

Oceanic whitetip shark

Carcharhinus longimanus

PROPOSAL
#42

Proposed action	Listing on CITES Appendix II
Lead proponent	Colombia
Co-sponsors	Brazil, United States
Annotation	Entry into effect delayed by 18 months to allow Parties to resolve technical and administrative issues



ANDREW BELLAMY

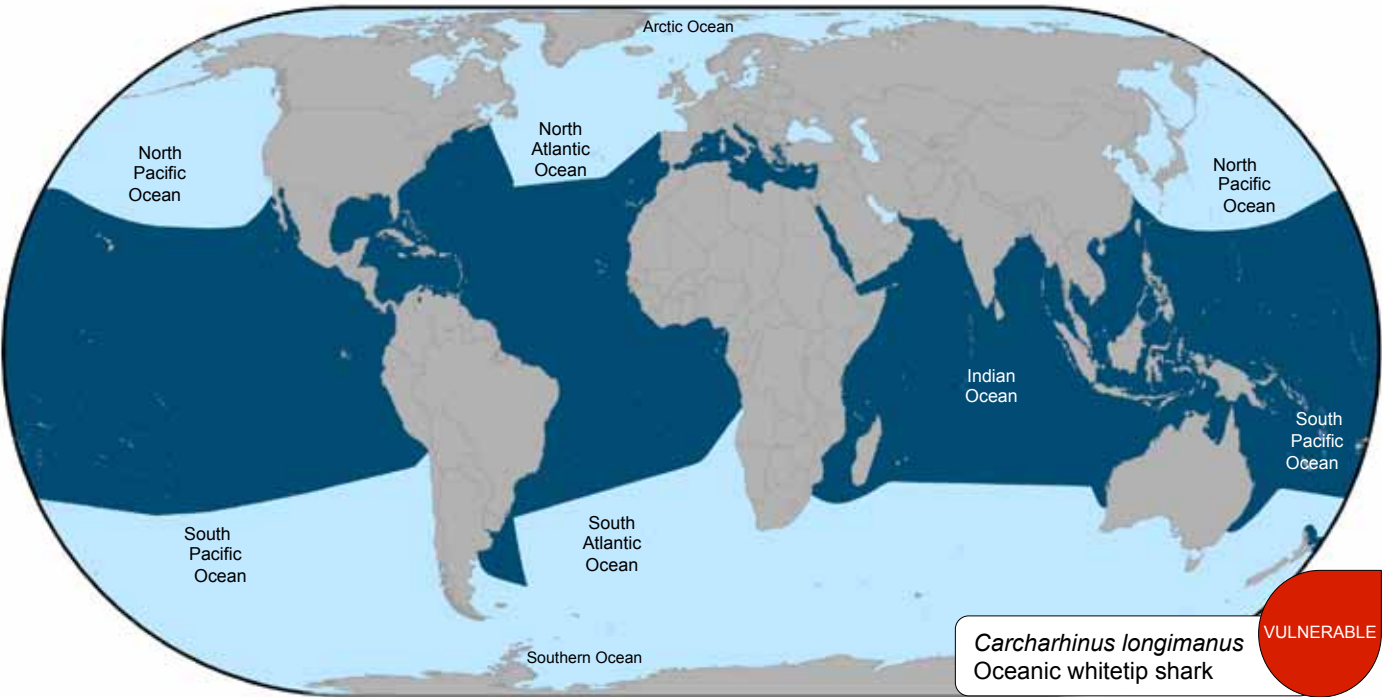
Overview

The oceanic whitetip shark is a slow-growing, globally threatened species that has been seriously overfished by pelagic fisheries around the world, primarily for its fins. International demand for fins continues to drive retention of incidentally caught oceanic whitetip sharks. The distinctive appearance of oceanic whitetip fins makes them readily identifiable in trade. CITES Appendix II listing is warranted to facilitate compliance with fisheries measures agreed by dozens of nations and establishment of science-based export limits, thereby complementing national and regional efforts toward recovery and sustainable use.



Distribution

The oceanic whitetip shark is found around the world, generally in far-offshore tropical and subtropical waters, to about 30° latitude.



