

# OCEANIC WHITETIP SHARK

(*Carcharhinus longimanus*) proposed for Annex 3

*Highly migratory oceanic species with severe population declines*



## Overview

The global status of the oceanic whitetip shark is assessed by IUCN as Vulnerable, but it is Critically Endangered in the Northwest and Western Central Atlantic because of the severe declines that have been reported. Estimated trends in abundance covering the Northwest and Western Central Atlantic regions estimated declines of 70%, 99.3%, and 98%, although the latter two may be overestimations. Fishing pressure on this species must be considerably decreased through reduction in fishing effort, catch limits, measures to enhance chances of survival after capture, and possibly also through the implementation of large-scale oceanic non-fishing areas. Because of its migratory nature, effective conservation of the oceanic whitetip shark will require international cooperation. The species is listed on Appendix II of CITES, Annex II of the CMS, and recognized as a highly migratory species by UNCLOS. The oceanic whitetip shark, therefore, qualifies for inclusion under Annex 3 of SPAW under Criterion 1, 4, 5 and 6.

- Moderate rebound potential and reproductive rate
- Listed as "Critically Endangered" in West Central Atlantic
- Estimated population declines of >90%
- Highly migratory nature requires international cooperation
- Listed on Appendix II of CITES, Annex II of the CMS MoU, and as a Highly Migratory Species by UNCLOS
- Proposed to be listed as either threatened or endangered under the U.S. Endangered Species Act (ESA)

## Biology and distribution

The oceanic whitetip shark is a globally widespread shark with an oceanic-epipelagic lifestyle. It has occasionally been recorded inshore but is more typically found offshore or around oceanic islands and areas with narrow continental shelves at depths close to the surface. Pregnant females are recorded closer to shore, particularly around the Caribbean Islands.

The species has relatively fast growth and early maturation, resulting in a moderate

intrinsic rebound potential. The population dynamics and structure, however, are unknown. Its distribution appears to depend on the size and sex and the nursery areas are likely oceanic. Very young oceanic whitetip sharks have been found well offshore along the southeastern U.S., suggesting offshore nurseries over the continental shelves. Larger individuals are caught deeper than smaller ones and there is geographic and sexual segregation.

## Population status

The oceanic whitetip shark is listed by IUCN as *Vulnerable* globally, but the Northwest and Western Central Atlantic population are considered *Critically Endangered*. Historically, the oceanic whitetip was caught in large numbers virtually everywhere they occur, particularly in pelagic longline and driftnet fisheries. Two estimates of trends in abundance from standardized catch rate indices that were made from independent datasets covering the Northwest and Western Central Atlantic regions estimated declines of 70%, 99.3%, and 98%, although the latter two may be overestimations.

It appears that the oceanic whitetip shark population in the Northwest Atlantic and the Gulf of Mexico suffered significant historical declines; however, the relative abundance of the shark may have stabilized since 2000 and the late 1990s, respectively.

## Conservation action

The oceanic whitetip is listed under CITES Appendix II, meaning that the species is not necessarily currently threatened with extinction, but may become so unless trade is strictly regulated to avoid utilization incompatible with their survival. International (commercial) trade is thus permitted but regulated. It is also listed as a highly migratory under UNCLOS and under Annex II of the Convention of Migratory Species (CMS).



Few data are available on the catch rate of these sharks, and this is a serious hindrance to assessing the status of this species in regions other than the Northwest Atlantic and Eastern Central Pacific. Only Brazil, Mexico, Spain, St. Lucia and the United States have reported catches to ICCAT, but these data are likely inaccurate and therefore may under-represent the magnitude of catches in the Atlantic Ocean.

This species has been recorded as part of the catch of oceanic longline industrial fisheries in the Colombian Caribbean with mean catch sizes corresponding to juvenile individuals. So this may be impacting developmental areas.

