Congressional Research Service
Informing the legislative debate since 1914

Shark Conservation and Management in the United States

May 19, 2026

Congressional Research Service
https://crsreports.congress.gov
R48951

CRS REPORT
Prepared for Members and
Committees of Congress

Congressional Research Service
Informing the legislative debate since 1914

SUMMARY

R48951

May 19, 2026

Anthony R. Marshak
Analyst in Natural Resources Policy

Pervaze A. Sheikh
Specialist in Natural Resources Policy

Shark Conservation and Management in the United States

Shark conservation and management in the United States have received attention from stakeholders and Congress due to biological, aesthetic, human safety, and other factors related to sharks. Stakeholders have discussed issues related to the status of shark populations, specifically regarding domestic and international fishing of sharks; human-shark conflicts, such as shark *depredation* of targeted fishery species (i.e., sharks completely or partially consuming marine species caught by fishing gear); and the predatory role of sharks in marine ecosystems. These discussions, among other matters, have prompted Congress to pass legislation related to the conservation and management of sharks and their body parts (e.g., shark fins), such as the Shark Finning Prohibition Act (P.L. 106-557), the Shark Conservation Act of 2010 (P.L. 111-348, Title I), and the legislation sometimes referred to as the "Shark Fin Sales Elimination Act of 2023" (P.L. 117-263, Division E, Title LIX, Subtitle E, Section 5946(b)). Additional statutes (e.g., the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act [MSA; 16 U.S.C. §§1801-1891d] and the Endangered Species Act [ESA; 16 U.S.C. §§1531-1544]) and multilateral agreements govern shark conservation and management, including for sharks inhabiting coastal, state, and international waters. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA's) National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) primarily administers federal shark-related efforts, including the conservation and management of targeted and protected shark species.

Congress has considered legislative proposals relating to sharks, which have focused on shark conservation and management, the feeding of sharks, and shark depredation and human safety, among other topics. For example, H.R. 207 as passed by the House and S. 2314 as reported, the Supporting the Health of Aquatic systems through Research Knowledge and Enhanced Dialogue Act (SHARKED Act; introduced in the 119th Congress), would require the Secretary of Commerce to establish a task force to address shark depredation and would amend the MSA to include projects related to shark depredation as a priority for the NMFS cooperative research and management program. At times, Congress also has included directives to agencies regarding shark science, conservation, and management in language accompanying appropriations laws. These proposals and directives may reflect commentary by experts and stakeholders with respect to shark science, conservation, and management.

Some Members of Congress, stakeholders, and experts have highlighted domestic and international approaches to shark conservation and management, and expressed opinions regarding intergovernmental agreements, international management approaches, and their effectiveness. Some stakeholders have also voiced that additional data are needed to fill information gaps, such as information on the status of shark populations and their ecology, habitat use, and interactions with fisheries. They further note the utility of that information for effective conservation and management. Additionally, some stakeholders and experts have raised concerns about shark depredation, including its alleged increase in recent years, and have provided potential considerations regarding depredation for fisheries management and shark conservation. Other stakeholders and experts have focused attention on the impacts of fishing (both commercial and recreational) and the wildlife trade on threatened and endangered sharks, including those listed under the ESA or classified as threatened or endangered by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature.

Congress may consider whether or not to pass or amend laws that focus on shark conservation and management, or whether to direct NMFS and partners to take certain conservation and management approaches for sharks. Congress also may consider whether current funding levels for shark conservation and management meet congressional goals, including as related to science needs and human-shark conflicts, or whether additional funding or funding directed to specific programs and activities is warranted. Congress also may consider the role of the United States in intergovernmental shark conservation and management activities (e.g., under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora or multilateral agreements through Regional Fisheries Management Organizations); intersections of shark conservation with illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing; and whether changes to present approaches may be warranted.

Contents

Figures

Tables

Appendixes

Contacts

Introduction

Sharks are *cartilaginous* fishes that primarily inhabit marine ecosystems (**Figure 1**).[1] Sharks prey on a variety of marine species; most sharks are carnivorous, and some feed on plankton (e.g., whale sharks or basking sharks). Sharks that directly influence the functioning of marine ecosystems are known as *apex predators*.[2] Waters under the jurisdiction of the United States are home to a variety of shark species. For example, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA's) National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) estimates that over 50 shark species inhabit waters off the east coast of the United States.[3] Additionally, NMFS and partners cumulatively manage and/or study around 100 populations of shark species throughout U.S. waters, which have had variable abundance over time.[4] NMFS also manages shark populations protected under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).[5] Some researchers have estimated that shark and ray populations worldwide are declining. In one study, scientists reported that the global abundance of oceanic sharks and rays has declined by 71% from 1970 to 2018, largely due to an increase in fishing.[6]

Shark conservation and management have received attention from stakeholders and Congress, due to biological, aesthetic, human safety, and other factors. Selected issues related to the status of shark populations include domestic and international harvesting of sharks and associated impacts to their populations; human-shark conflicts (e.g., shark *depredation* of targeted fishery species);[7] and the predatory role of sharks in marine ecosystems.[8] Further, stakeholders and experts have identified data needs and information gaps regarding sharks, including with respect to targeted (i.e., fished) and threatened and endangered species, and have raised concerns about potential limitations to effective shark conservation and management practices.[9] These issues may apply to individual shark species in different ways due to variation in their life histories (e.g.,

[1] Fishes are classified as *cartilaginous* (i.e., having a skeleton made of cartilage) or bony (i.e., having a skeleton composed of hard bones). Cartilaginous fishes include sharks, skates, and rays.

[2] Some experts describe *apex predators* as having an "elevated position on the trophic ladder [i.e., food chain]" that inhibits "population irruptions of prey and smaller predators" with a cascading effect "throughout ecological communities [that] promotes biodiversity." Arian D. Wallach et al., "What Is an Apex Predator?," *Oikos*, vol. 124 (2015), pp. 1453-1461.

[3] National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), "Sharks in Atlantic, Gulf, and Caribbean Coastal Waters," https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/atlantic-highly-migratory-species/sharks-atlantic-gulf-and-caribbean-coastal-waters.

[4] Jason S. Link and Anthony R. Marshak, "Characterizing and Comparing Marine Fisheries Ecosystems in the United States: Determinants of Success in Moving Toward Ecosystem-Based Fisheries Management," *Reviews in Fish Biology and Fisheries*, vol. 29 (2019), pp. 23-70 (hereinafter Link and Marshak, "Characterizing and Comparing Marine Fisheries Ecosystems"); and NOAA, NMFS, *National Marine Fisheries Service—1st Quarter 2026 Update*, March 31, 2026, https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/s3/2026-04/q1_2026_stock_status_tables.pdf. Hereinafter NOAA, NMFS, *National Marine Fisheries Service—1st Quarter 2026 Update*.

[5] 16 U.S.C. §§1531-1544.

[6] Nathan Pacoureau et al., "Half a Century of Global Decline in Oceanic Sharks and Rays," *Nature*, vol. 589, no. 7843 (2021), pp. 567-571.

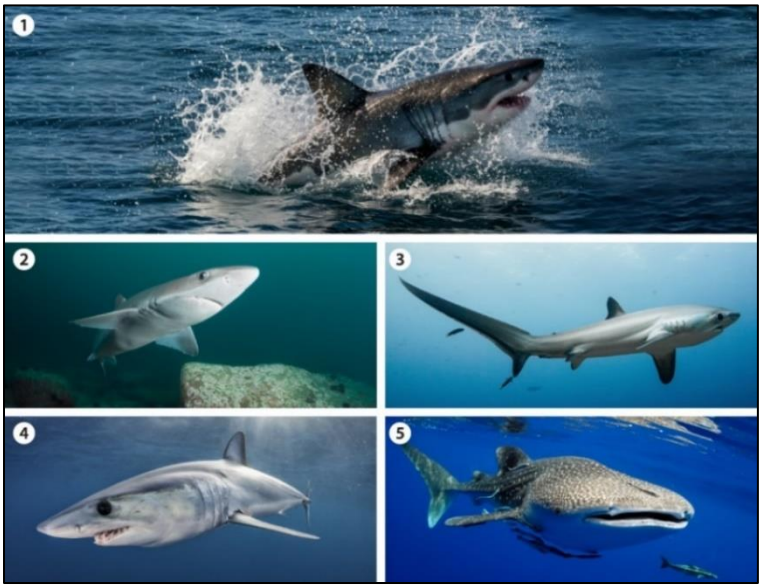
[7] Some experts define *depredation* as occurring when "a predator (e.g., a shark, cetacean, pinniped, seabird, squid, large teleost) completely or partially consumes an animal caught by fishing gear." J.D. Mitchell et al., "Shark Depredation: Future Directions in Research and Management," *Reviews in Fish Biology and Fisheries*, vol. 33 (2023), pp. 475-499. Hereinafter Mitchell et al., "Shark Depredation."

[8] For example, George H. Burgess et al., "Is the Collapse of Shark Populations in the Northwest Atlantic Ocean and Gulf of Mexico Real?," *Fisheries*, vol. 30, no. 19 (2005), pp. 19-26; and Mitchell et al., "Shark Depredation."

[9] Salvador J. Jorgensen et al., "Emergent Research Priorities for Shark and Ray Conservation," *Endangered Species Research*, vol. 47 (2022), pp. 171-203 (hereinafter Jorgensen et al., "Emergent Research Priorities").

their lifespans, diets, time to maturity, and growth rates).[10] Studies note that these elements also may influence sharks' vulnerabilities to human activities, such as exploitation by fisheries.[11]

Figure 1. Images of Selected Shark Species



Sources: CRS, using public-domain photos at http://shutterstock.com/.

Notes: Images include (1) Great white shark (*Carcharodon carcharias*), (2) Spiny dogfish (*Squalus acanthias*), (3) Thresher shark (*Alopias* sp.), (4) Shortfin Mako shark (*Isurus oxyrinchus*), and (5) Whale shark (*Rhincodon typus*).

To address some of these issues, Congress has passed legislation related to the conservation and management of sharks and their body parts.[12] Laws that govern marine fisheries and threatened and endangered species (e.g., the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act [MSA] and the ESA) cover shark harvesting, trade in shark parts, and shark conservation.[13] Multiple laws also address the practice of *shark finning*, such as the Shark Finning Prohibition Act (P.L. 106-557), the Shark Conservation Act of 2010 (P.L. 111-348, Title I), and the James M. Inhofe National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023 (P.L. 117-263, Division E, Title LIX, Subtitle E, Section 5946(b)).[14] NMFS primarily administers most federal shark-related efforts in accordance with these and other statutes.[15]

[10] For example, Michelle R. Heupel et al., "Sizing Up the Ecological Role of Sharks as Predators," *Marine Ecology Progress Series*, vol. 495 (2014), pp. 291-298.

[11] Michael G. Frisk et al., "Life Histories and Vulnerability to Exploitation of Elasmobranchs: Inferences from Elasticity, Perturbation and Phylogenetic Analysis," *Journal of Northwest Atlantic Fishery Science*, vol. 35 (2005), pp. 27-45.

