

The conservation status of sharks

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Many shark populations have been seriously depleted by unsustainable levels of target fishing and through 'bycatch' mortality in fisheries targeting other fish stocks. Sharks and their relatives are highly vulnerable to depletion because of their slow reproductive rates, and it can take many decades for populations to rebuilt once driven to a low level. The IUCN Shark Specialist Group has spent over ten years assessing the conservation status all of the 1040 species of shark, skate, ray and chimaera that had been described by scientists before 2008. Some of the results of this global shark assessment will be presented, with particular emphasis on species occurring in the Northeast Atlantic and Mediterranean Seas. Several international and regional biodiversity conventions have now begun to use the results of the Shark Specialist Group's study to identify and protect shark species that are at highest risk of extinction. Fisheries management measures are also now being adopted for commercial and threatened shark species. These initiatives will be described briefly and future conservation and management needs for sharks in European seas will be outlined.