

# Shark Beats

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**Short, quick pops of information to help enhance your speeches, policy development, media interviews and soundbites, presentations and general message sharing when it comes to 'all things shark'.**

**We hope you find these helpful!**



**SPREP**

Secretariat of the Pacific Regional  
Environment Programme



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## Why sharks are important for us

Sharks help maintain the health of the marine life in the ocean, including the population of commercially important fish species.

As many sharks are top predators of the food web, a decline in shark populations can have cascading effects throughout the marine ecosystem.

Sharks have existed for more than 400 million years; depleting shark populations can lead to unpredictable consequences.

Coral reefs in particular benefit from a healthy shark population to maintain a balance in trophic levels.

Healthy reefs are vital for tourism. Science now shows that sharks help maintain the health of coral reefs.

An individual reef shark is estimated to be valued at USD 1.9 M over its lifetime to the tourism industry.

The shark diving industry contributed USD 42.2 M to the Fijian economy in 2011.<sup>1</sup>

Sharks are culturally important to Pacific Islanders, they are featured in our Pacific island legends, proverbs and songs.



## Sharks are threatened with extinction

Between 63 million to 273 million sharks are killed each year in commercial fisheries to meet the high demand of shark fins.

One third of species found in the global fin trade are threatened with extinction.<sup>2</sup>

It has been estimated that more than 20 million blue sharks are caught annually, these are the dominant species in the global shark fin trade.<sup>3</sup>

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) estimates that 54% of sharks and rays are threatened or near threatened with extinction.

- 1 GMS Vianna, JJ Meeuwig, D Pannell, H Skyes and MG Meekan (2011) The socio-economic value of the shark-diving industry in Fiji. Australian Institute of Marine Science. University of Western Australia. Perth (26pp).
- 2 Fields, A.T., Fischer, G.A., Shea S.K.H., Zhang, H., Abercrombie, D.L., Feldheim K.A., Babcock, E.A., and Chapman, D. 2017. Species composition of the international chondrichthyan fin trade assessed by a retail market survey in Hong Kong. Conservation Biology.
- 3 Stevens, J. 2009. *Prionace glauca*. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2009: e.T39381A10222811. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2009-2.RLTS.T39381A10222811.en>. Downloaded on 26 September 2017



## Management measures

The Pacific islands have demonstrated global leadership, as strong advocates promoting shark conservation and management at global and international forums.

CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) member countries are legally obliged to implement regulations to control the trade of species listed in its Appendices.

Shark sanctuaries enforce and prohibit all commercial fishing, sale and trade of sharks and retention of sharks caught as bycatch within a country's full exclusive economic zone (EEZ). These important conservation measures help keep sharks protected, and provide valuable ecosystem, environmental and economic benefits.

Shark sanctuaries are an effective tool to ensure CITES compliance of all current and future listings as well as obligations under regional fisheries management organisations (RFMOs).

The Pacific islands established large national or territory-wide protection of sharks through sanctuaries which includes the first regional shark sanctuary.



## Our choices and what we can do

Carry out outreach campaigns to promote awareness for sharks.

Implement policies and laws that make enforcement at ports easier.

Have in place effective and strong measures for the protection of sharks in their sanctuary that includes the prohibition of:

- Commercial fishing of sharks in the entire EEZ.
- The sale, import, export, and possession of sharks and shark parts, including fins.
- Use of fishing gear typically used to target sharks.
- Prohibit bycatch retention.
- Establish MPAs for critical and important habitats for sharks.

## Did you know?

An estimated total area of 17 million sq. km has been established as shark sanctuaries in the Pacific islands and includes the following countries:

Country	EEZ Size	Sanctuary Declared
Palau	608,289 km <sup>2</sup>	2009
Marshall Islands	2 million km <sup>2</sup>	2011
Cook Islands	2 million km <sup>2</sup>	2012
French Polynesia	4.8 million km <sup>2</sup>	2012
New Caledonia	1.2 million km <sup>2</sup>	2013
Federated States of Micronesia	3 million km <sup>2</sup>	2015
Kiribati	3.4 million km <sup>2</sup>	2015
Samoa	128,000 km <sup>2</sup>	2018

## Definitions

**Depredation** is the direct removal and/or preying of captured fish from fishing gears.

**Bycatch** refers to the catch of non-targeted or incidental catch of fish and other wildlife, including what is brought to port and/or discarded at sea, dead or alive.

**Fecund** refers to the capacity to reproduce.



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*A resilient Pacific environment, sustaining our livelihoods and natural heritage in harmony with our cultures.*



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