

Silky Shark *Carcharhinus falciformis*

Proposed action	Inclusion on CMS Appendix II
Proponents	Egypt



ALEX CHERNIKH/WIKIPEDIA COMMONS

Overview

The Silky Shark is a sleek, pelagic species found in tropical waters around the globe. This highly migratory, low-productivity shark is at risk from substantial incidental take in high seas fisheries, exacerbated by strong demand for its fins, and is also targeted in some regions for its meat. Despite some regional prohibitions, Silky Shark mortality is under-reported and largely unmanaged. Including the species in CMS Appendix II could bolster compliance with existing protections, and facilitate international cooperation toward more comprehensive national and regional conservation measures, thereby enhancing the chances for sustainable use.



Biology and Distribution

Characterized by relatively smooth skin, the Silky Shark is a tropical migratory species found worldwide in coastal seas and the open ocean, at depths up to 500 meters. Silky Sharks can grow to more than 3m (10 feet).

With nurseries along the continental shelf, Silky Sharks make lengthy and regular migrations. Tagging studies have documented Silky Shark journeys of 2,200 km (1,367 miles) in the Galapagos region, as well as movements across the national and international boundaries of six Eastern Pacific countries. The tendency of these high-order predators to associate with schools of pelagic fish, such as tuna, makes them highly susceptible to incidental capture in fisheries.

Silky Sharks are particularly vulnerable to overfishing due to slow growth, late maturity (7–15 years for females), lengthy gestation (one year), and few young (2–25 per litter).

Population Status and Threats

The global IUCN Red List classification for the Silky Shark is *Near Threatened*, with populations in the Eastern Central and Southeast Pacific as well as the Northwest and Western Central Atlantic listed as *Vulnerable*.

Silky Sharks are among the shark species most commonly captured in high seas longline and purse seine gear; the associated mortality is a primary threat to their populations. This species is also targeted in various coastal multispecies fisheries, particularly in the Indian Ocean and off Central America. This fishing pressure, combined with low productivity and inadequate limits, has led to serious population depletion in many regions. Under-reporting of catches hinders robust assessment of Silky Shark population health, but scientists associated with the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) and the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission have been able to document steep declines in abundance. The Silky Shark has ranked high in terms of vulnerability to overfishing in Ecological Risk Assessments conducted by scientists with the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) and the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission.

Destruction of Silky Shark habitats also poses a risk to the health of populations.

Uses

Silky Shark fins are valuable for use in the Chinese celebratory dish, shark fin soup. Silky Sharks are also targeted for their meat. Consumption of Silky Shark meat is relatively high in Taiwan (23% of sampled fillets).

Shark-based tourism offers substantial revenue to coastal economies, presenting viable alternative uses for sharks. Silky Sharks are popular with divers in several places including the Florida Keys and parts of the Caribbean.

Conservation Measures

ICCAT and WCPFC have banned retention of Silky Sharks. The ICCAT measure, however, allows exemptions for developing countries that report catch data, cap catches, and ensure fins are not traded. While several ICCAT and WCPFC Parties, including the United States and the European Union, have prohibited retention of Silky Sharks in pelagic Atlantic fisheries accordingly, overall compliance for these measures is questionable. Other regional bodies governing vast sections of the Silky Shark range have not yet adopted conservation measures for the species.

Several Silky Shark range states, including French Polynesia, Palau, Cook Islands, Honduras, and Bahamas, have banned commercial shark fishing and/or trade. Elsewhere, there are few national fishing regulations specific to Silky Sharks. These measures would benefit from enhanced monitoring and complementary actions for adjacent waters through which Silky Sharks migrate.

Expert Advice

The CMS Scientific Council's Fish Working Group has endorsed the proposal to include the Silky Shark in CMS Appendix II, in line with the 2007 conclusions based on an IUCN Shark Specialist Group review.

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 Silky Sharks on CMS Appendix II could:

- encourage improved compliance with existing protections;
- facilitate regional cooperation toward conservation of shared populations and key habitats; and
- enhance national efforts to ensure recovery and sustainable fishing mortality.

We urge CMS Parties to support inclusion of the Silky Shark on CMS Appendix II at CoP11

References

This fact sheet is based on the CMS listing proposal, the relevant assessments of population status and Ecological Risk, 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.

Camhi, M.D., Fordham, S.V. & Fowler, S.L. 2008. Domestic and international management for pelagic sharks. In: *Sharks of the Open Ocean: Biology, Fisheries and Conservation* (eds. M.D. Camhi, E.F. Pikitch & E.A. Babcock). Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, UK.