Press Release

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You can swim but you can't hide – more oceanic sharks on the IUCN Red List

Bonn, Germany, May 22, 2008 (IUCN/Wiley-Blackwell) – The first study to determine the global status of 21 species of oceanic pelagic sharks and rays reveals that 11 of them are threatened with extinction, says IUCN on International Biodiversity Day.

The international study, published in the latest edition of *Aquatic Conservation: Marine and Freshwater Ecosystems*, shows serious overfishing is to blame and recommends key steps that governments can take to safeguard the sharks and rays.

Organized by the IUCN Shark Specialist Group (SSG), the study was conducted by 15 scientists from 13 different research institutes around the world, with additional contributions from scores of other SSG members.

The experts found that the sharks and rays, including the Thresher shark (*Alopias vulpinus*), the Silky shark (*Carcharhinus falciformis*) and the Shortfin mako (*Isurus oxyrinchus*) are at risk of extinction due to targeted fishing for valuable fins and meat, as well as indirect bycatch in other fisheries. In most cases, these catches are unregulated and unsustainable.

"The traditional view of oceanic sharks and rays as fast and powerful too often leads to a misperception that they are resilient to fishing pressure," says **Sonja Fordham, co-author of the paper and Deputy Chair of the IUCN SSC Shark Specialist Group (SSG)**. *"Despite mounting evidence of decline and increasing threats to these species, there are no international catch limits for oceanic sharks. Our research shows that action is urgently needed on a global level if these fisheries are to be sustainable."*

The increasing demand for the delicacy 'shark fin soup', driven by rapidly growing Asian economies, means that often the valuable shark fins are retained and the carcasses discarded. Frequently, discarded sharks and rays are not even recorded.

Sharks and rays are particularly vulnerable to overfishing due to their tendency to take many years to become sexually mature and have relatively few offspring.

"Fishery managers and regional, national and international officials have a real obligation to improve this situation," says **lead author Nicholas Dulvy, who is based at Simon Fraser University, Vancouver**. *"We are losing species at a rate 10 to 100 times greater than historic extinction rates. Humans are making increasing use of ocean resources so many more aquatic species, particularly sharks, are coming under threat. But it doesn't have to be like this. With sufficient public support and resulting political will, we can turn the tide."*

The group's specific recommendations for governments address the need to

- Establish and enforce science-based catch limits for sharks and rays
- Ensure an end to shark finning (removing fins and discarding bodies at sea)
- Improve the monitoring of fisheries taking sharks and rays
- Invest in shark and ray research and population assessment
- Minimize incidental catch ('bycatch') of sharks and rays
- Cooperate with other countries to conserve shared populations.

Notes to editors

Table of ocean pelagic sharks and their global IUCN Red List status

NB: Assessments marked with an asterisk (*) below have been submitted and accepted for inclusion in the 2008 IUCN Red List.

Family	Species	English common name	Global IUCN Red List status*	Year of assessment
Rhincodontidae	*Rhincodon typus*	Whale shark	Vulnerable A1bd+2d	2000
Odontaspididae	*Odontaspis noronhai*	Bigeye sand tiger	Data Deficient	2000
Pseudocarchariidae	*Pseudocarcharias kamoharai*	Crocodile shark	Near Threatened	2000
Megachasmidae	*Megachasma pelagios*	Megamouth shark	Data Deficient	2000
Alopiidae	*Alopias pelagicus*	Pelagic thresher	*Vulnerable A2d+4d	2008
Alopiidae	*Alopias superciliosus*	Bigeye thresher	*Vulnerable A2bd	2008
Alopiidae	*Alopias vulpinus*	Thresher shark	*Vulnerable A2bd+3bd+4bd	2008
Cetorhinidae	*Cetorhinus maximus*	Basking shark	Vulnerable A1ad+2d	2000
Lamnidae	*Carcharodon carcharias*	Great white shark	Vulnerable A1cd+2cd	2000
Lamnidae	*Isurus oxyrinchus*	Shortfin mako	*Vulnerable A2abd+3bd+4ad	2008
Lamnidae	*Isurus paucus*	Longfin mako	Vulnerable A2bd+3d+4bd	2005
Lamnidae	*Lamna ditropis*	Salmon shark	*Least Concern	2008
Lamnidae	*Lamna nasus*	Porbeagle shark	Vulnerable A2bd+3d+4bd	2006
Carcharhinidae	*Carcharhinus falciformis*	Silky shark	*Near Threatened	2008
Carcharhinidae	*Carcharhinus longimanus*	Oceanic whitetip shark	Vulnerable A2ad+3d+4ad	2006
Carcharhinidae	*Prionace glauca*	Blue shark	Near Threatened	2000
Dasyatidae	*Pteroplatytrygon violacea*	Pelagic stingray	*Least Concern	2008
Mobulidae	*Manta birostris*	Manta ray	Near Threatened	2006
Mobulidae	*Mobula japanica*	Spinetail devilray	Near Threatened	2005
Mobulidae	*Mobula mobular*	Giant devilray	Endangered A4d	2006
Mobulidae	*Mobula tarapacana*	Chilean devilray	Data Deficient	2006

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A selected panel of the research authors will be available for interview at a press briefing on May 22, 2008, at 15:00 - 15:30 hours to take place at the 9th CoP of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), Bonn, 19-30 May, www.cbd.int/cop9.

To arrange a separate interview with an author, please use the details below:
* Nick Dulvy, based at Simon Fraser University, Vancouver - nick_dulvy@sfu.ca
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About IUCN

IUCN, the International Union for Conservation of Nature, helps the world find pragmatic solutions to our most pressing environment and development challenges by supporting scientific research; managing field projects all over the world; and bringing governments, NGOs, the UN, international conventions and companies together to develop policy, laws and best practice.

IUCN is the world's oldest and largest global environmental network. IUCN is a democratic union with more than 1,000 government and NGO member organizations, and some 10,000 volunteer scientists in more than 150 countries. IUCN's work is supported by 1,100 professional staff in 62 countries and hundreds of partners in public, NGO and private sectors around the world.

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About the IUCN Shark Specialist Group

The Shark Specialist Group (SSG) of IUCN's Species Survival Commission aims to promote the long-term conservation of the world's chondrichthyan fishes, effective management of their fisheries and habitats and, where necessary, the recovery of their populations. One of the roles central to the SSG's mission is the preparation of species assessments for the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species ™.

For more information on the IUCN Shark Specialist Group please visit http://www.flmnh.ufl.edu/fish/organizations/ssg/ssg.htm (soon moving to www.iucnssg.org).

About Aquatic Conservation: Marine and Freshwater Ecosystems

Aquatic Conservation: Marine and Freshwater Ecosystems is an international journal dedicated to publishing original papers that relate specifically to freshwater, brackish or marine habitats and encouraging work that spans these ecosystems. This journal provides a forum in which all aspects of the conservation of aquatic biological resources can be presented and discussed, enabling greater cooperation and efficiency in solving problems in aquatic resource conservation. The publication of both practical studies in conservation as well as theoretical considerations of the underlying principles is encouraged. Contributions are accepted from as wide a geographical range as possible to ensure a broad representation of conservation issues in both developed and developing countries. The journal also publishes short communications, review articles and discussions. *Aquatic Conservation: Marine and Freshwater Ecosystems* can be accessed online at: www.interscience.wiley.com/journal/aqc

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