



CITES APPENDIX II LISTINGS

TROUBLED THRESHERS

SRI LANKA'S PROPOSAL
TO LIST THRESHER SHARKS ON
APPENDIX II OF CITES





KEY FACTS

BIGEYE, COMMON, AND PELAGIC THRESHER SHARKS

Bigeye thresher sharks take as long as 13 years to mature, and after a 12-month pregnancy typically give birth to only two pups. These life history characteristics of late maturity and low fecundity make them highly vulnerable to overexploitation through fisheries^{1,3}.

Thresher sharks are easily identified by their extended caudal or tail fin, which they use in a whip-like fashion to stun prey⁴.

Shark dive tourism is a rapidly expanding industry and the Philippines is home to the most popular thresher shark dive destination in the world.

CITES APPENDIX II LISTINGS

A NECESSARY STEP TO ENSURE SUSTAINABLE THRESHER SHARK POPULATIONS

Acknowledging the severe population declines of thresher sharks worldwide, the Government of Sri Lanka has proposed all three species be listed on Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). The thresher shark family (*Alopias* spp.) includes the bigeye, common, and pelagic thresher shark. In 2014, *Alopias* spp. were identified as the world's most vulnerable family of pelagic sharks due to a lack of global management and the threat of the unsustainable shark fin trade¹.

Historically, thresher sharks played an important role in the Sri Lankan onshore and offshore shark fisheries – making up nearly 20% of the total shark catch by the Sri Lankan fleet in 1994². However, this catch dropped significantly over the next decade, indicating widespread declines in the population. In response to the reported declines in thresher shark catches throughout the Indian Ocean, in 2010, the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) prohibited all retention of thresher sharks in their fisheries.

In response to the IOTC prohibition, in 2012, Sri Lanka imposed a total ban on catching, retaining, transshipping, landing, and selling of any thresher sharks. Recognizing the severe threat to thresher sharks worldwide, Sri Lanka is now calling on Governments to promote sustainable trade of these species through an Appendix II CITES listing at CoP17.



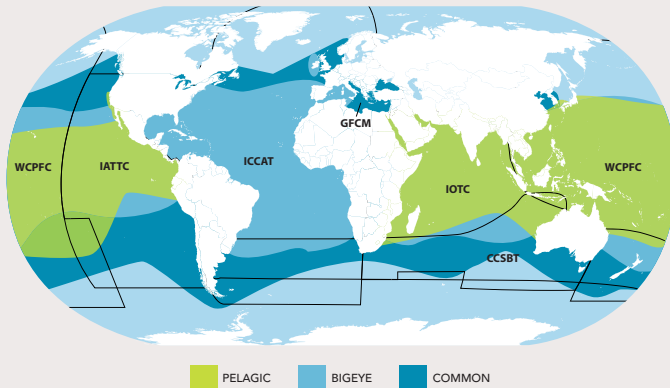
A PRESSING THREAT

GLOBAL THRESHER SHARK DECLINES

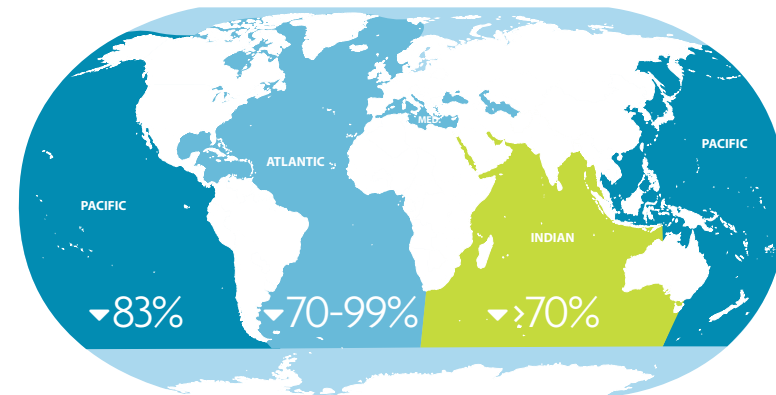
High levels of fishing pressure have led to rapid declines of thresher shark populations around the world, as noted by scientific research, fisheries stock assessments, and ecological risk assessments conducted throughout their range^{3,5,6}. The demand for shark fins is driving the overexploitation of these species. In the early 2000's, *Alopias* spp. fins comprised approximately 2.3% of all shark fins transiting through Hong Kong, representing between 350,000 and 3.9 million thresher sharks per year⁷. By 2015, the proportion of thresher shark fins in this market had declined to some 0.03-0.53% (median 0.20%) of all shark species represented⁸. This, combined with reported catches and other trend data, confirms that thresher shark catches have been significantly underreported, that populations are declining, and that RFMO measures for thresher shark conservation lack compliance monitoring and enforcement.