[12] As examples, 16 U.S.C. §1822 note and 16 U.S.C. §1866.

[13] 16 U.S.C. §§1531-1544 and 16 U.S.C. §§1801-1891d.

[14] The Shark Finning Prohibition Act (P.L. 106-557), as amended, under 16 U.S.C. §1822 note, defines *shark finning* as "the taking of a shark, removing the fin or fins (whether or not including the tail) of a shark, and returning the remainder of the shark to the sea." Some entities, such as the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA's) National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), refer to P.L. 117-263, Division E, Title LIX, Subtitle E, Section 5946(b) as the "Shark Fin Sales Elimination Act of 2023." This report also adopts this reference. NOAA, NMFS, "Shark Management Laws," https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/laws-policies/shark-management-laws.

[15] NOAA, NMFS, "Fish [and] Sharks," https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/fish-sharks#overview; and NOAA, NMFS, "Shark Conservation," https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/international-affairs/shark-conservation.

Various Members of Congress continue to express interest in shark conservation and management.[16] For example, some Members have expressed concern over encounters between sharks and anglers and related potential disruptions for the fishing industry.[17] Other Members have promoted efforts that aim to protect beachgoers from shark attacks.[18] Some of these issues cover intergovernmental approaches to shark conservation, such as through the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) International Plan of Action for Conservation and Management of Sharks (IPOA-Sharks), and other multilateral agreements.[19]

This report provides a summary of federal efforts to manage and conserve sharks and a discussion of selected laws and regulations that affect sharks. It also provides an analysis of selected stakeholder perspectives on sharks, along with options Congress may consider to address issues relating to shark conservation and management.

Federal Management of Sharks

NMFS administers most federal shark-related efforts, including the conservation and management of targeted and protected shark species.[20] NMFS regulates shark harvest and conservation, which includes implementing fishery management plans (FMPs) and fishery ecosystem plans (FEPs) as developed by U.S. Regional Fishery Management Councils (see "Federal Statutes on Shark Conservation and Management").[21] FMPs and certain FEPs can address commercial quotas and trip limits, recreational bag limits, fishery closures, take of prohibited species, finning prohibitions, and reporting requirements, among other management measures in accordance with MSA.[22] The North Pacific, Pacific, and Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Councils manage specific sharks under their FMPs and FEPs.[23]

[16] As examples, Rep. Rob Wittman, "[Supporting the Health of Aquatic Systems through Research, Knowledge, and Enhanced Dialogue (SHARKED] Act Passes Senate Committee," press release, August 1, 2025, https://wittman.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=6553; and Melissa R. Cronin et al., "Policy and Transparency Gaps for Oceanic Shark and Rays in High Seas Tuna Fisheries," *Fish and Fisheries*, vol. 24, no. 1 (2023), pp. 1-15 (hereinafter Cronin et al., "Policy and Transparency Gaps for Oceanic Sharks and Rays").

[17] Sen. Rick Scott, "Sen. Rick Scott Introduces SHARKED Act to Address Rising Shark Depredation and Protect U.S. Fisheries," press release, July 22, 2025, https://www.rickscott.senate.gov/2025/7/sen-rick-scott-introduces-sharked-act-to-address-rising-shark-depredation-and-protect-u-s-fisheries.

[18] For example, see Sen. Katie Britt, "U.S. Senator Katie Britt Celebrates Senate Passage of Lulu's Law," press release, July 8, 2025, https://www.britt.senate.gov/news/press-releases/u-s-senator-katie-britt-celebrates-senate-passage-of-lulus-law/.

[19] 16 U.S.C. §1537a; Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), "CITES," https://cites.org/eng (hereinafter CITES, "CITES"); Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), "International Plan of Action for Conservation and Management of Sharks," https://www.fao.org/ipoa-sharks/en/ (hereinafter FAO, "International Plan of Action for Conservation and Management of Sharks"); and Emma Shahabi, "We're Gonna Need a Bigger Boat: The Importance of Increased Shark Conservation Across Countries, States, and the High Seas," *Duke Environmental Law and Policy Forum*, vol. 33 (2024), pp. 45-76.

[20] National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), "Fish [and] Sharks," https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/fish-sharks#overview; and NOAA, NMFS, "Shark Conservation," https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/international-affairs/shark-conservation.

[21] For more information about U.S. Regional Fishery Management Councils (FMCs) and their partnerships with NMFS, see CRS Report R47645, *U.S. Regional Fishery Management Councils*, by Anthony R. Marshak.

[22] CRS Report R47645, *U.S. Regional Fishery Management Councils*, by Anthony R. Marshak; and Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Legal Program, "Part 9: What is a Fishery Management Plan," https://masglp.olemiss.edu/fisherymanagement/part9/.

[23] North Pacific FMC, "Fisheries [and] Issues," https://www.npfmc.org/fisheries-issues/; Pacific FMC, "Fishery (continued...)

Additionally, Spiny dogfish is jointly managed by the Mid-Atlantic and New England Fishery Management Councils under a specific FMP.[24] Some Fishery Management Councils whose jurisdiction includes U.S. Atlantic waters (e.g., the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council) also include sharks in their draft or final FEPs.[25]

Under NMFS, the Office of Sustainable Fisheries Atlantic Highly Migratory Species (HMS) division is responsible for managing *transboundary* sharks in the Atlantic.[26] The HMS program implements the *Consolidated Atlantic Highly Migratory Species* FMP to regulate Atlantic HMS (i.e., Atlantic tunas, billfish, and certain sharks).[27] NMFS also is responsible for threatened and endangered shark populations that are listed under the ESA (see "Endangered Species Act").[28] Additionally, NMFS may work with interstate marine fisheries commissions, such as the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC), to address interstate management of sharks in coastal waters (see "Additional Selected Statutes and Agreements").[29] Federal enforcement of laws that protect shark species is primarily carried out by NMFS through its Office of Law Enforcement, including its joint enforcement agreements with various U.S. states and territories, and in collaboration with other federal agencies (e.g., U.S. Coast Guard).[30]

U.S. Fisheries Landings of Sharks

The harvest of sharks in federal waters is primarily regulated under the MSA, while state laws and other federal legislation govern harvest in state waters as applicable. **Figure 2** includes reported U.S. fisheries landings of sharks (i.e., commercial and recreational cumulatively) from 1950 to 2024, including by most common *species group*.[31]

Management Plans," https://www.pcouncil.org/fishery-management-plans/; and Western Pacific Regional FMC, "Fishery Ecosystem Plans [and] Amendments," https://www.wpcouncil.org/fishery-ecosystem-plans-amendments/.

[24] New England FMC, "Spiny Dogfish," https://www.nefmc.org/management-plans/dogfish.

[25] For example, South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, *Fishery Ecosystem Plan II of the South Atlantic Region*, March 2018 (compiled February 2024), pp. 1-403, https://safmc.net/documents/fishery-ecosystem-plan-2-fep-ii/.

[26] NOAA, NMFS, "Atlantic Highly Migratory Species," https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/topic/atlantic-highly-migratory-species. With respect to a fishery population (i.e., stock), NMFS defines *transboundary* as meaning "stocks of fish that migrate across international boundaries or, in the case of the United States, across the boundaries between states or fishery management council (FMC) areas of control." NOAA, *NOAA Fisheries Glossary*, NOAA Technical Memorandum NMFS-F/SPO-69, October 2005, p. 55, https://repository.library.noaa.gov/view/noaa/12856.

[27] NOAA, NMFS, "Consolidated Atlantic Highly Migratory Species Management Plan," https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/management-plan/consolidated-atlantic-highly-migratory-species-management-plan.

[28] NOAA, NMFS, "Shark Conservation."

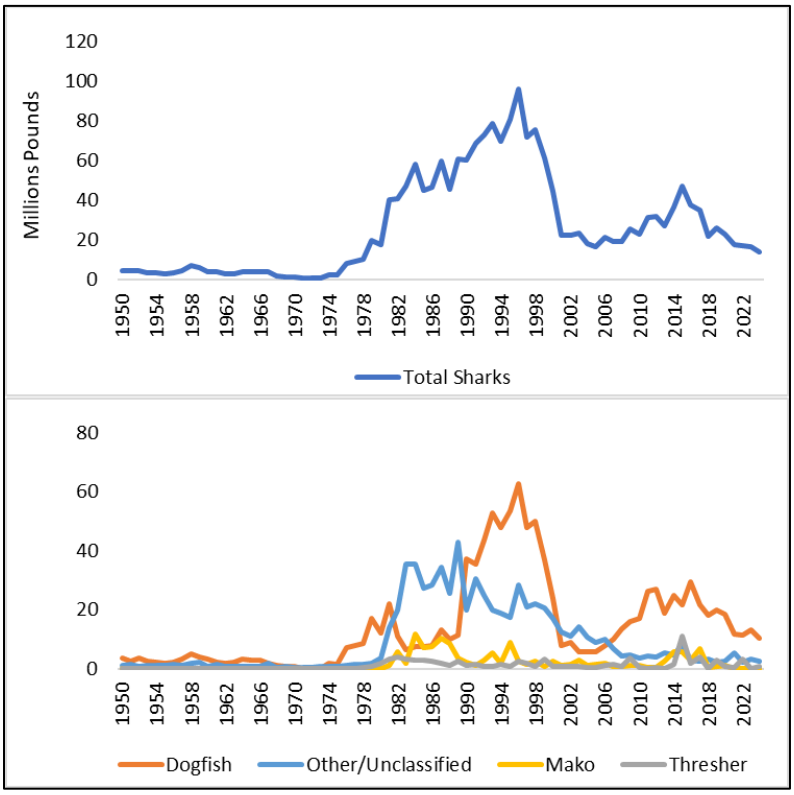
[29] Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC), "Coastal Sharks," https://asmfc.org/species/coastal-sharks/.

[30] NOAA, NMFS, "Office of Law Enforcement," https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/about/office-law-enforcement; NOAA, NMFS, "Enforcement: Cooperative Enforcement," https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/topic/enforcement/cooperative-enforcement.

[31] Some experts define a species group as a complex of related species with certain physical (i.e., morphological) similarities.

Figure 2. Reported U.S. Fisheries Landings of Sharks

(Total Shark Landings, Including by Most Common Species Groups; Years 1950-2024)



Source: CRS, using National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), "Commercial Fisheries Landings," accessed February 1, 2026, https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/sustainable-fisheries/commercial-fisheries-landings; and NOAA, NMFS, "Recreational Fisheries Statistics Queries," accessed February 1, 2026, https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/data-tools/recreational-fisheries-statistics-queries.

Notes: Data shown include total reported landings (i.e., both commercial and recreational landings) for sharks cumulatively (top panel) and by the most frequently landed species groups over time (i.e., Dogfish [Family Squalide], Mako sharks [*Isurus* spp.], Thresher sharks [*Alopias* spp.], and other or unclassified shark species; bottom panel). All data in the bottom panel sum to values shown in the top panel. Some experts define a species group as a complex of related species with morphological (i.e., certain physical) similarities.