Global distribution of the oceanic whitetip shark. Source: IUCN

Biological Characteristics

The oceanic whitetip shark is a relatively large, highly migratory shark with distinctive white-tipped, rounded fins. Oceanic whitetip sharks serve as top predators, feeding mainly on fish and squid.

Oceanic whitetip sharks are exceptionally vulnerable to overfishing due to:

- Late maturity (females mature as late as age 7)
- Lengthy gestation (9–12 months)
- Few young (average of 5–6 pups every two years).

These characteristics lead to intrinsic rates of population increase estimated at 0.07–0.09 yr⁻¹, placing the oceanic whitetip shark in the lowest productivity category of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) guidelines for evaluating the status of commercially exploited aquatic species (rate of population increase of <0.14 and a generation time of >10 years).

Fisheries

Oceanic whitetip sharks are taken primarily as bycatch in pelagic longline and purse seine fisheries that target tuna and swordfish. The large fins of oceanic whitetip shark are used in the traditional Asian celebratory dish, *shark fin soup*. The low value of oceanic whitetip meat (relative to fins) can create incentive for “finning” (slicing off the fins and discarding the bodies at sea); however, in the Western and Central Pacific, oceanic whitetip sharks are reportedly landed whole more often than they are finned. Tagging studies have determined that oceanic whitetip sharks have a high chance of surviving capture on pelagic longline fishing gear if carefully released. As with other pelagic sharks, the widespread lack of national landings reports leads to serious under-estimates of oceanic whitetip shark catches.

International Trade

International demand for shark fins is the driving force behind oceanic whitetip shark mortality. Oceanic white sharks fins are exported from around the globe to Asia, particularly China, for use in shark fin soup. Dried, unprocessed fins from this species sold for an average wholesale auction price of USD122/kg per kilogram in 2001. Shark import and export trade records are generally not species-specific, which hampers understanding of international trade. The oceanic whitetip shark is known, however, to be one of six shark species frequently found in the global fin trade, including in the dominant Hong Kong market. The fins of an estimated 220,000–1.2 million oceanic whitetip sharks were traded globally in 2000, representing about 2% by weight of the global fin trade.

White tips and rounded edges make the fins of oceanic whitetip sharks distinctive and easily identifiable in trade. Genetics studies have backed up reports that Hong Kong-based fin traders sort oceanic whitetip shark fins into a separate market category (“Liu Qiu”). These factors should significantly ease implementation of CITES controls. There are also numerous shark species identification guides and improvement of these tools is ongoing.

Population Status

IUCN classifies the oceanic whitetip shark as *Vulnerable* globally, with Northwest and Western Central Atlantic population considered *Critically Endangered*.

Once common, oceanic whitetip sharks have been depleted on a global scale. Northwest Atlantic populations have declined substantially. Scientists recently used Central Pacific standardized catch rate data to estimate a 17%/year decline in oceanic whitetips for 1995–2010, equating to a 93% decline over the period as a whole. The Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) does not require shark landings to be recorded to the species level,

so data from this region are seriously incomplete. The IOTC Scientific Committee, however, has reported clear and significant declines in oceanic whitetip shark abundance over recent decades.

Globally, the extent and rate of decline of oceanic whitetip populations significantly exceed the qualifying levels for inclusion in CITES Appendix II.

Conservation Measures

The oceanic whitetip shark is listed in Annex I, Highly Migratory Species, of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which signals international recognition of the need for cooperative management of the species but does not carry specific, binding fisheries regulations. Prohibitions on retention, transshipment, and landing of oceanic whitetip sharks have been adopted by the following Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs):

- International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT);
- Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC); and
- Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC).

Compliance with and application of these bans depends on national actions that are to date seriously lacking. Indeed, most ICCAT, IATTC, and WCPFC Parties have yet to implement species-specific oceanic whitetip protections. Rejection of a ban on oceanic whitetip retention by the IOTC leaves the species virtually unprotected throughout a large portion of its range.

Domestic oceanic whitetip shark-specific fishing prohibitions, consistent with relevant RFMO obligations, have been adopted by the European Union, New Zealand, and the United States.

