Blue Shark (*Prionace glauca*)

Proposed action: Inclusion on CMS Appendix II
Proponents: Samoa and Sri Lanka

Overview

Shark species around the world face a wide variety of threats, including overfishing. The blue shark is likely the most frequently caught shark in the world, partially due to its long migration patterns and vulnerability to fishing pressure. The species is among the world's most highly migratory fish species. The blue shark is on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species as Near Threatened globally, according to the 2005 assessment. As of 2016, the Mediterranean population was considered Critically Endangered. Their fins remain the most heavily traded of all species in the Hong Kong fin trade. An attempt was made to collect data on the blue shark catches in the Pacific, but no actions were taken because the data was insufficient for providing management advice. Listing the blue shark on Appendix II would allow for collaborative management and could prevent the fishing pressure on this species from detrimentally being increased.

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Biology and Distribution

Blue sharks are high trophic level predators that primarily feed on pelagic fish and squids. The species has a gestation period of between 9-12 months and an average litter size of 34 pups. Reproductive characteristics differ between oceans, but in general males mature between 4-6 years old and females between 5-7 years old.

Blue sharks are found around the world in both temperate and tropical waters, though their populations are usually smaller in warm equatorial waters. The species occurs circumglobally in tropical, subtropical, and warm-temperate waters, both on the high seas and within Exclusive Economic Zones. They have been found as deep as 600 meters in the ocean.

Population Status and Threats

The blue shark is assessed as Near Threatened globally. The International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tuna (ICCAT) did a stock assessment for the Atlantic populations of blue sharks and found that while biomass was relatively high, the possibility that the population is being overfished cannot be ruled out.

A stock assessment by the U.S. National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) suggests that the North Atlantic and North Pacific population is decreasing by more than 5% each year. The population decline in the Mediterranean region is more severe and may be partly attributed to the exploitation of immature individuals in large pelagic fisheries. Studies show that the blue sharks have not had sufficient opportunity to reproduce in Mediterranean waters, which is one reason why that population is assessed as Critically Endangered.

Uses

Blue sharks are caught extensively in high seas targeted fisheries and are vulnerable to fishing pressure. They are likely the most frequently caught large shark in the world's oceans. The species' transoceanic migrations result in many fisheries having access to blue sharks, which is partially why so many are being caught. Blue sharks are used in national and international trade. They are targeted for their fins, but are also caught as bycatch. These sharks are so widely used that ICCAT scientists recommend a 39,000 ton limit on blue shark catches, however this cap has not been adopted.

Conservation Measures

None of the major Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs) have adopted catch limits for the blue shark. If North Atlantic catches rise above recent levels, ICCAT has indicated that it may be prepared to adopt catch limits. Listing this species on Appendix II of CMS and including it in Annex 1 of the CMS Shark MOU would facilitate collaborative management between range states.

Expert Advice

ICCAT scientists recommend placing a cap on the number of blue sharks that can be caught in the South Atlantic where the population is of particular concern. No such action has been taken.

The CMS Scientific Council recommends the inclusion of the blue shark on Appendix II of the Convention. The Council found that the species meets all of the criteria for inclusion in Appendix II and should be entitled to the protections provided by such listing. They found that blue sharks are highly migratory and make long-distance, transoceanic migrations. The Council notes that several stock assessments will be performed in the near future, which will provide more data about several populations of blue sharks.

CALL TO ACTION

Benefits from listing this species under CMS Appendix II depend on concrete follow-up actions. If properly implemented, listing *Prionace glauca* could:

- ensure improved protection and encourage actions to prevent pressure from overfishing;
- encourage regulation of the amount of blue sharks caught in every ocean where they occur; and
- facilitate regional cooperation toward conservation of shared populations and key habitats.

We urge CMS Parties to support inclusion of *Prionace glauca* on CMS Appendix II at CoP12.

References

Information in this fact sheet is based on the CMS listing proposal and relevant IUCN Red List assessments.