Total reported shark landings are dominated by dogfish species. Reported shark landings increased from the mid-1970s to the mid-to-late 1990s to a peak of approximately 96 million pounds. A decrease occurred in 2001, primarily caused by a disease in sharks, when landings totaled approximately 24.8 million pounds. Although total landings increased at times during the mid-2010s, they have generally remained at similar levels since the 2000s. These trends primarily are driven by fluctuations in New England and Mid-Atlantic dogfish landings. Additionally, declines in landings for other and unclassified shark species occurred in the 1990s-2000s,

primarily related to overharvesting of certain shark species.[32] The dollar value of shark landings has followed similar trends, primarily dominated by dogfish in recent decades.[33]

Federal Statutes on Shark Conservation and Management

Several federal laws directly and indirectly address sharks. These laws complement state laws related to the conservation and management of coastal shark species, as well as international agreements and enforcement measures that address sharks.[34] Over time, Congress has focused its attention on shark conservation and management, including passage of three acts focused on the subject of shark finning.[35]

Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act

The MSA, as amended, is the primary law that authorizes the conservation and management of U.S. federal fisheries (i.e., those occurring in waters up to 200 nautical miles offshore and beyond state or territorial waters). The MSA governs both commercial and recreational fisheries. Its provisions also apply to U.S. *ecosystem component* species (species that are needed to achieve ecosystem management objectives but do not require stock assessments; e.g., certain sharks).[36] The MSA established eight councils, which develop FMPs or FEPs, and which are jointly implemented with NMFS through fishery-specific regulations.[37] Example FMPs and FEPs under which federal sharks are managed include the Spiny Dogfish FMP (jointly managed by the New England and Mid-Atlantic Councils, as mentioned above), the Pelagic Fisheries of the Western Pacific FEP (managed by the Western Pacific Regional Council), and two FMPs for Alaskan groundfish (managed by the North Pacific Council).[38] NMFS, in collaboration with the councils,

[32] George H. Burgess et al., "Is the Collapse of Shark Populations in the Northwest Atlantic Ocean and Gulf of Mexico Real?," *Fisheries*, vol. 30, no. 19 (2005); and Cassidy D. Peterson et al., "Preliminary Recovery of Coastal Sharks in the South-East United States," *Fish and Fisheries*, vol. 18, no. 5 (2017), pp. 845-859 (hereinafter Peterson et al., "Preliminary Recovery of Coastal Sharks").

[33] NOAA, NMFS, "Commercial Fisheries Landings," accessed February 1, 2026, https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/sustainable-fisheries/commercial-fisheries-landings.

[34] NOAA, NMFS, "International Enforcement," https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/topic/enforcement/international-enforcement; NOAA, NMFS, "Shark Management Laws"; 16 U.S.C. §1826k.

[35] These acts include the Shark Finning Prohibition Act (P.L. 106-557), the Shark Conservation Act of 2010 (P.L. 111-348, Title I), and the Shark Fin Sales Elimination Act of 2023 (P.L. 117-263, Division E, Title LIX, Subtitle E, Section 5946(b)).

[36] 16 U.S.C. §§1853, 1855(b); and 50 C.F.R. §600.305(c)(5), (d)(12)-(13). NMFS regulations, under 50 C.F.R. §600.305(d)(13), define *ecosystem component species* as those that a "[U.S. Regional Fishery Management] Council or the Secretary [of Commerce] has determined do not require conservation and management, but desire to list in an [Fishery Management Plan] in order to achieve ecosystem management objectives."

[37] For more information about FMCs' fishery management plans, see CRS Report R47645, *U.S. Regional Fishery Management Councils*. For more information about FMCs' fishery ecosystem plans, see CRS In Focus IF12768, *Ecosystem-Based Fisheries Management*, by Anthony R. Marshak.

[38] New England FMC, "Spiny Dogfish"; Western Pacific Regional FMC, "Pelagic Fishery Ecosystem Plan," https://www.wpcouncil.org/fishery-ecosystem-plans-amendments/pelagic-fishery-ecosystem-plan/; North Pacific FMC, "[Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands] Groundfish Fisheries," https://www.npfmc.org/fisheries-issues/fisheries/bsai-groundfish-fisheries/; and North Pacific FMC, "[Gulf of Alaska] Groundfish Fisheries," https://www.npfmc.org/fisheries-issues/fisheries/goa-groundfish-fisheries/.

also is required to identify and map *essential fish habitat* for federally managed species, including federally managed sharks.[39]

The MSA authorizes the Secretary of Commerce (Secretary) to directly manage HMS in Atlantic waters, including certain species of sharks.[40] Pursuant to MSA, NMFS conducts research on sharks (e.g., surveys, assessments, and tagging studies of shark populations) and monitors shark captures in commercial and recreational fisheries.[41]

Multiple species of sharks are prohibited from capture by U.S. commercial and recreational fishers in accordance with FMPs and NMFS regulations. Under the MSA, NMFS and FMCs may regulate targeted and nontargeted catch of sharks (i.e., *bycatch*) by permitting entry in a given fishery to selected participants, setting catch limits or quotas, requiring certain gear restrictions, and establishing fishing closures for a given area or time period.[42] These types of management actions also could apply to shark fishery species assessed by NMFS and partners as being *overfished* or experiencing *overfishing*.[43] As of March 31, 2026, the most recent status assessment, one Western and Central Pacific shark stock was listed as overfished and as experiencing overfishing (Oceanic whitetip shark [*Carcharhinus longimanus*]).[44] No other Pacific shark stocks were listed as either overfished or experiencing overfishing. Further, six Atlantic shark species were listed as overfished, with four of those species listed as experiencing overfishing.[45] One previously overfished shark species was designated as being *rebuilt* in accordance with the MSA (Atlantic Blacktip shark [*C. limbatus*] in 2003) as of March 31, 2026.[46] Several other shark species (e.g., Atlantic Sandbar shark [*C. plumbeus*]) are on long-term rebuilding plans.[47]

---

[39] The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA), under 16 U.S.C. §1802(10), defines *essential fish habitat* as "those waters and substrate necessary to fish for spawning, breeding, feeding or growth to maturity."

[40] 16 U.S.C. §1854(g); and 50 C.F.R. §§635.1-635.71.

[41] 16 U.S.C. §§1865, 1867, 1881-1882; and NOAA, NMFS, "Northeast Shark Research," https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/new-england-mid-atlantic/atlantic-highly-migratory-species/northeast-shark-research.

[42] David S. Shiffman and Neil Hammerschlag, "Shark Conservation and Management Policy: A Review and Primer for Non-Specialists," *Animal Conservation*, vol. 19, no. 5 (2016), pp. 401-412.

[43] The MSA, under 16 U.S.C. §1802(34), defines the terms *overfishing* and *overfished* as "a rate or level of fishing mortality that jeopardizes the capacity of a fishery to produce the *maximum sustainable yield* [MSY] on a continuing basis." The MSA does not define MSY. Some experts define MSY as the highest possible annual catch that can be continuously taken from a stock under existing environmental conditions that still allows the population to sustain itself and keeps the stock at the level producing the maximum growth of its population. See Athannassios C. Tsikliras and Rainer Froese, "Maximum Sustainable Yield," in *Encyclopedia of Ecology*, 2nd ed., ed. Brian D. Fath (Elsevier, 2019), pp. 108-115.

[44] NOAA, NMFS, "Overfishing and Overfished Stocks as of March 31, 2026," https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/s3/2026-04/q1-2026-overfishing-and-overfished-stocks-map.pdf; and NOAA, NMFS, "Fishery Stock Status Updates," https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/population-assessments/fishery-stock-status-updates.

[45] As of March 31, 2026, Atlantic shark species listed as overfished are Blacknose shark (*Carcharhinus acronotus*), Dusky shark (*C. obscurus*), Scalloped Hammerhead shark (*Sphyrna lewini*), Porbeagle shark (*Lamna nasus*), Sandbar shark (*C. plumbeus*), and Shortfin Mako shark (*Isurus oxyrinchus*). Blacknose shark, Dusky shark, Scalloped Hammerhead shark, and Shortfin Mako shark also are listed as experiencing overfishing. NOAA, NMFS, "Overfishing and Overfished Stocks as of March 31, 2026."

[46] According to NMFS, the Atlantic Blacktip shark is now managed as two fishery stocks (Blacktip shark—Atlantic and Blacktip shark—Gulf of America), but was previously assessed as rebuilt while it was one combined stock. NOAA, NMFS, "52 Stocks Rebuilt as of March 31, 2026," https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/s3/2026-04/q1-2026-rebuiltmap.pdf. For more information on the rebuilding of fish stocks, see CRS Report R47645, *U.S. Regional Fishery Management Councils*, by Anthony R. Marshak.

[47] NOAA, NMFS, *National Marine Fisheries Service—1st Quarter 2026 Update*.

Another provision under the MSA that affects shark species is Section 317, which includes provisions prohibiting the feeding of sharks in certain Western Pacific regions with certain exceptions.[48] These feeding exceptions include baiting activities associated with shark fishing, research activities, or other activities determined by the Secretary or state law as presenting no public health hazard or safety risk.[49]

Laws Addressing Shark Finning

Since the 106th Congress, Congress has passed three laws that address the practice of shark finning and pertain to shark conservation. The following sections provide more details about each of these laws and their associated amendments, as applicable.

Shark Finning Prohibition Act

The Shark Finning Prohibition Act (P.L. 106-557) aimed to reduce the practice of *shark-finning* through both domestic and international efforts.[50] The act initially amended Section 307 of the MSA ("Prohibited Acts") to make it illegal to remove any fins of a shark (including the tail) in U.S. waters and to discard the shark carcass at sea.[51] The law also prohibited having "custody, control, or possession" of those parts aboard a vessel without the corresponding carcass, or landing them without the corresponding carcass.[52] Further, the law stated that any shark fins landed or found on board a fishing vessel are presumed to be "taken, held, or landed" illegally if their total weight exceeds 5% of the total weight of shark carcasses landed or found on board.[53] The act also authorized the Secretary to promulgate regulations on shark finning and establish a research program on Atlantic and Pacific sharks.[54] It also required the Secretary to provide Congress with an annual report about efforts to implement the law.[55] Further, the law authorized the Secretary, acting through the Secretary of State, to engage in discussions and enter agreements with foreign governments to implement measures to prohibit shark-finning and promote shark conservation.[56]

Shark Conservation Act of 2010

The Shark Conservation Act of 2010 (P.L. 111-348, Title I) amended the MSA and the Shark Finning Prohibition Act to require that all sharks in the United States be brought to shore with their fins *naturally attached*,[57] with the exception of Smooth dogfish (*Mustelus canis*) fished commercially within certain limitations.[58] Specifically, the law retained prohibitions on shark-

[48] 16 U.S.C. §1866.

[49] 16 U.S.C. §1866.

[50] Codified under 16 U.S.C. §1822 note. NOAA, NMFS, "Shark Management Laws." See also footnote 14.

[51] 16 U.S.C. §§1822 note, 1857.

[52] 16 U.S.C. §§1822 note, 1857.

[53] 16 U.S.C. §§1822 note, 1857.

[54] 16 U.S.C. §1822 note; and 50 C.F.R. §§600.1200-600.1203.