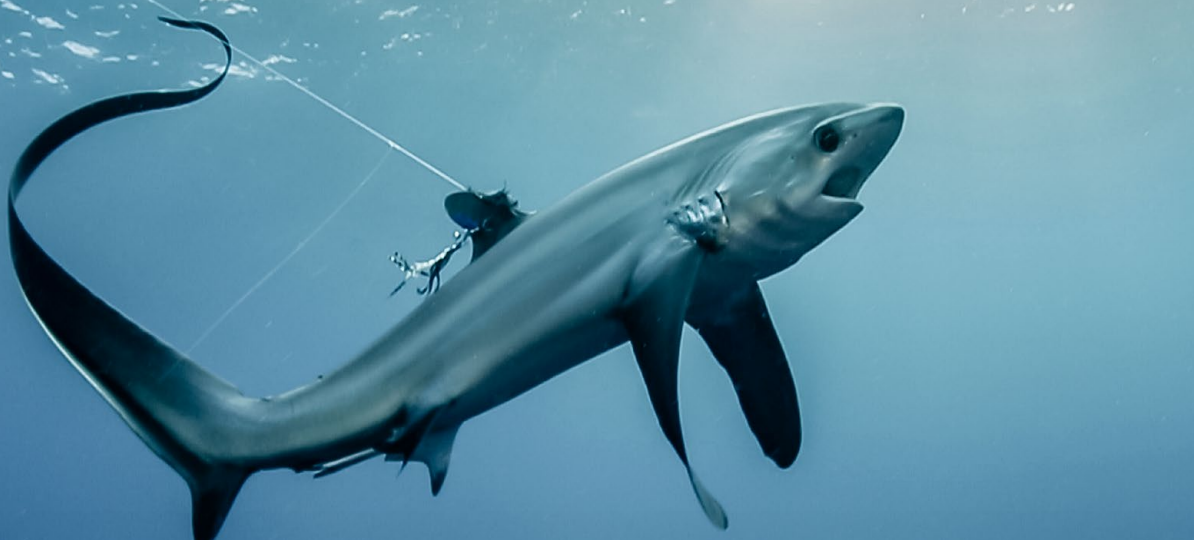
DISTRIBUTION MAP WITH RFMO CONVENTION AREAS

Bigeye, common and pelagic thresher sharks are categorized by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) on the Red List™ as Vulnerable globally.



POPULATION DECLINES ACROSS RANGE^{5,6,8,9,10,11}





KEY FACTS

RFMO PROTECTION IS LIMITED

Despite these regional protections, catches of thresher sharks reported to FAO have continued to rise in the Atlantic and have only fallen slightly in the Indian Ocean.

CURRENT CHALLENGES

MANAGEMENT GAPS – Two of the major Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMO's) have protections for thresher sharks - the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT), has prohibited retention of the bigeye thresher shark and the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) has prohibited the retention of all species of thresher sharks (family *Alopiidae*). However, the lack of global management outside of these two RFMOs still leaves thresher sharks vulnerable over a majority of their range due to unsustainable catch rates, as target and bycatch species in offshore tuna and swordfish longline, and gillnet fisheries.

