless, there is evidence that demand for rostra, fins and live animals (particularly in northern Australia), continues to drive directed fisheries for sawfish. And the existence of lucrative international markets for these products and live specimens almost certainly results in the harvest of incidentally caught specimens that would otherwise be returned to the wild. As a result, international trade may be driving retention of specimens taken as bycatch to a greater extent than it is driving directed harvest.

With small, declining wild populations and increasing demand for sawfish rostra, fins and live specimens, Pristidae species satisfy the biological and trade criteria for inclusion in CITES Appendix I. Listing in Appendix I will bring much needed protection to these Critically Endangered species and may also encourage range countries to take national measures for sawfish conservation.

Additional information on individual species is provided below.

Species	Range	Observations
<i>Anoxypristis cuspidata</i>	Indo-West Pacific Ocean ranging from east Africa to Australia and China	Global declines greater than 50%, and potential declines to less than 20% of 1950s levels. (Compagno et al. 2006)*
<i>Pristis clavata</i>	Northern nearshore waters of Australia	"Australian populations have declined significantly as a result of bycatch in commercial gillnet and trawl fisheries throughout this limited range and this bycatch continues" (Cavanagh et al. 2003)*
<i>Pristis microdon</i>	From Sri Lanka to Australia including islands in the archipelago	"Serious declines in virtually all known populations,... compounded by habitat loss and degradation over most of its range...remaining populations are now small, fragmented" (IUCN 2006)*
<i>Pristis pectinata</i>	Western Atlantic Ocean, Gulf of Mexico and Brazil, may be found in west African countries, South Africa, east Africa to southeast Asia and Australia, extinct in the Mediterranean	Both population size and range have been severely reduced. (Simpfendorfer 2000)* Estimated that the U.S. population is currently less than 5% of virgin abundance at the time of European settlement. (Simpfendorfer 2002)*
<i>Pristis perotteti</i>	Western Atlantic ocean from the United States to Brazil and in the Eastern Pacific Ocean from Mexico to Ecuador; formerly Europe	Extirpated from its former European range; Other populations have declined in the past 35 years (Prop. 17)*; status is known to be especially serious in Lake Nicaragua and other Central American sites (IUCN 2006)*
<i>Pristis pristis</i>	Eastern Atlantic Ocean from Portugal to Angola	Extirpated from Europe and the Mediterranean; "without timely intervention, there is a high probability that this sawfish will become extinct" (IUCN 2006)*
<i>Pristis zijsron</i>	Indian Pacific Ocean from east Africa to Australia including some areas of southeast Asia and in Indonesian archipelago	Similar declined observed as for <i>Anoxypristis cuspidata</i> ; the species has not been observed in 30-40 years in the Gulf of Thailand (Compagno et al., 2006)*; declared extinct in New South Wales, Australia, in 2007 (Prop. 17)*

* Because of space limitations, full references are omitted but are available upon request