[55] 16 U.S.C. §1822 note; and NOAA, NMFS, *2024 Shark Finning Report to Congress, Developed Pursuant to: Shark Finning Prohibition Act of 2000 (*P.L. 106-557*)*, December 2024, pp. 1-15, https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/s3//2024-12/2024-shark-finning-rtc.pdf.

[56] 16 U.S.C. §§1822 note.

[57] The MSA defines *naturally attached*, with respect to a shark fin, as "attached to the corresponding shark carcass through some portion of uncut skin." 16 U.S.C. §1857(1), (1)(P).

[58] See Section 103(b)(1) of the Shark Conservation Act of 2010 (P.L. 111-348, Title I), codified under 16 U.S.C. §1857 note.

finning at sea and further prohibited having "custody, control, or possession" of a shark's fin or tail aboard a fishing vessel unless naturally attached to the corresponding carcass.[59] The law also amended the Shark Finning Prohibition Act and the MSA to presume that any shark fin or tail aboard a nonfishing vessel and not naturally attached to a corresponding carcass was transferred illegally. The law also retained similar presumptions regarding the legality of shark fins found aboard a fishing vessel (i.e., as being no more than 5% of the total weight of shark carcasses landed from a fishing vessel).[60]

As these provisions do not prohibit trade of shark fins, or of those that were landed while attached to a given shark, NMFS data include occasional reported U.S. harvest and trade of shark fins over the past decade; data are not classified according to species. NMFS commercial landings include information about the reported value (in nominal dollars) of shark fins from U.S.-harvested sharks for most years since 2016 (unclassified by species; no data are included by weight).[61] Cumulatively, over this time period, fins from U.S.-harvested sharks have been valued at approximately $2.1 million, with the majority of this value from sharks harvested during 2016-2019 (approximately $1.6 million; primarily off the Gulf of America and South Atlantic regions).[62] In 2024, shark fins from U.S.-harvested species were valued at approximately $30,000.[63] NMFS seafood trade data also include reported U.S. exports of shark fins from 2017 to 2022 (unclassified by species), which totaled approximately 570,000 pounds, at a cumulative value of approximately $1.2 million.[64]

The Shark Conservation Act of 2010 also amended the High Seas Driftnet Fishing Moratorium Protection Act to include more specific references to shark conservation and shark-finning practices.[65] The amendments directed the Secretary, in consultation with the Secretary of State, to urge international fishery management organizations with U.S. membership to adopt shark conservation measures, including those to prohibit shark-finning practices, to improve those organizations' effectiveness.[66] It additionally amended the High Seas Driftnet Fishing Moratorium Protection Act to direct the Secretary to seek to enter into international shark conservation agreements, including measures prohibiting shark-finning practices that are comparable to U.S. prohibitions.[67] It further directed the Secretary to include shark conservation measures when

[59] 16 U.S.C. §1857(1)(P).

[60] 16 U.S.C. §1857(1), (1)(P).

[61] NOAA, NMFS, "Commercial Fisheries Landings," accessed September 16, 2025, https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/sustainable-fisheries/commercial-fisheries-landings.

[62] Executive Order 14172, "Restoring Names That Honor American Greatness," issued on January 31, 2025, directed the renaming of the Gulf of Mexico to the Gulf of America for U.S. federal use; other countries may continue to refer to the water body as the Gulf of Mexico. Executive Office of the President, "Executive Order 14172 of January 20, 2025, Restoring Names That Honor American Greatness," 90 *Federal Register* 8529-8631, January 31, 2025.

[63] For 2024, all reported U.S. shark fin value was from sharks (unclassified by species) harvested off the Mid-Atlantic region.

[64] NOAA, NMFS, "Foreign Fishery Trade Data," accessed September 16, 2025, https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/sustainable-fisheries/foreign-fishery-trade-data. NMFS foreign fishery trade data on shark fins include information about U.S. exports through a given U.S. Customs district. As exports through a given U.S. Customs district are not necessarily a total representation of products only originating within that region (i.e., they may include products from other U.S. regions that ultimately are exported from that particular U.S. Customs district), CRS is unable to confirm the region of original harvest for any U.S.-exported shark fins.

[65] 16 U.S.C. §§1826i(a)(1)(F), (3), 1826j(e)(3)(A), 1826k(a)(1)(B). For more information about how Congress directed the Secretary of Commerce to consider shark conservation in defining IUU fishing, see CRS Report R48215, *Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing: Frequently Asked Questions*, by Caitlin Keating-Bitonti and Anthony R. Marshak.

[66] 16 U.S.C. §1826i(a)(1)(F).

[67] 16 U.S.C. §1826i(a)(3).

defining illegal, unreported, or unregulated (IUU) fishing,[68] and when identifying nations whose vessels have participated in IUU fishing and in fishing practices leading to unregulated *bycatch* of certain species, among other unsustainable fishing practices.[69] In the act, Congress additionally required the Secretary to include fishing vessels that target or incidentally catch sharks in waters beyond their jurisdiction in its biennial report identifying nations whose fishing vessels have participated in IUU fishing and these types of fishing practices, including nations that have not adopted a regulatory program for shark conservation and shark-finning comparable to that of the United States.[70]

"Shark Fin Sales Elimination Act of 2023"

The James M. Inhofe National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023 (P.L. 117-263, Division E, Title LIX, Subtitle E, Section 5946(b); also referred to as the "Shark Fin Sales Elimination Act of 2023")[71] prohibits the possession, transport, and sale of shark fins or their associated products with certain exceptions and exemptions.[72] These exceptions include possession or landing of a shark fin that was separated after the first point of landing in accordance with a license or permit, and is

> (A) destroyed or disposed of immediately after separation from the carcass;
>
> (B) used for noncommercial subsistence purposes in accordance with applicable laws;
>
> (C) used solely for display or research purposes by a museum, college, or university pursuant to an issued permit for noncommercial scientific research.[73]

Additionally, the law allows for the possession, transport, and sale of fins belonging to two shark species, Smooth dogfish and Spiny dogfish (*Squalus acanthias*). The act also directs the Secretary to review this exemption for the two dogfish species and to submit a report to Congress by January 1, 2027.[74] The report is to include the Secretary's recommendation for the continuation or termination of the dogfish exemption, and analysis of information regarding the recommendation's potential impacts to dogfish fisheries, ocean ecosystems, the enforcement of shark fin sales prohibitions, and shark conservation efforts.[75] Among its contents, the law directs the Secretary to enforce its requirements, while also allowing for any state or territory to adopt or enforce a more stringent regulation or standard.[76] The law stipulates that any violation of the act's provisions is to be treated as an action prohibited under Section 307 of the MSA and penalized pursuant to Section 308 of the MSA ("Criminal Penalties and Permit Sanctions").[77] According to NMFS, as of 2024, the agency does not intend to issue implementing regulations for the act.[78]

---

[68] 16 U.S.C. §1826j(e)(3)(A). For more information about IUU fishing, see CRS Report R48215, *Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing: Frequently Asked Questions*, by Caitlin Keating-Bitonti and Anthony R. Marshak.

[69] 16 U.S.C. §§1826h, 1826k(a)(1)(B).

[70] 16 U.S.C. §§1826h, 1826k(a)(1)(B), (e).

[71] See footnote 14.

[72] The Shark Fin Sales Elimination Act of 2023, codified under 16 U.S.C. §1857 note, defines *shark fin* as "the unprocessed, dried, or otherwise processed detached fin or tail of a shark."

[73] 16 U.S.C. §1857 note.

[74] 16 U.S.C. §1857 note.

[75] 16 U.S.C. §1857 note.

[76] 16 U.S.C. §1857 note.

[77] 16 U.S.C. §1857 note; 16 U.S.C. §§1857-1858.

[78] According to NMFS, it reviewed federal and state shark fishery regulations and consulted with other federal agencies (continued...)

Endangered Species Act

The ESA aims to conserve species listed as threatened or endangered under the act, including multiple species of listed sharks and their *distinct population segments* as applicable (see **Appendix A** for a list of ESA-listed sharks).[79] In accordance with the statute, the Secretary of Commerce, acting through NMFS, administers the ESA with respect to marine and anadromous species, including sharks. NMFS also is responsible for determining the status of ESA-listed species under its jurisdiction and designating their *critical habitat*,[80] among other requirements.[81] Further, under Section 7 of the ESA ("Interagency Cooperation"), NMFS carries out consultations and evaluates activities with a federal nexus that may cause an adverse impact to a listed species or its critical habitat.[82]

NMFS administers the protection and conservation of two domestic and nine foreign shark species that are listed under the ESA.[83] Additionally, several other shark-like fishes,[84] including one domestic species of sawfish, five foreign species of sawfish, and three foreign species of guitarfish, are listed under the ESA and managed under NMFS's jurisdiction.[85] NMFS also collaborates with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in its administration and enforcement of CITES.[86]

and determined that there was not a demonstrated "need for additional statutory interpretation at this time." NOAA, NMFS, "Frequently Asked Questions: Shark Fin Sales Elimination Act of 2023," https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/laws-policies/frequently-asked-questions-shark-fin-sales-elimination-act-2023.

[79] The Endangered Species Act (ESA) does not define the term *distinct population segment (DPS)*. With respect to sharks and other ESA-listed species, NMFS and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) joint regulations reference the term in the definition for *species*, which "includes any species or subspecies of fish, wildlife, or plant, and any distinct population segment of any vertebrate species that interbreeds when mature." 50 C.F.R. §424.02. Further, in accordance with a joint NMFS and FWS policy, a DPS under the ESA refers to a population of a species that is a discrete and significant segment of the species as a whole. FWS and NMFS, "Policy Regarding the Recognition of Distinct Vertebrate Populations Segments Under the Endangered Species Act," 61 *Federal Register* 4722-4725, February 7, 1996. For more information about the Endangered Species Act, see CRS Report R46677, *The Endangered Species Act: Overview and Implementation*, by Pervaze A. Sheikh and Erin H. Ward.

[80] The ESA, under 16 U.S.C. §1532(5)(A), defines *critical habitat* for a threatened or endangered species as "(i) the specific areas within the geographical area occupied by the species, at the time it is listed in accordance with the provisions of section 1533 of this title, on which are found those physical or biological features (I) essential to the conservation of the species and (II) which may require special management considerations or protection; and (ii) specific areas outside the geographical area occupied by the species at the time it is listed in accordance with the provisions of section 1533 of this title, upon a determination by the Secretary that such areas are essential for the conservation of the species."

[81] 16 U.S.C. §1532(15); 16 U.S.C. §§1533-1540.

[82] 16 U.S.C. §1536; and NOAA, NMFS, "Section 7: Types of Endangered Species Act Consultations in the Greater Atlantic Region," https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/insight/section-7-types-endangered-species-act-consultations-greater-atlantic-region.

[83] NOAA, NMFS, "Species Directory—ESA Threatened & Endangered," https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/species-directory/threatened-endangered. Hereinafter NOAA, NMFS, "Species Directory."

[84] These other shark-like fishes also are classified with sharks as *elasmobranchs* (subclass Elasmobranchii), which are a classification of certain cartilaginous fishes that include modern sharks, rays, and skates.

