

Barcelona Convention:

The necessity of Annex II protection for threatened sharks & rays

The 17th meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention is a critical opportunity for the protection of elasmobranchs (sharks and rays) in the Mediterranean Sea:

- Ten species of threatened and endangered elasmobranchs are proposed for protection under Annex II (List of Endangered and Threatened Species) of the Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity (SPA/BD).
- The best available data show that these species – including hammerhead sharks, shortfin makos, and guitarfish – have undergone severe population declines (> 99%) and/or vanished from parts of the Mediterranean where they were once common (see **Table 1**, overleaf).
- All ten species are currently listed under Annex III, which requires their exploitation to be regulated – yet they remain threatened by overfishing and require stronger protection.
- Uplisting these threatened fish to Annex II is the most appropriate measure for safeguarding them, and is a necessary complementary to fisheries management.

Mediterranean Sea: The most dangerous place in the world for sharks & rays

- The Mediterranean Sea is the region of highest risk in the world for elasmobranchs, with 40% of species considered threatened, compared with 17% globally.¹
- Elasmobranchs grow slowly, mature late, and have low reproductive potential. As a result, they are highly vulnerable to overfishing and habitat loss, and populations are slow to recover once depleted.
- Some threatened Mediterranean sharks and rays have undergone serious declines in abundance, biomass, and/or area of distribution. Overfishing is the greatest recognised cause of these declines – whether through target fisheries or by-catch – and continues to threaten these vulnerable fishes. Habitat loss and degradation are additional threats for some species.
- Fishing for some sharks and rays has been prohibited by the EU (e.g., porbeagles), Spain (hammerhead and thresher sharks) and Israel (all elasmobranchs), but most shark fisheries are unmanaged.
- Neither of the two major Regional Fisheries Management Organisations in the Mediterranean is likely to assume responsibility for the conservation of sharks and rays. GFCM has never adopted shark measures of its own initiative, while ICCAT shark measures focus on entire species, not only on Mediterranean populations. Neither organisation includes any rays among their species of interest.



Table 1. Ten species of threatened and endangered sharks and rays that need protection under Annex II of the SPA/BD Protocol. Source: Proposals prepared by the RAC/SPA, Oceana, and other elasmobranch experts.

Scientific name	Common name	Red List Status, Mediterranean	Conservation status	Threats
<i>Galeorhinus galeus</i>	Tope	Vulnerable	Once common in coastal waters, now a rare by-catch Severe population decline: >99.97% over 25 years	Overfishing (bycatch) Habitat degradation
<i>Isurus oxyrinchus</i>	Shortfin mako	Critically Endangered	Once common, now virtually disappeared from some areas Severe population decline: >99.99% over 106-135 yrs	Overfishing (any catches are likely unsustainable)
<i>Lamna nasus</i>	Porbeagle	Critically Endangered	Now scarce where once common, and virtually disappeared from Mediterranean records Severe population decline: >99.99% over 106-135 years	Overfishing (any catches are likely unsustainable)
<i>Leucoraja circularis</i>	Sandy skate	Critically Endangered	Substantial reduction in area of occurrence, with local extinctions Significant population decline over 50 years Rare in many parts of its range	Overfishing (bycatch)
<i>Leucoraja melitensis</i>	Maltese skate	Critically Endangered	Absent or rare from areas where once common Considered under imminent extinction threat	Overfishing (bycatch, especially in trawls)
<i>Rhinobatos cemiculus</i> <i>R. rhinobatos</i>	Blackchin guitarfish Common guitarfish	Endangered	Severe declines in abundance and area of occupancy Once common, now virtually extirpated from northern Mediterranean	Overfishing Degradation of shallow inshore habitats
<i>Sphyrna lewini</i> <i>S. mokarran</i> <i>S. zygaena</i>	Scalloped hammerhead Great hammerhead Smooth hammerhead	Endangered (<i>S. lewini</i> , <i>S. mokarran</i>) Vulnerable (<i>S. zygaena</i>)	Rapid declines in catches Severe population decline: > 99.99% over 107-178 yrs	Overfishing (with high post-capture mortality) and high commercial value of fins

ⁱ Abdul Malak, D. et al. (2011). *Overview of the Conservation Status of the Marine Fishes of the Mediterranean Sea*. Gland, Switzerland and Malaga, Spain: IUCN. vii + 61pp.