

## Common Guitarfish (*Rhinobatos rhinobatos*)

<b>Proposed action:</b>	Inclusion on CMS Appendices II
<b>Proponents:</b>	Israel, Mauritania, Senegal, and Togo
<b>Proposed action:</b>	Inclusion of the Mediterranean population of the Guitarfish on CMS in Appendix I
<b>Proponent:</b>	Israel

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### Overview

The common guitarfish is considered by the IUCN as one of the most threatened fish in the Mediterranean Sea, largely due to overfishing. It is currently listed as Endangered at the global level. Many species of guitarfish migrate seasonally to give birth, which makes them vulnerable to several types of fishing activities. The species would benefit in its Mediterranean and western African ranges from cooperative regional and international management. Israel proposes listing the global population of the common guitarfish on CMS Appendix II and the Mediterranean Sea population of the same taxon on Appendix I as well. Mauritania, Senegal, and Togo are also proposing listing the global population of this species on Appendix II.

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## Biology and Distribution

*Rhinobatos rhinobatos* is a cartilaginous fish in the Rhinobatidae family of rays. *R. rhinobatos* is a bottom-dwelling species that consumes a variety of crustaceans, fishes, and mollusks. The species has been present in waters as deep as 100 m throughout the Mediterranean and in the sub-tropical regions of the eastern Atlantic from the Bay of Biscay to Angola. This species occurred throughout the Mediterranean, but appears to have been more prevalent in the southern and eastern regions. While historical information indicates the presence of *R. rhinobatos* in northern and western Mediterranean waters, they appear to have been extirpated in that part of their range. They occur regularly in the eastern Mediterranean in Israel.

Many species of guitarfish exhibit a seasonal migration pattern typically moving into near-shore shallow waters to give birth. According to regional fishers in Mauritania, Senegal, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, and Sierra Leone, *R. rhinobatos* migrates along the coast of West Africa. Guitarfish exhibit a clear pattern of movement based on their reproductive cycle, as they aggregate seasonally, with females visiting relatively quiet shallow waters for parturition. Similarly, in Israeli waters in the eastern Mediterranean, gravid female *R. rhinobatos* can be found predictably migrating into coastal shallow waters from mid-August to November for parturition. Increased observations of neonates in shallow waters during this time also confirmations migration.

## Population Status and Threats

There are no quantitative abundance estimates for *R. rhinobatos* throughout its range. The IUCN Red List assesses both the global population and the Mediterranean population as Endangered. Fishing pressure is the largest threat facing populations of *R. rhinobatos*. This species has been extirpated in the northern Mediterranean waters largely due to high incidents of bycatch and unregulated fishing. According to IUCN, this species is one of the most endangered fish species in the Mediterranean Sea.

The predictable migration pattern of the guitarfish allows fishers the ability to target adults during this critical phase of their life cycle. Guitarfishes are particularly vulnerable to gillnet and trawl fishing activities.

This species has declined throughout much of its range, and is now likely extinct in the Mediterranean waters of Spain, France, Italy, and likely the entire Adriatic Sea.

## Uses

In some areas, the species is fished in targeted fisheries for local consumption as food. In others, it is caught as bycatch. There is a high rate of targeting and/or retention of this species as secondary catch in north Africa from Tunisia to Egypt.

Along the coast of West Africa, regional fishers in Mauritania, Senegal, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, and Sierra Leone synchronize fishing activities with the migration patterns and reproductive behavior of *R. rhinobatos*. Currently, *R. rhinobatos* is widely fished in the waters of Tunisia where there is a targeted fishery and the species is commonly taken as bycatch. The guitarfish also occurs in fishery landings along the north coast of Africa and in the eastern Mediterranean to southeastern Turkey.

## Conservation Measures

Italy, Lebanon, and Greece have put some legal protections in place for *R. rhinobatos*. The species may not be retained in Tunisia if smaller than 40 cm. In 2011, the European Union (EU) prohibited any EU vessel to fish for, retain on board, ship, land, store, sell, display or offer for sale any species of guitarfish in its Atlantic waters. This protection does not extend to Mediterranean waters, even though there is a clear need for protection to be extended to the Mediterranean. The United States of America, while not a range state for the species, listed *R. rhinobatos* as "Threatened" under the Endangered Species Act on 18 January 2017.

## Expert Advice

The Scientific Council recommends the Mediterranean population of the common guitarfish to be included in Appendix I of CMS. They also recommend adding the global population of the species to Appendix II. Further, the proposals recommend the inclusion of the species in Annex 1 of the CMS Sharks Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

## CALL TO ACTION

Benefits from listing the Mediterranean population of this species under CMS Appendix I and the global population under Appendix II depend on concrete follow-up actions. If properly implemented, listing *Rhinobatos rhinobatos* could:

- improve protection and encourage actions to prevent overfishing;
- provide greater emphasis on the need to protect the species in the entire Mediterranean Sea; and
- facilitate regional cooperation toward conservation of shared populations and key habitats.

**We urge CMS Parties to support the proposals for inclusion of *Rhinobatos rhinobatos* on CMS Appendices I and II at CoP12.**

## References

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