[85] These species are classified as rays and are members of the families Pristidae (sawfishes) and Rhinobatidae (guitarfishes). NOAA, NMFS, "Species Directory."

[86] 16 U.S.C. §1537a; and CITES, "CITES."

Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)

CITES is an international agreement among 185 national governments that aims to ensure the international trade in plants and animals does not threaten their survival. CITES provides a framework that is voluntarily adhered to by each of the signatories, or parties. Parties to CITES are responsible for implementing the convention in their national legislation. In the United States, the implementing legislation for CITES is the ESA. CITES parallels the ESA's structure by dividing its listed species into groups according to the estimated risk of extinction. However, rather than differentiating species as threatened or endangered, as done under the ESA, CITES uses three major categories of protected species organized into three appendixes. Species listed under CITES are first identified as needing protection and then assessed for the risk trade poses for the species' survival. Species listed under Appendix I have the most stringent restrictions on trade. Appendix I contains species that are threatened with extinction, which are or may be affected by trade. CITES generally prohibits commercial international trade in specimens of these species. Appendix II contains species that are not necessarily threatened with extinction but require controlled trade to prevent population declines. Trade in Appendix II species is permitted if trade will not be detrimental to the species in the wild. Appendix III species are listed because at least one country has requested that other countries assist it in regulating trade of that species. The requesting country might require an export permit before a species is traded internationally. Some experts have raised concerns regarding the applicability of CITES listing criteria for certain shark species, such as the Shortfin Mako shark. Among the concerns raised are approaches in CITES that classify a given species as a collective unit, independent of the status of its individual populations.

Sources: Treaties and Other International Acts Series (T.I.A.S.) 8249, as signed by the United States, March 3, 1979. See also CRS Report RL32751, *The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)*, by Pervaze A. Sheikh; Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), "CITES," https://cites.org/eng; and M. Kai, "Are the Current IUCN Category and CITES Listing Appropriate for the Conservation and Management of Shortfin Mako, *Isurus oxyrinchus*, in the North Pacific Ocean?," *Marine Policy*, vol. 134 (2021), 104790.

CITES contains most shark and shark-like species under Appendix II.[87] As of April 2025, Whale shark (*Rhincodon typus*), Oceanic Whitetip shark (*Carcharhinus longimanus*), all Manta and Devil rays, and all seven species of sawfishes are included under Appendix I.[88] Further, on March 5, 2026, all *Mustelus* species (e.g., smooth dogfish, Florida smoothhound, and Gulf smoothhound sharks) were added to Appendix II with implementation effective June 5, 2027.[89] In addition to CITES, the ESA also references other international conventions applicable to sharks, including the International Convention for the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries, the International Convention for the High Seas Fisheries of the North Pacific Ocean, and other international agreements.[90]

[87] As of April 2025, the following shark species are listed under Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES; earliest to most recent listing): Basking shark (*Cetorhinus maximus*), Great White shark (*Carcharodon carcharias*), Porbeagle shark (*Lamna nasus*), Great Hammerhead shark (*Sphyrna mokarran*), Scalloped Hammerhead shark (*S. lewini*), Smooth Hammerhead shark (*S. zygaena*), Silky shark (*Carcharhinus falciformis*), Thresher sharks (*Alopias* spp.), Longfin Mako shark (*Isurus oxyrinchus*), Shortfin Mako shark (*I. paucus*), 54 additional species of Requiem sharks (Family Carcharhinidae), 6 additional species of Hammerhead sharks (Family Sphyrnidae), Gulper sharks (Family Centrophoridae), Smoothhound sharks (*Mustelus* spp.), and Tope shark (*Galeorhinus galeus*). CITES, "History of CITES Listing of Sharks (Elasmobranchii)," https://cites.org/eng/prog/shark/history.php (hereinafter CITES, "History of CITES Listing of Sharks"); and Chris Chase, "CITES Adds Broad Protections for Sharks, Nixes Proposals on Eels and Sea Cucumbers," *Seafood Source*, December 2, 2025.

[88] CITES, "History of CITES Listing of Sharks"; and Alexa Robles-Gil, "Sharks and Rays Gain Sweeping Protections from Wildlife Trade," *The New York Times*, December 2, 2025.

[89] According to NMFS, as of June 5, 2027, specific permits will be required from FWS for the import, export, or reexport of smoothhound sharks. NOAA, NMFS, "New Requirements for Smoothhound Sharks Beginning June 5, 2027," https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/new-england-mid-atlantic/atlantic-highly-migratory-species/new-requirements-smoothhound-sharks-beginning-june-5-2027.

[90] 16 U.S.C. §1531(a)(4); Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization, "International Convention for the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries (ICNAF)," https://www.nafo.int/About-us/ICNAF/icnaf-convention; and North Pacific Fisheries (continued...)

Additional information about threatened and endangered shark species is included below under "Conservation Concerns for Threatened and Endangered Sharks."

Additional Selected Statutes and Agreements

Additional statutes may be applicable to shark conservation and management depending on the specifics of a given location, corresponding management plan, or particular project or activity,[91] including the following:

- The Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Act (ACFCMA)[92] includes directives for the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) to prepare and adopt interstate coastal FMPs for the conservation of coastal fishery resources (e.g., coastal sharks).[93] Among its 27 interstate FMPs, the ASMFC administers an interstate FMP for over 40 species of Atlantic coastal sharks.[94]
- The Interjurisdictional Fisheries Act (IFA)[95] includes authorities regarding the management of *interjurisdictional fishery resources* (e.g., certain species of sharks) throughout their range.[96] The law also includes directives for apportionments of federal funding by NOAA to interstate marine fisheries commissions and for federal support of related state projects.[97]
- The Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA)[98] directs the Secretary to publish an annual list of commercial fisheries for which different degrees of incidental (i.e., nonintentional) *takes* of marine mammals are associated.[99] These include Category I fisheries, which are associated with frequent incidental takes; Category II fisheries, in which occasional incidental taking occurs; and Category III fisheries, which have a remote likelihood of or no known incidental taking of marine mammals.[100] In the 2024 annual list of commercial fisheries (the most

Commission, "Convention on the Conservation and Management of High Seas Fisheries Resources in the North Pacific Ocean," https://www.npfc.int/system/files/2017-01/Convention%20Text.pdf.

[91] These laws have a variety of provisions that address other topics. For the purposes of this report, CRS has outlined provisions related to shark conservation and management.

[92] 16 U.S.C. §§5101-5108.

[93] 16 U.S.C. §5014(a).

[94] ASMFC, "Coastal Sharks"; and ASMFC, "Managed Species," https://asmfc.org/species/. The ASMFC has assessed the status of 14 shark species that it manages, of which 6 are listed by the ASMFC as overfished (Blacknose shark, Dusky shark, Great Hammerhead shark [*Sphyrna mokarran*], Porbeagle shark, Sandbar shark, and Shortfin Mako shark). Blacknose shark, Dusky shark, and Shortfin Mako shark also are listed by the ASMFC as experiencing overfishing.

[95] 16 U.S.C. §§4101-4107.

[96] The Interjurisdictional Fisheries Act, under 16 U.S.C. §4102(3), defines an *interjurisdictional fishery resource* as "(A) a fishery resource for which a fishery occurs in waters under the jurisdiction of one or more [s]tates and the exclusive economic zone established by Proclamation Numbered 5030, dated March 10, 1983; (B) a fishery resource for which there exists an interstate fishery management plan; or (C) a fishery resource which migrates between the waters under the jurisdiction of two or more [s]tates bordering on the Great Lakes."

[97] 16 U.S.C. §§4103-4104. Further, the Shark Conservation Act of 2010 (P.L. 111-348, Title I; 16 U.S.C. §4107, repealed) amended authorization of appropriations language in the Interjurisdictional Fisheries Act.

[98] 16 U.S.C. §§1361-1423h. For more information about the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA), see CRS Report R47892, *The Marine Mammal Protection Act (P.L. 92-522): Primer and Issues for Congress*, by Anthony R. Marshak.

[99] 16 U.S.C. §1383a(b). The MMPA, under 16 U.S.C. §1362(13), defines take as "to harass, hunt, capture, or kill, or attempt to harass, hunt, capture, or kill any marine mammal."

[100] 16 U.S.C. §1383a(b)(1)(A)(i)-(iii).

recently finalized), two commercial shark fisheries are listed as Category II fisheries: (1) the California Thresher shark and Swordfish drift gillnet (greater than or equal to 14 inches mesh size) fishery, which affects multiple species of dolphins, whales, seals, and sea lions, and (2) the Southeastern U.S. Atlantic shark gillnet fishery, which affects several populations of bottlenose dolphins and the North Atlantic right whale.[101] Additionally, two shark fisheries are listed as Category III fisheries.[102] The MMPA authorizes the Secretary to grant a marine mammal authorization to a registered vessel engaged in a Category I or II listed fishery.[103] That authorization allows the vessel to incidentally take marine mammals in that fishery upon receipt of a completed registration form.[104]

- The National Marine Sanctuaries Act (NMSA)[105] provides NOAA the authority to administer the National Marine Sanctuary System, including protections and considerations for *sanctuary resources* (e.g., sharks, as applicable) contained within or proposed for inclusion in that system.[106]
- The Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA)[107] provides a national framework for U.S. states and territories to consider and manage *coastal resources of national significance* (e.g., shark habitat, as applicable) and potential impacts to those resources.[108] It also authorizes NOAA to provide federal assistance for these efforts.[109]
- The Lacey Act regulates the trade of wildlife (e.g., sharks) and plants and creates penalties for a broad spectrum of violations.[110] For example, the unlawful trafficking of sharks (or their associated parts) protected under the ESA or CITES constitutes a violation of the Lacey Act.[111]

[101] NOAA, NMFS, "List of Fisheries Summary Tables," https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/marine-mammal-protection/list-fisheries-summary-tables.

[102] These fisheries include the Gulf of Maine, U.S. Mid-Atlantic tuna, shark, swordfish hook-and-line/harpoon fishery, which affects Gulf of Maine humpback whales, and the Southeastern U.S. Atlantic, Gulf of America shark bottom longline/hook-and-line fishery, which affects two Gulf of America bottlenose dolphin populations. NOAA, NMFS, "List of Fisheries Summary Tables."

[103] 16 U.S.C. §1387(c)(2)-(3); and NOAA, NMFS, "Marine Mammal Authorization Program," https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/marine-mammal-protection/marine-mammal-authorization-program.

[104] NOAA, NMFS, "Marine Mammal Authorization Program."

[105] 16 U.S.C. §§1431-1445c-1.

[106] The National Marine Sanctuaries Act, under 16 U.S.C. §1432(8), defines a *sanctuary resource* as "any living or nonliving resource of a national marine sanctuary that contributes to the conservation, recreational, ecological, historical, educational, cultural, archeological, scientific, or aesthetic value of the sanctuary." NOAA, Office of National Marine Sanctuaries, "National Marine Sanctuaries," https://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/.

[107] 16 U.S.C. §§1451-1468. For more information about the Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA), see CRS Report R45460, *Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA): Overview and Issues for Congress*, by Eva Lipiec.

