

# Wedgefishes

CoP18 Prop. 44 to include two species commonly referred as white-spotted wedgefish (*Rynchobatus australiae* and *Rynchobatus djiddensis*) in Appendix II in accordance with Article II, paragraph 2(a) of the Convention, and the inclusion of all other species of the family Rhinidae in Appendix II in accordance with Article II, paragraph 2(b).

Sponsored by: Bangladesh, Benin, Bhutan, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Chad, Cote d'Ivoire, Egypt, Ethiopia, European Union, Fiji, Gabon, Gambia, India, Jordan, Kenya, Lebanon, Maldives, Mali, Mexico, Monaco, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, Palau, Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Seychelles, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Togo and Ukraine.



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## RECOMMEND: SUPPORT ADOPTION OF PROPOSAL

The family Rhinidae has been considered to be the third most threatened of all chondrichthyan families (White and McAuley, 2003). The primary threat to these species is unsustainable and unregulated fisheries mortality throughout their range.

According to the IUCN/TRAFFIC Analyses of Proposals to CoP18, *R. australiae* and *R. djiddensis* have been recently re-classified as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. The white-spotted/bottlenose wedgefish (*Rhynchobatus australiae*) was listed in CMS Appendix II in 2017.

### DISTRIBUTION

*R. djiddensis* is found in the Western Indian Ocean, from South Africa to Oman. The range of *R. australiae* overlaps with that of *R. djiddensis*, and also extends into South Asia, South East Asia and Oceania, (Last et al., 2016). Similarities between these species have made identification difficult (Jabado et al., 2017), and their respective ranges were only defined in 2016 (Last et al., 2016). Both species inhabit shallow bays, estuaries, and coastal coral reefs.

### THREATS

Both species are caught by artisanal and commercial fisheries, both as a target species and as bycatch in demersal trawl, net, and longline fisheries, and are retained due to the very high value of their fins in international trade.

In addition to overfishing, habitat degradation and modification are likely among the primary reasons for the declines in abundance and distribution of



Distribution of *R. australiae*.  
Source: Last et al. 2016.



Distribution of *R. djiddensis*.  
Source: Last et al. 2016.

the Rhinidae family worldwide (White et al., 2013).

### TRADE

Information from interviews with fishermen and traders in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) suggests that wedgefish have replaced sawfish as the most sought-after species for the international fin trade market, and are therefore increasingly targeted and retained due to the high value of their fins (Jabado et al., 2015). Furthermore, *R. australiae* and *R. djiddensis* are subject to limited management globally.

As they are inshore range fishes, they are subject to the national laws of countries throughout their range rather than those of regional fisheries bodies and agreements.

Guitarfish and wedgefsh have a specific trade category (“Qun Chi”) in the Hong Kong Shark trade market. This trade category has the highest value of any fin type in trade (Fields et al., 2017). Both of the species commonly referred as white-spotted wedgefsh are part of this category, making the Rhinidae family among the 20 most frequently traded elasmobranch families (Fields et al., 2017).

## DECLINES

Populations of both species of white-spotted wedgefsh (*R. australiae* and *R. djiddensis*) have seen significant declines of up to 80% of their total population in particular regions (Jabado et al., 2017). According to CoP18 Prop. 44, due to the addition of the global footprint of tangle and gillnet fisheries as well as their high fin value in international trade, similar declines are likely to occur in much of the

species’ range (Moore, 2017).

The FAO Expert Panel concluded that there was insufficient evidence to decide if these species merit Appendix II listing. Note, however, that the FAO requires that its expert panel use a narrower interpretation of the CITES listing criteria than CITES itself does. Both the CITES Secretariat and IUCN/TRAFFIC recommend adoption of this listing.

**REGULATION OF INTERNATIONAL TRADE THROUGH AN APPENDIX II LISTING OF THE WHITE-SPOTTED WEDGEFISH IN ACCORDANCE WITH ARTICLE II, PARAGRAPH 2 (A), OF THE CONVENTION AND CRITERION A AND B IN ANNEX 2 A OF RES. CONF. 9.24 (REV. COP17), AND ALL OTHER SPECIES IN THE FAMILY RHINIDAE IN ACCORDANCE WITH ARTICLE II, PARAGRAPH 2 (B), OF THE CONVENTION AND CRITERION A IN ANNEX 2 B OF RES. CONF. 9.24 (REV. COP17) IS NECESSARY TO ENSURE THAT THE SURVIVAL OF ALL SPECIES OF THE RHINIDAE FAMILY IS NOT FURTHER THREATENED WITH EXTINCTION BY INTERNATIONAL TRADE.**

### Summary of *R. australiae* and *R. djiddensis* declines by region (Source: CoP18 Prop. 44):

Region	Noted declines	Reference
Southeast Asia – Oceania	Significant – degree uncertain	Giles et al., 2016; White et al., 2014; White and McAuley, 2003; Chen, 1996; White, unpubl. data.
Southern Asia	86% in less than one generation, near extirpation elsewhere	Jabado et al., 2017; AC30 Inf.12 (Gov. of Pakistan)
Northwest Indian Ocean	50-80% over three generations	Jabado et al., 2017; Moore, 2017
East Africa	Declines noted – degree uncertain	Barrowclift et al., 2017; Hopkins, 2011; Pierce et al., 2008; Schaeffer, 2004

## LITERATURE CITED:

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