



EMBARGOED UNTIL 11 JUNE 10.00 CET

NEW SCIENTIFIC STUDY SHOWS WORRYING DECLINE IN THE MED'S TOP PREDATORS

Rome: A new scientific study funded in part by the Lenfest Ocean Program has concluded that all shark species assessed in the Mediterranean Sea declined by more than 97 percent in abundance and “catch weight” over the last 200 years.

The findings of the study, *Loss of large predatory sharks from the Mediterranean Sea*, published in the journal *Conservation Biology*, suggest several Mediterranean shark species are at risk of extinction, especially if current levels of fishing pressure continue.

Lead author Francesco Ferretti and his co-authors are concerned that the declines in sharks may have implications for the broader Mediterranean marine ecosystem.

Ferretti said: “The loss of top predators such as sharks in other sectors of the Atlantic has resulted in changes to the ecosystem. These changes are unpredictable and poorly understood but given the decline in Mediterranean shark numbers, there is cause to be seriously concerned about the effects this could have.”

Forty-seven species of sharks live in the Mediterranean Sea, of which 20 are considered top predators.

The study authors only had enough information to assess the status of five of the twenty large predatory shark species in the Mediterranean. Of those analyzed, almost all of the large sharks have decreased in abundance because of unintended capture in open ocean fisheries, targeted shark fishing, and human population pressure in coastal areas. Sharks are especially vulnerable to overfishing and slow to recover from depletion because they generally grow slowly, mature late and produce few young.

The mean size of sharks caught in the Mediterranean is among the lowest in the world. The study reveals that size and weight declines over time indicate that more young and immature sharks are being caught.

Margaret Bowman, director of the Lenfest Ocean Program said: “This study makes an important contribution to our understanding of how multiple pressures are threatening sharks. We understand too little about the consequences of losing top predators to take shark declines so lightly.”

There are currently no catch limits for commercially-fished shark species in the Mediterranean Sea. A comprehensive monitoring program for fisheries has been difficult to implement in the Mediterranean because of the artisanal (small and localized) nature of its fisheries and the large number of countries bordering the sea.

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NOTES TO EDITORS:

To view a summary of the Conservation Biology paper, visit:

http://www.lenfestocean.org/publications/ferretti_med_sharks.html

The Lenfest Ocean Program supports scientific research aimed at forging new solutions to the challenges facing the global marine environment. The program was established in 2004 by the Lenfest Foundation and is managed by the Pew Environment Group.

For more information about the program, please visit www.lenfestocean.org

Only five species of sharks offered sufficient information for analysis, including the blue shark, one thresher shark species, two mackerel shark species, and one hammerhead shark species. The authors combined the two mackerel shark species for the analysis because of ambiguity in some of the data sets regarding species identification.

The blue, smooth hammerhead and thresher sharks were classified as “Vulnerable” according to the latest IUCN-World conservation Union Red List Criteria for extinction risk. Two mackerel sharks, porbeagle and shortfin mako, were classified as “critically endangered”. Many other large sharks are classified as “Data Deficient”.