[108] The CZMA, under 16 U.S.C. §1453(2), defines *coastal resource of national significance* as "any coastal wetland, beach, dune, barrier island, reef, estuary, or fish and wildlife habitat, if any such area is determined by a coastal state to be of substantial biological or natural storm protective value."

[109] 16 U.S.C. §§1451-1468.

[110] 16 U.S.C. §§3371-3378; 18 U.S.C. §42. For more information about the Lacey Act, see CRS Report R42119, *The Lacey Act: Compliance Issues Related to Importing Plants and Plant Products*, by Pervaze A. Sheikh.

[111] U.S. Department of Justice, "Owner of Japanese Fishing Vessel Charged with Unlawful Trafficking of Shark Fins," press release, August 31, 2020, https://www.justice.gov/archives/opa/pr/owner-japanese-fishing-vessel-charged-unlawful-trafficking-shark-fins.

Under various treaty-based, multilateral bodies, the United States is a party to multiple regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs) whose fishery management authorities may include the conservation and management of transboundary shark species within distinct marine geographies.[112] For example, the United States is a party to the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources, which adopted a conservation measure in 2006 that prohibits directed fishing of shark species in the Convention Area.[113] As another example, the United States comanages Atlantic HMS, including sharks, as a participant in the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) in accordance with the International Convention for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas.[114] Congress included specific research requirements for the Secretary of Commerce (in consultation with ICCAT commissioners) regarding the biology of Atlantic HMS and their fisheries in the Atlantic Tunas Convention Authorization Act of 1995 (P.L. 104-43, Title III) and amended them further in the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Reauthorization Act of 2006 (P.L. 109-479, Title IV).[115] The United States also engages as a nonparty in elements of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) with respect to the conservation of migratory sharks.[116] The CMS is an intergovernmental treaty that aims to conserve terrestrial, aquatic, and avian migratory species throughout their ranges. Although the United States is not a party to the CMS, it has signed the memorandum of understanding (MOU) on the Conservation of Migratory Sharks (hereinafter referred to as CMS MOU on Sharks), which outlines intergovernmental measures for the conservation and management of migratory sharks.[117]

Selected Legislation Related to Shark Conservation and Management in the 119th Congress

In recent decades, Congress has considered legislative proposals with specific references to shark conservation and management, such as those focused on shark-finning practices and international shark conservation efforts.[118] For example, in the 117th Congress, H.R. 3360/S. 1372, the Sustainable Shark Fisheries and Trade Act of 2021, would have required DOC to revise its regulations to include rays and skates in the Seafood Import Monitoring Program (SIMP), among other requirements pertaining to shark finning practices and the seafood trade.[119]

---

[112] U.S. Department of State, "International Fisheries Management," https://www.state.gov/international-fisheries-management. For more information on Regional Fisheries Management Organizations, see CRS Report R48215, *Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing: Frequently Asked Questions*, by Caitlin Keating-Bitonti and Anthony R. Marshak.

[113] Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources, "Conservation Measure 32-18 (2006) Conservation of Sharks," https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/mul164048.pdf.

[114] 16 U.S.C. §§971-971k. NOAA, NMFS, "International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas," https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/international-affairs/international-commission-conservation-atlantic-tunas; and International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT), "ICCAT," https://www.iccat.int/en/.

[115] 16 U.S.C. §971i.

[116] Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals, "Parties and Non-Parties," https://www.cms.int/parties.

[117] Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals, *Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation of Migratory Sharks*, Bonn, Germany, March 2023, pp. 1-26, https://www.cms.int/sharks/sites/default/files/basic_page_documents/Sharks_MOU_Text_annexes_2023_e.pdf.

[118] Selected examples include H.R. 3377, the Justice Attributed to Wounded Sharks Act (JAWS Act; introduced in the 115th Congress) and similar legislation introduced in the 113th (H.R. 5308) and 114th Congresses (H.R. 2951).

[119] Similar legislation was introduced in the 115th (H.R. 5248/S. 2764) and 116th Congresses (H.R. 788). Sharks (continued...)

Additionally, Congress has included directives to agencies regarding shark science, conservation, and management in language accompanying appropriations laws.[120] Examples of these types of directives are included in "Selected Options and Considerations for Congress."

As of April 2026, bills introduced in the 119th Congress relating to shark conservation and management have focused on the feeding of sharks, shark depredation, and human safety. Relevant bills identified by CRS in the 119th Congress are included below.[121]

- H.R. 207/S. 2314, the Supporting the Health of Aquatic systems through Research Knowledge and Enhanced Dialogue Act (SHARKED Act; H.R. 207, as passed by the House), would require DOC to establish a task force with multiple state, federal, and independent representatives to address shark depredation and report its findings to Congress. It would also amend the MSA to include projects related to shark depredation as a priority for the NMFS cooperative research and management program.[122] Similar legislation was introduced in the 118th Congress (H.R. 4051).
- H.R. 2076/S. 1003, Lulu's Law (S. 1003, as passed by the Senate), would require the Federal Communications Commission to issue an order that a shark attack is an event for which a wireless emergency alert applies. Similar legislation was introduced in the 118th Congress (H.R. 9376/S. 4832).
- H.R. 3831, the Florida Safe Seas Act of 2025, as ordered reported, would amend the MSA to prohibit the feeding of sharks in federal waters off the state of Florida. Some Members have indicated that the intent of the bill also is to mitigate shark depredation activities off Florida.[123] Similar legislation was introduced in the 116th (H.R. 3697) and 117th Congresses (H.R. 59).
- Among its contents, H.R. 3718, the Sustaining America's Fisheries for the Future Act of 2025, would amend the MSA to include and prioritize projects designed to understand and address interactions between sharks and humans and the status of shark populations. The bill also would direct NMFS to develop a strategy for research and funding with respect to updating and improving shark research, shark population surveys, and shark stock assessments, including the use of new and emerging technologies and techniques. Similar legislation was introduced in the 117th (H.R. 4690) and 118th (H.R. 8862) Congresses.

collectively are included as a species group (i.e., a complex of related species with certain physical similarities) covered by the Seafood Import Monitoring Program (SIMP). For more information about the Seafood Import Monitoring Program, see CRS Report R48469, *The Seafood Import Monitoring Program (SIMP)*, by Anthony R. Marshak.

[120] For example, the explanatory statement accompanying the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021 (P.L. 116-260) directed NMFS to review and assess conflicts among dolphins, sharks, and commercial, for-hire, and recreational fishing vessels in the South Atlantic and then-named Gulf of Mexico. U.S. Congress, House Appropriations Committee, *Explanatory Statement Submitted by Mrs. Lowey, Chairwoman of the House Committee on Appropriations, Regarding H.R. 133, Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021*, committee print, 117th Cong., 1st sess., March 2021, H.Prt. 43-749, p. 216. Hereinafter House Appropriations Committee, *Explanatory Statement Submitted by Mrs. Lowey*.

[121] CRS conducted searches for legislation, appropriations directives, and information in committee reports and the *Congressional Record* on Congress.gov using the keywords "shark," "depredation," "conservation," "fishing," and "shark fin." These searches were conducted on December 17, 2025, February 11, 2026, and again on April 23, 2026. Given the variety of ways that legislation might refer to matters related to the management and conservation of sharks, these search results should not be considered necessarily comprehensive.

[122] NOAA, NMFS, "National Cooperative Research Program," https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/sustainable-fisheries/national-cooperative-research-program; and 16 U.S.C. §1867.

[123] Nathan Strout, "Florida Representatives Want to Ban Shark Feeding to Stop Red Snapper Depredation," *Seafood Source*, June 19, 2025. Hereinafter Strout, "Florida Representatives Want to Ban Shark Feeding."

Selected Stakeholder Perspectives on Shark Conservation and Management

Experts and stakeholders have provided commentary about global and domestic approaches to shark conservation and management in multiple surveys and scientific papers.[124] This section summarizes stakeholder perspectives on issues related to intergovernmental approaches to shark conservation, including those by RFMOs with U.S. participation; data needs and information gaps for shark populations; and shark depredation events.

Selected National and International Approaches to Shark Conservation

Some international organizations have implemented programs to address global shark conservation, and some countries have adopted laws to implement actions called for in certain international agreements or to address their own national priorities related to shark conservation.[125] For example, the IPOA-Sharks initiative seeks to ensure the conservation and sustainable management of sharks among nations.[126] The initiative calls for countries that fish sharks to adopt and periodically revise a National Plan of Action to conserve and manage shark stocks.[127] It also calls for countries to cooperate through multilateral and/or regional forums and meetings to ensure shark conservation. Some stakeholders have questioned the effectiveness of this initiative. For example, some scientists argue that the initiative has uneven implementation, that existing national plans of action for the IPOA-Sharks have been limited and inconsistent in their approaches, and that the initiative has low effectiveness due to its voluntary approach to implementation.[128] Some also contend that there may be a discordance among the IPOA-Sharks, CMS MOU on Sharks, and other international shark conservation approaches (e.g., CITES).[129] However, other experts argue that nations with successful shark conservation and management approaches, such as the United States, had shark plans that matched the aims of the IPOA-Sharks, were associated with a schedule of actions, and included estimated costs.[130]

[124] As examples, Erika Techera and Natalie Klein, "Fragmented Governance: Reconciling Legal Strategies for Shark Conservation and Management," *Marine Policy*, vol. 35, no. 1 (2011), pp. 73-78 (hereinafter Techera and Klein, "Fragmented Governance"); and Jorgensen et al., "Emergent Research Priorities."

[125] Techera and Klein, "Fragmented Governance."

[126] FAO, "International Plan of Action for Conservation and Management of Sharks"; Nathan Pacoureau et al., "Conservation Successes and Challenges for Wide-Ranging Sharks and Rays," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, vol. 120, no. 5 (2023), e2216891120, pp. 1-10 (hereinafter Pacoureau et al., "Conservation Successes and Challenges"); Techera and Klein, "Fragmented Governance."

[127] FAO, "International Plan of Action for Conservation and Management of Sharks."

[128] Techera and Klein, "Fragmented Governance"; Pacoureau et al., "Conservation Successes and Challenges"; and Laura Muir and Natalie Klein, "From IPOA Sharks to Sharks MoU Under the Convention on Migratory Species: Progress or Clutter in International Environmental Law?," *Journal of International Wildlife Law and Policy*, vol. 21, no. 2-3 (2018), pp. 190-219 (hereinafter Muir and Klein, "From IPOA Sharks to Sharks MoU").

[129] Muir and Klein, "From IPOA Sharks to Sharks MoU"; and Eric Gilman et al., "Global Governance Guard Rails for Sharks: Progress Towards Implementing the United Nations International Plan of Action," *Fish and Fisheries*, vol. 25, no. 1 (2024), pp. 1-17 (hereinafter Gilman et al., "Global Governance Guard Rails for Sharks").

[130] Pacoureau et al., "Conservation Successes and Challenges"; and NOAA, NMFS, *Final United States National Plan of Action for the Conservation and Management of Sharks*, February 2001, pp. 1-90.

