



Initiative launched to Avert Crisis for Critically Endangered Mediterranean Angel Sharks

Tunis, 29 March, 2019. Just five days after the IUCN reconfirmed all three species of Mediterranean angel sharks are Critically Endangered, regional and international experts gathered together in Tunisia. Brought together by the Shark Trust and the IUCN Shark Specialist Group (SSG), the meeting represents the first initiative to develop the roadmap to restore these enigmatic species to robust populations in the region. Drawing on a wealth of knowledge, existing experience of the Angel Shark Conservation Network partners, and with a commitment to work together for these species as a priority, participants started to develop a concrete set of actions.

The Mediterranean Sea is a hotspot of extinction risk for sharks and rays. Thirty-eight out of 73 shark and ray species are threatened, facing an elevated risk of extinction, yet retained as valuable bycatch of intensive trawl and net fisheries. While protected on paper throughout the Mediterranean since 2012, angel sharks remain exposed to fisheries pressure by those coastal states yet to act on their commitments.

Twenty-three species of angel shark are found globally. The three species found in the Mediterranean are the Angelshark (*Squatina squatina*), Smoothback Angelshark (*Squatina oculata*) and the Sawback Angelshark (*Squatina aculeata*). Living in coastal waters and growing to over 1.5 metres long, angel sharks are at risk from fishing and habitat degradation.

“Angel sharks are the second most threatened family of sharks in the world,” said Professor Nicholas Dulvy, SSG Co-chair based at Simon Fraser University. “All three angel shark species found in the Mediterranean Sea were formerly abundant in coastal waters but have declined to the point where few records are documented each year. Consequently, they are listed as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List.”

Professor Bradai, Head of the Marine Biodiversity Laboratory, for the National Institute of Sciences and Technologies of the Sea (INSTM) voiced his support, and his pleasure in hosting the event. Saying “I applaud this important step toward the development of this Regional Action Plan, the first of its kind in the Mediterranean Sea,” going on to highlight the level of scientific and conservation expertise of participants in this process.

“In 2012, the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean banned the retention of 24 species of exceptionally threatened sharks and rays, including angel sharks,” noted Ali Hood, Director of Conservation for the Shark Trust. “The initial findings of this workshop further highlight the importance of effective implementation – we are calling on Mediterranean countries to uphold their commitments and will be seeking their active participation in this initiative.”

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Notes to Editors:

Workshop participants included: Angel Shark Project (Zoological Society of London and Zoological Research Museum Alexander Koenig); Conservation of Migratory Species (CMS) secretariat; IUCN Shark Specialist Group (SSG); IUCN Mediterranean / Institute for Biological Resources and Marine Biotechnology - National Research Council (IRBIM-CNR); iSea; Italian National Institute for Environmental Protection and Research (ISPRA); National Agricultural Institute of Tunisia (INAT) / Nature Link; National Institute of Sciences and Technologies of the Sea (INSTM); Regional Activity Center for Specially Protected Areas (RAC/SPA); Omar Al-Mukhtar University / Libya Marine Conservation Society; Save the Med Foundation; Submon; The Advocacy Hub; The Shark Trust; World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) Mediterranean Initiative.

Species information. For further details on all three Critically Endangered Angel Shark visit iucnredlist.org:

- [Angelshark \(*Squatina squatina*\)](#)
- [Sawback Angelshark \(*Squatina aculeata*\)](#)
- [Smoothback Angelshark \(*Squatina oculata*\)](#)

Existing angel shark conservation frameworks include:

- The Eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean Angel Shark Conservation Strategy. [EN/FR/ESP](#)
- Angelshark Action Plan for the Canary Islands. [EN/ESP](#)
- Angel shark conservation activities are coordinated through the [Angel Shark Conservation Network](#).

The General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM): In 2012 the GFCM banned retention of 24 Mediterranean elasmobranch species listed on Annex II of the Barcelona Convention (GFCM/36/2012/3 now GCFM/42/2018/2). Sharkleague.org

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