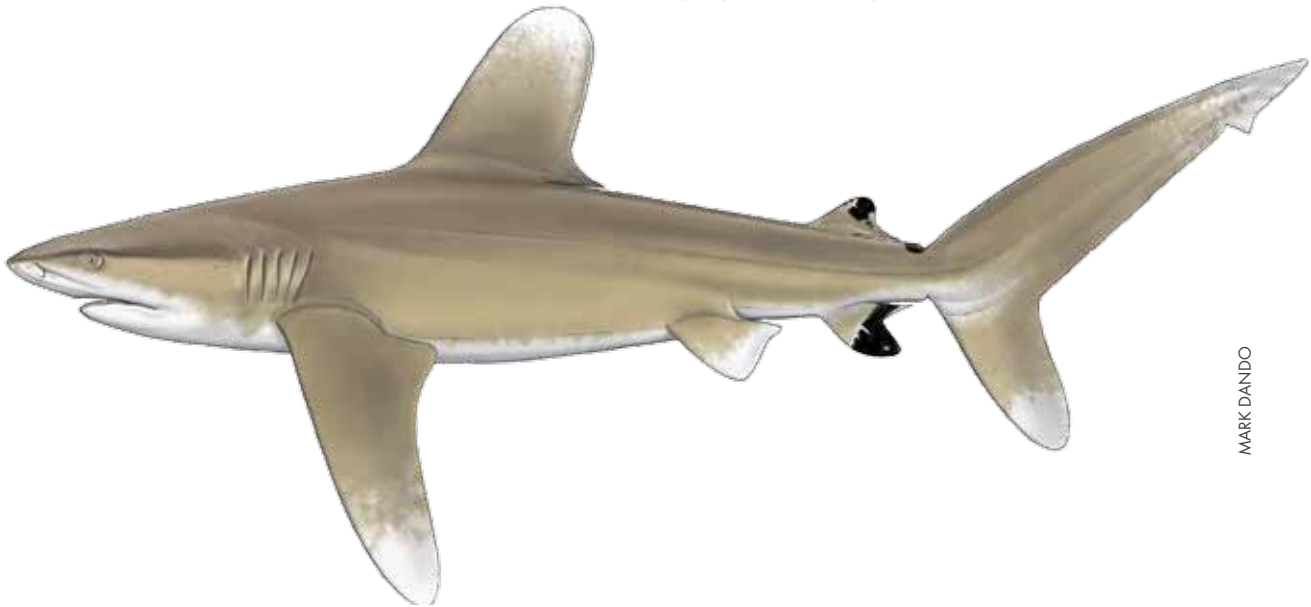


CITES History

The United States and Palau proposed the oceanic whitetip shark for listing in CITES Appendix II at CoP15 in 2010. The proposal received support from a majority of Parties, but not the two-thirds' majority required for adoption.

Expert Advice

IUCN and TRAFFIC have concluded that the oceanic whitetip shark meets the criteria for listing in CITES Appendix II, and TRAFFIC recommends that Parties support the proposal. The ad hoc Expert Panel convened by FAO to review CITES proposals for marine species also agreed that the species meets the decline criteria for inclusion in Appendix II. The CITES Secretariat recommends that this proposal be adopted.



MARK DANDO

Call to action

Listing the oceanic whitetip shark under CITES Appendix II is:

- **Warranted under the listing criteria;**
- **Essential to ensuring that international trade is held to sustainable levels;**
- **Complementary to fisheries management and recovery efforts;**
- **Key to improving data on fisheries and trade; and**
- **Consistent with numerous international and regional policy commitments.**

Our coalition urges CITES Parties to vote in favor of Proposal #42 to list the oceanic whitetip shark (*Carcharhinus longimanus*) on CITES Appendix II at CoP16.

References

Information in this fact sheet is based on that in the listing proposal, the associated IUCN/TRAFFIC analyses, the TRAFFIC Recommendations, the 2012 FAO Ad Hoc Expert Panel report, the CITES Secretariat's findings, and:

Clarke, S. C., Harley, S. J., Hoyle, S. D. and Rice, J. S. 2012. Population Trends in Pacific Oceanic Sharks and the Utility of Regulations on Shark Finning. Conservation Biology. doi: 10.1111/j.1523-1739.2012.01943.x