Some experts have attributed declines in populations of multiple shark species, in part, to fragmented regulation of fisheries and shark conservation by nations.[131] They further argue that limitations in certain international agreements and national laws hamper conservation.[132] Some experts suggest that the development of legally binding, regularly updated international agreements would yield improvements, along with greater compliance by nations.[133] Some stakeholders also suggest that countries develop national plans according to preset guidelines, such as plans used for international compliance with the voluntary FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and FAO International Plan of Action to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing.[134] Further, some experts suggest that these efforts could be guided by an international body or commission dedicated to the conservation and management of sharks throughout global waters.[135] Other experts emphasize that while aspects of national approaches to shark conservation may fall short in addressing international objectives, certain nations have developed more comprehensive national plans of action, including those tailored to local interests.[136] Some also note differing viewpoints among nations regarding sharks and wildlife, and caution that generalized approaches to conservation may be unsuccessful and actively resisted in some nations without consideration of varying cultural attitudes toward sharks.[137] Further, some experts assert the importance of conservation strategies tailored to local needs given the broad geographical distribution of many sharks and their varying national or regional statuses.[138]

Use of Marine Protected Areas

Some experts suggest that using geographic-based management tools, such as *marine protected areas* (MPAs), may improve shark conservation.[139] An MPA is a geographic region that may be managed for the conservation of marine species, ecosystems, and/or cultural heritage.[140] MPAs focused on sharks might be subject to catch limitations, speed limitations, or other safeguards for

[131] Techera and Klein, "Fragmented Governance."

[132] Andrew Herndon et al., "The Case for an International Commission for the Conservation and Management of Sharks," *Marine Policy*, vol. 34 (2010), pp. 1239-1248. Hereinafter Herndon et al., "The Case for an International Commission."

[133] Techera and Klein, "Fragmented Governance"; and Gilman et al., "Global Governance Guard Rails for Sharks."

[134] Techera and Klein, "Fragmented Governance"; FAO, "Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries," https://www.fao.org/iuu-fishing/international-framework/code-of-conduct-for-responsible-fisheries/en/; FAO, "Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing," https://www.fao.org/iuu-fishing/international-framework/ipoa-iuu/en/; and FAO, *International Plan of Action to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing*, Rome, Italy, 2001.

[135] Herndon et al., "The Case for an International Commission."

[136] Brendal Davis and Boris Worm, "The International Plan of Action for Sharks: How Does National Implementation Measure Up?," *Marine Policy*, vol. 38 (2013), pp. 312-320.

[137] Colin A. Simpfendorfer et al., "Complex Human-Shark Conflicts Confound Conservation Action," *Frontiers in Conservation Science*, vol. 2 (2021), 692767, pp. 1-8. Hereinafter Simpfendorfer et al., "Complex Human-Shark Conflicts."

[138] Nicholas K. Dulvy et al., "Challenges and Priorities in Shark and Ray Conservation," *Current Biology*, vol. 27, no. 11 (2017), pp. R565-R572. Hereinafter Dulvy et al., "Challenges and Priorities in Shark and Ray Conservation."

[139] Techera and Klein, "Fragmented Governance"; Jordan K. Snyder, "Shark-NATO: A Comparative Analysis of International Shark Conservation to Nationalized Shark Conservation," *Texas Environmental Law Journal*, vol. 47, no. 2 (2017), pp. 217-233.

[140] NOAA, "Ocean Exploration: What is a Marine Protected Area (MPA)?," https://oceanexplorer.noaa.gov/ocean-fact/mpas/.

human activity.[141] Some stakeholders say that the effectiveness of MPAs for conserving sharks varies according to protection levels, MPA purpose and design, and species' life history traits (e.g., different and typically longer generation times needed for rebuilding shark populations) and home ranges.[142] Some studies also assert that while conservation approaches using MPAs have the potential to enhance shark conservation, suitable habitat for threatened shark species may be limited in MPAs, including those that prohibit fishing by including no-take zones.[143]

Management of Sharks in Developing Countries

The majority of shark captures occur in developing countries, where management strategies for conserving sharks and other marine life vary.[144] Some experts suggest that an increase in international collaboration inclusive of developing countries, greater stakeholder participation from fishers in developing countries, and better scientific understanding and monitoring of fishing intensity and species can increase the conservation of shark populations in developing countries.[145] Some other experts suggest that these approaches also may benefit transboundary shark populations that reside in waters of the United States, other countries (including developing countries), and/or the high seas.[146] Complementing these findings, a study found that certain governance factors (i.e., regulation, enforcement, and monitoring) among western Atlantic developed and developing countries were related to successful conservation measures for shark populations.[147]

Methods used in developed countries such as the United States could be models for developing countries. For example, some stakeholders expressed the view that the recovery of sharks in U.S. waters was made possible by a system of regulations for these species, which included catch reporting requirements, aggregate and species-specific quotas, and catch prohibitions for some species.[148] Further, they argued that comprehensive enforcement of laws and regulations by law enforcement agencies, ongoing monitoring and assessment of shark fisheries, and refinements to regulations to address shark mortality aided conservation. These efforts were complemented by reductions in the numbers of vessels, permits, and fishing trips for sharks in U.S. waters. While these methods might be useful for developing countries, some stakeholders note that data limitations on shark species and their fisheries (e.g., catch totals) can hinder conservation efforts. Additional recommendations for developing countries, asserted by stakeholders, include reducing

[141] Tracy MacKeracher et al., "Sharks, Rays and Marine Protected Areas: A Critical Evaluation of Current Perspectives," *Fish and Fisheries*, vol. 20, no. 2 (2018), pp. 255-267.

[142] Andrew Chin et al., "Conceptual Frameworks and Key Questions for Assessing the Contribution of Marine Protected Areas to Shark and Ray Conservation," *Conservation Biology*, vol. 37, no. 1 (2023), p. e13917 (hereinafter Chin et al., "Conceptual Frameworks and Key Questions"); and C.A. Ward-Paige et al., "Recovery Potential and Conservation Options for Elasmobranchs," *Journal of Fish Biology*, vol. 80, no. 5 (2012), pp. 1844-1869.

[143] Charlotte A. Birkmanis et al., "Shark Conservation Hindered by Lack of Habitat Protection," *Global Ecology and Conservation*, vol. 21 (2020), e00862, pp. 1-10.

[144] Michael J. Barker and Vera Schluessel, "Managing Global Shark Fisheries: Suggestions for Prioritizing Management Strategies," *Aquatic Conservation: Marine and Freshwater Ecosystems*, vol. 15, no. 4 (2005), pp. 325-347 (hereinafter Barker and Schluessel, "Managing Global Shark Fisheries"); and Hollie Booth et al., "The Neglected Complexities of Shark Fisheries, and Priorities for Holistic Risk-Based Management," *Ocean and Coastal Management*, vol. 182 (2019), 104994, pp. 1-15 (hereinafter Booth et al., "The Neglected Complexities of Shark Fisheries").

[145] Barker and Schluessel, "Managing Global Shark Fisheries"; and Booth et al., "The Neglected Complexities of Shark Fisheries."

[146] Pacoureau et al., "Conservation Successes and Challenges."

[147] Pacoureau et al., "Conservation Successes and Challenges."

[148] Pacoureau et al., "Conservation Successes and Challenges."

demand for shark meat, encouraging citizens to actively participate in shark management efforts, and efforts to better ensure that nations' imported seafood comes from sustainable sources.[149]

Conservation of sharks in developing countries can pose some challenges. Some experts argue that increasing protections for sharks in developing countries might lead to costs associated with replacing lost revenue from shark fisheries and higher costs for seafood, which can be a primary source of protein.[150] Further, some stakeholders assert that certain developing countries might find it challenging to prioritize shark conservation due to poverty, food security issues, and limited scientific advice on sustainable catch levels.[151] Others suggest that shark-watching ecotourism value in certain developing countries may outweigh their national landed value for sharks, which may incentivize certain nations toward shark conservation practices, but also find greater landed value compared to ecotourism value in developed nations.[152] Such disparities, including challenges in transitioning from fishing to tourism, may also affect broader adoption of shark conservation practices.[153]

Selected Perspectives on Regional Fisheries Management Organization (RFMO) Shark Conservation Policies

Stakeholders and experts have offered perspectives on RFMO policies related to sharks. While some argue that RFMOs and multilateral agreements can help ensure sustainable conservation of sharks in certain jurisdictions, some other experts have raised concerns about the effectiveness of intergovernmental RFMO policies that address shark mortality and bycatch. For example, one 2024 study found that of 34 active policies in place, 76% (26 active policies) were unlikely to avoid or minimize bycatch of sharks. The study found that these policies instead focused on mitigating post-capture mortality or encouraged greater research and data collection. These experts suggest that the absence of research has not historically prohibited policymaking, that the existence of research was not necessarily related to policy adoption, and that currently available research and data transparency were sufficient to adequately evaluate impacts of bycatch on many species. Complementing these findings, some studies have examined the susceptibility of shark species as bycatch to certain fishing gears to inform management approaches for mitigating their incidental captures. These investigations concluded that mortality is likely underestimated in these studies due to an inability to monitor post-release fates of sharks, suggesting that certain data limitations may continue regardless of the number of studies carried out if post-release mortality is not measured. In light of these findings, some experts have recommended a precautionary approach that involves the adoption of binding requirements for elasmobranch catch limits and bycatch avoidance for certain fisheries. They also recommend concurrent measures related to pre- and post-capture handling and release modifications and protection of areas important to threatened sharks and shark-like species found in open ocean environments. Further, an additional study found that shark retention bans implemented by some RFMOs could reduce shark mortality, but the investigators recommended that additional measures to stop overfishing (e.g., area-based fishing restrictions, catch quotas, fishing gear requirements) also were necessary, particularly for low-productivity species.

Other experts note increasing attention to shark management by RFMOs in recent decades, along with ongoing consensus among certain academics and organizations on their view that RFMO policies for sharks remain insufficient and that further efforts to protect sharks remain warranted. Despite such criticisms, some experts have tried to reinforce a contention that RFMO resolutions and other policies pertaining to sharks are essential

[149] Pacoureau et al., "Conservation Successes and Challenges"; and Barker and Schluessel, "Managing Global Shark Fisheries," pp. 325-347.

[150] Dulvy et al., "Challenges and Priorities in Shark and Ray Conservation."

[151] Dulvy et al., "Challenges and Priorities in Shark and Ray Conservation"; and Barker and Schluessel, "Managing Global Shark Fisheries."

[152] Andrés M. Cisneros-Montemayor and U. Rashid Sumaila, "Sharks: Conservation, Governance, and Management," in *Economic Rationale for Shark Conservation,* ed. Erika J. Techera, Natalie Klein, 1st ed. (Taylor and Francis Group, 2014), pp. 197-212.

[153] Simpfendorfer et al., "Complex Human-Shark Conflicts"; Dulvy et al., "Challenges and Priorities in Shark and Ray Conservation"; and Andrés M. Cisneros-Montemayor et al., "Global Economic Value of Shark Ecotourism," *Oryx,* vol. 47, no. 3 (2013), pp. 381-388.

for shark conservation, with some arguing that positive aspects of most management measures "outweigh the negatives."

