

# Conclusion of CITES leads to new protection of sharks and guitarfishes

By Emma Desrochers

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The 19th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) on 25 November, 2022, ended with increased protections for 95 species of sharks and guitarfish.

According to the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), roughly one third of sharks, rays, and chimaeras (cartilaginous fish) are threatened with extinction. The number of species threatened is even higher if data-deficient species are included and assumed threatened. Traded for meat and fins, these species are threatened or endangered due to illegal fishing practices and overfishing.

“Ninety-five species of sharks and guitarfishes received new protection on CITES Appendix II,” Humane Society International Senior Director for Wildlife Rebecca Regnery said. “These species are threatened by the unsustainable and unregulated fisheries that supply the international trade in their meat and fins, which has driven extensive population declines. With Appendix II listing, CITES parties can allow trade only if it is not detrimental to the survival of the species in the wild, giving these species help they need to recover from overexploitation.”

The 95 species now protected by the CITES, or also known as CoP19, include 54 species of requiem sharks, the bonnethead shark, 3 species of hammerhead shark, and 37 species of guitarfishes. The Rob Stewart Sharkwater Foundation said majority of the global fin and shark meat trade is made up of requiem sharks. It will take about 12 months for the changes to go into effect in global trade.

CITES lists species under three appendices depending on the level of protection from exploitation that is needed. The new shark and guitarfish species were added to CITES Appendix II, described as species that are not threatened now – but unless trade is regulated or controlled could become so.

This means international trade of these species can be authorized with an export permit or re-export certificate. Appendix I is for the most endangered species, with prohibition of trade unless it is not commercial. Appendix III are species already regulated by a party that requests a species' addition in order to gain cooperation of other countries with illegal exploitation. Species may be moved between Appendix I and II, or added and removed by the Conference of the Parties.

Three species of sea cucumbers, often harvested for human consumption, also gained new protections. Many species of sea cucumbers these are also threatened or endangered by illegal fishing practices.

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