THRESHER SHARKS AND CMS – in 2014, the 120 Parties to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) listed *Alopias* spp. on Appendix II of the Convention, thereby identifying *Alopias* spp. as shark species in need of conservation action. In 2016, the 40 Signatories added thresher sharks to the Annex of the CMS Memorandum of Understanding on Migratory Sharks. Member and MOU signatory governments now must, *inter alia*, coordinate through global or regional agreements, organizations, and fora to better protect and manage these migratory species. A CITES Appendix II listing would allow for governments around the world to fulfill their obligations under CMS for thresher species.

THRESHER SHARK PROTECTION THROUGH CITES – CITES has long been considered one of the best tools to ensure global trade does not threaten the survival of a species. An Appendix II listing requires international trade to be regulated at sustainable levels with specimens obtained from legal sources. Considering the high level of demand for thresher shark fins in the global shark fin trade, an Appendix II listing is necessary to prevent such trade from driving these species toward extinction.



MAKING PROGRESS

PREVIOUS CITES SHARK LISTINGS AND TOOLS FOR FUTURE SUCCESS

In March 2013, Parties to CITES added porbeagle, oceanic whitetip, and three species of hammerhead sharks – scalloped, great, and smooth – as well as both species of manta ray to CITES Appendix II. The protections went into effect on September 14th 2014 and implementation efforts to date have been a global effort.

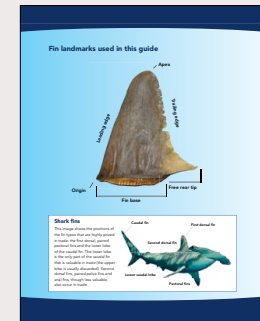
A series of workshops in each region of the world have provided training to research and enforcement officials implementing the listings. The workshops focus on developing Non-Detriment Findings (NDF's) to determine sustainability of the stocks being harvested, exploring how CITES listings can complement other management measures including those in RFMO's, and utilizing the available tools to identify CITES listed species in trade. Workshops to ensure the effective implementation of the 2013 CITES shark listings will continue, with updates to focus on implementation of upcoming listings.

FIN ID GUIDE - The ability for wildlife inspectors, customs agents, and fisheries personnel to identify CITES listed shark species is critical. A comprehensive fin ID guide developed for the 2013 CITES shark listings allows officials to identify fins based solely on their morphological characteristics ¹². Since the listings came into force, over 500 officials from dozens of countries have been trained to quickly distinguish fins of CITES listed species from non-CITES listed species during routine inspections.

The fins of thresher sharks are highly distinctive and just like the 2013 listings, can be easily visually identified. A Fin ID guide has already been developed for thresher sharks, enabling easy enforcement of a potential CITES Appendix II listing ¹³, particularly as the fins are primarily traded dried and unprocessed. When combined with the previous fin ID guide, this guide will help key personnel visually identify a significant proportion of the fins traded based on species composition of the Hong Kong market ^{7,8}.

Similarly, molecular tools have been created that can identify the 2013 CITES listed species by using specific genetic protocols. Such tools can be used when identification based on morphological characteristics is not possible, specifically when attempting to identify shark meat or processed fins, or when visual identification requires additional confirmation for prosecution purposes. These molecular tools have been developed for thresher sharks as well, further confirming that implementation and enforcement of a CITES Appendix II listing for thresher sharks is indeed possible.

FIN ID GUIDE



A comprehensive fin ID guide was developed for the 2013 CITES shark listings and the upcoming 2016 listings to aid officials..





KEY FACTS

UP TO

3.9 million

THRESHER SHARKS ARE KILLED EACH YEAR IN COMMERCIAL FISHERIES.

These catch rates are unsustainable for thresher species. Without global protections, these populations are being pushed closer to extinction.

CONCLUSION

As top predators, sharks are essential to the health of the ocean, but their populations are severely threatened and an estimated 100 million are killed in commercial fisheries each year. Thresher sharks in particular have experienced significant global population declines and are likely to be pushed closer to extinction unless enforceable measures are put in place worldwide to protect them from overexploitation. A CITES Appendix II listing would allow for sustainable and regulated commercial trade of thresher shark fins and other products, while simultaneously offering an opportunity for these populations to recover and survive for generations to come.



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