



Shark Management

The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act requires overfished shark stocks to be rebuilt and requires healthy shark populations to be maintained. Many shark stocks, particularly in the Atlantic, are overfished and must be rebuilt.

In 2002, the United States enacted a ban on shark finning, which prohibits any person, under U.S. jurisdiction, from engaging in shark finning or possessing shark fins, harvested on board a U.S. fishing vessel, without the corresponding carcasses. Finning is defined as the practice of removing the fin(s) from a shark and discarding the remainder of the shark at sea.

NOAA's Highly Migratory Species management division (HMS) manages seventy-two species of sharks, which are divided into four species groups for management: large coastal sharks (LCS), small coastal sharks (SCS), pelagic sharks, and prohibited sharks. The LCS complex is comprised of 11 species including sandbar, silky, tiger, blacktip, spinner, bull, lemon, nurse, scalloped hammerhead, great hammerhead, and smooth hammerhead sharks. SCS consist of finetooth, Atlantic sharpnose, blacknose, and bonnethead sharks. Pelagic sharks consist of blue, oceanic whitetip, porbeagle, shortfin mako, and thresher sharks. Prohibited sharks consist of sand tiger, bigeye sand tiger, whale, basking, white, dusky, bignose, Galapagos, night, Caribbean reef, smalltail, Caribbean sharpnose, narrowtooth, Atlantic angel, longfin mako, bigeye thresher, sevengill, sixgill, and bigeye sixgill sharks.

The United States is a conservation leader internationally and was a key player in developing the Food and Agriculture Organization's International Plan of Action for the Conservation and Management of Sharks. The United States and Australia are the only two nations (out of 87 shark fishing nations) to develop a National Plan of Action for the Conservation and Management of Sharks. The United States has participated or plans on participating in bilateral meetings regarding shark management with Japan, Spain, Taiwan, the European Union, Canada, China, and Mexico.



In the Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico, and Caribbean Sea:

- All Federal fisheries for sharks, except dogfish, are managed under the Fishery Management Plan for Atlantic tunas, swordfish, and sharks.
- Sandbar sharks and dusky sharks are overfished and overfishing is occurring.
- Porbeagle sharks are overfished; however, overfishing is not occurring.
- Pelagic sharks (e.g., blue, shortfin mako, thresher) population status is unknown, however an international assessment in 2004 indicated that blue sharks do not seem to be currently overfished, and that shortfin mako sharks may be overfished with overfishing possibly occurring.
- Commercial fishermen are restricted by quotas, trip limits, and limited access permits.
- Recreational fishermen are restricted by bag limits and a minimum size.
- All fishermen are prohibited from keeping 19 species of sharks including white, whale, and basking sharks.
- NOAA Fisheries has designated certain areas as essential fish habitat.
- NOAA Fisheries will be conducting a stock assessment for small coastal sharks throughout 2007.

In the Pacific:

- The status of most shark species in the Pacific Ocean is unknown. Recent assessments found that the blue shark population is healthy and the common thresher and Pacific angel shark populations are in recovery.
- Approved portions of the Fishery Management Plan for U.S. West Coast Highly Migratory Species was published as a final rule in April 2004 (includes CA, OR, and WA). The plan enacts harvest guidelines for mako and common thresher sharks and coastwide protection for white, megamouth, and basking sharks.
- The Western Pacific Pelagic Fisheries Fishery Management Plan (includes HI, AS, GU) covers sharks including blue, mako, and thresher sharks
- In the North Pacific (includes AK), sharks are covered under the Groundfish Fishery Management Plan. This includes salmon, sleeper, and dogfish sharks.

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