Sources: Melissa R. Cronin et al., "Policy and Transparency Gaps for Oceanic Shark and Rays in High Seas Tuna Fisheries," *Fish and Fisheries*, vol. 24, no. 1 (2023), pp. 1-15; William A. Walsh, Keith A. Bigelow, and Karen L. Sender, "Decreases in Shark Catches and Mortality in the Hawaii-Based Longline Fishery as Documented by Fishery Observers," *Marine and Coastal Fisheries*, vol. 1, no. 1 (2009), pp. 270-282; Animal Welfare Institute, "International Shark Protection Measures," https://awionline.org/content/international-shark-protection-measures; Stijn van Osch, "Student Note: Save Our Sharks: Using International Fisheries Law Within Regional Fisheries Management Organizations to Improve Shark Conservation," *Michigan Journal of International Law*, vol. 33, no. 2 (2012), pp. 383-432; Mariana Travassos Tolotti et al., "Banning Is Not Enough: The Complexities of Oceanic Shark Management By Tuna Regional Fisheries Management Organizations," *Global Ecology and Conservation*, vol. 4 (2015), pp. 1-7; and Leonardo Manir Feitosa et al., "Retention Bans Are Beneficial but Insufficient to Stop Shark Overfishing," *Fish and Fisheries*, vol. 26, no. 3 (2025), pp. 473-487.

Data Needs and Information Gaps

Several stakeholders have stated that additional data on shark populations, catch totals, and life history are needed to support effective shark conservation and management.[154] As of March 31, 2026, NMFS reports that 14 Atlantic shark stocks have unknown overfishing and overfished status. An additional 6 North Pacific shark stocks have unknown overfished status, while 4 have unknown overfishing status.[155] Further, the ASMFC reports that 28 of the shark species it manages have not been assessed and have unknown overfishing and/or overfished status.[156] According to scientists, undetermined status for these species and stocks is primarily due to limited biological and catch data.[157] Along with these unassessed shark populations are many nonshark fishery stocks also with unknown overfished and/or overfishing status, and for which data gaps remain.[158] NMFS classifies all U.S. fish stocks based on their importance to commercial and recreational fisheries in its Fish Stock Sustainability Index (FSSI), and does not include most federal shark populations as *FSSI stocks* (i.e., most shark populations are *non-FSSI stocks* of lower commercial value and/or assessment priority).[159] Further, NMFS prioritizes assessments for the fishery stocks it manages to optimize available resources and capacity.[160] Some stakeholders request additional data on a variety of fishery species for which ambiguities about their ecology or accuracy of stock status persist; these include both FSSI and non-FSSI stocks.[161] Such factors influence decisionmaking regarding which fishery populations may warrant priority assessments

[154] Jorgensen et al., "Emergent Research Priorities."

[155] NOAA, NMFS, *National Marine Fisheries Service—1st Quarter 2026 Update*.

[156] ASMFC, "Coastal Sharks."

[157] NOAA, NMFS, *Status of Stocks 2023. Annual Report to Congress on the Status of U.S. Fisheries*, May 2024, https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/s3/2024-04/2023SOS-final.pdf; ASMFC, "Coastal Sharks"; and Jorgensen et al., "Emergent Research Priorities."

[158] NOAA, NMFS, *National Marine Fisheries Service—1st Quarter 2026 Update*.

[159] NOAA, NMFS, "Fish Stock Assessment Report," https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/population-assessments/fish-stock-assessment-report; NOAA, NMFS, "Fish Stock Sustainability," https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/population-assessments/fish-stock-sustainability; and NOAA, NMFS, *National Marine Fisheries Service—1st Quarter 2026 Update*.

[160] NOAA, NMFS Office of Science and Technology, *Implementing a Next Generation Stock Assessment Enterprise: Policymakers' Summary*, NOAA Technical Memorandum NMFS-F/SPO-184, June 2018, p. 14.

[161] For example, some fishers have questioned the accuracy of the stock status for the South Atlantic red snapper population, which as of March 31, 2026, continues to be classified as both overfished and experiencing overfishing. Nathan Strout, "Commercial Fishers and Businesses Challenge U.S. Federal Red Snapper Plan Over Dead Discards," *Seafood Source*, July 16, 2025.

and how to allocate resources in addressing data limitations among them (including shark populations).

According to some stakeholders, data gaps for shark populations perpetuate in part due to limited resources.[162] They call for prioritizing data collection on certain elements regarding sharks, with some experts having identified research priorities for U.S. shark species—such as studies into their population status, ecology, habitat use, and interactions with other fisheries—to inform assessments.[163] Additional studies and commentary emphasize priorities for broader, socioecological approaches to shark conservation and management, including addressing socioeconomic factors affecting their implementation.[164] For example, some experts note that human dimensions (e.g., differing cultural viewpoints regarding sharks) and social, cultural, and economic roles of sharks are not explicitly considered in many shark conservation and management approaches.[165] Some experts also argue that greater communication of accurate scientific data with respect to the status of certain shark populations is needed.[166] These elements may inform management of individual shark species or of certain shark species groups. Some stakeholders also assert that prioritizing data collection on shark species with the greatest economic significance may be effective for working with limited resources.[167]

Some experts also suggest that broader ecosystem-based approaches that account for multiple species might allow for effective management practices despite certain data gaps on sharks and other fishery species.[168] In implementing these approaches (e.g., ecosystem-based fisheries management [EBFM]), sharks and other species (or species groupings) are considered in concert, including with respect to setting harvest limits collectively for particular *functional groups*,[169] or as related to total ecosystem productivity, for which certain species-specific information may not be as limiting.[170] Others also suggest that despite certain data limitations, fisheries management (both at the single-species level and via ecosystem-based approaches) and conservation may still be possible through certain precautionary or aggregate-based management approaches for which

[162] For example, F. Ferretti et al., "From Data Deficient to Big Data in Shark Conservation," *Fish and Fisheries*, vol. 26 (2025), pp. 977-990. Hereinafter Ferretti et al., "From Data Deficient to Big Data."

[163] David S. Shiffman et al., "The Next Generation of Conservation Research and Policy Priorities for Threatened and Exploited Chondrichthyan Fishes in the United States: An Expert Solicitation Approach," *Conservation Science and Practice*, vol. 4, no. 3 (2022), e12629, pp. 1-13. Hereinafter Shiffman et al., "The Next Generation of Conservation Research and Policy Priorities."

[164] Booth et al., "The Neglected Complexities of Shark Fisheries."

[165] Simpfendorfer et al., "Complex Human-Shark Conflicts"; and John K. Carlson et al., "Are We Ready for Elasmobranch Conservation Success?," *Environmental Conservation*, vol. 46, no. 4 (2019), pp. 264-266.

[166] David S. Shiffman and Neil Hammerschlag, "Preferred Conservation Policies of Shark Researchers," *Conservation Biology*, vol. 30, no. 4 (2016), pp. 805-815; and David S. Shiffman et al., "The Role and Value of Science in Shark Conservation Advocacy," *Scientific Reports*, vol. 11 (2021), 16626, pp. 1-12.

[167] For example, Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission, *[Fifth] Technical Meeting on Sharks: Data Collection*, La Jolla, CA, May 15-16, 2015, pp. 1-20.

[168] Wesley S. Patrick and Jason S. Link, "Myths That Continue to Impede Progress in Ecosystem-Based Fisheries Management," *Fisheries*, vol. 40, no. 4 (2015), pp. 155-160; and Link and Marshak, "Characterizing and Comparing Marine Fisheries Ecosystems."

[169] Some experts refer to a *functional group* as "species that respond in similar ways to particular environmental perturbations" or "sets of species that have similar effects on specific ecosystem processes." Others view the term as "a hierarchical way of aggregating species" and have proposed further refinements for the term according to species' responses or their ecosystem-level effects. Sebastian Catovsky, "Functional Groups: Clarifying Our Use of the Term," *Bulletin of the Ecological Society of America*, vol. 79, no. 1 (1998), pp. 126-127.

[170] Ecosystem Sciences and Management Working Group, NOAA Science Advisory Board, *Exploration of Ecosystem Based Fishery Management in the United States*, July 2014, pp. 1-111. For more information about Ecosystem-Based Fisheries Management, see CRS In Focus IF12768, *Ecosystem-Based Fisheries Management*, by Anthony R. Marshak.

broader (i.e., non-species specific) data resolutions may be feasible for informing management.[171] Additional experts suggest that concurrently managing a mix of species rather than managing each species in isolation, together with advancements in data-limited assessment methods, also may address certain limitations.[172] Relatedly, some scientists also assert that focusing primarily on individual species in analysis and management may be insufficient for policy recommendations and predictions.[173] Still, others emphasize that greater species-specific information remains needed for informing focused shark conservation to complement these broader management approaches, and for further understanding of how sharks and other key species affect marine ecosystems and their dependent fisheries.[174] For example, some experts suggest that maintaining long-term shark monitoring programs could assist with increasing data availability.[175] Others have sought approaches to address limited data and resources for managing a variety of species, including sharks, and carrying out science to inform EBFM concurrently.[176]

In considering data and assessment priorities for sharks, some experts point out that multiple ongoing fishery-independent surveys throughout U.S. regions already collect information about sharks, along with findings asserting that many studies on sharks are biased toward commercially important species in developed countries.[177] Some stakeholders and scientists may argue that addressing data limitations on sharks may be a more urgent need in certain developing countries to assist with global conservation efforts, while others may point to ongoing data concerns in particular U.S. regions.[178] Further, some stakeholders and policymakers may suggest that addressing present data limitations on other U.S. priority species beyond sharks might align more with Trump Administration priorities for American seafood competitiveness.[179] Other decisionmakers express concerns about how shark depredation may affect certain fisheries,

---

[171] V.R. Restrepo et al., *Technical Guidance on the Use of Precautionary Approaches to Implementing National Standard 1 of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act*, Prepared for the National Marine Fisheries Service, NOAA Technical Memorandum NMFS-F/SPO-31, July 17, 1998, pp. 25-26, 36; Howard Townsend et al., *Report of the National Ecosystem Modeling Workshop (NEMoW)*, NOAA, NMFS, NOAA Technical Memorandum NMFS-F/SPO-87, February 2008; Chin et al., "Conceptual Frameworks and Key Questions"; and Link and Marshak, "Characterizing and Comparing Marine Fisheries Ecosystems."

[172] Howard Townsend et al., "Multispecies Portfolios of U.S. Marine Fisheries: Ecosystem-Based Fisheries Management Reduces Economic Risk," *Fisheries*, vol. 49, no. 11 (2024), pp. 536-547 (hereinafter Townsend et al., "Multispecies Portfolios of U.S. Marine Fisheries"); Rod Fujita, "The Assessment and Management of Data Limited Fisheries: Future Directions," *Marine Policy*, vol. 133 (2021), 104730; and Steven X. Cadrin, "Assessing and Managing Data-Limted Fish Stocks," in *Management Strategies for Mixed-Species Commercial, Recreational, and Subsistence Fisheries*, ed. T.J. Quinn II et al. (Alaska Sea Grant, University of Alaska, Fairbanks, 2016), pp. 1-32.

[173] Steyen F. Edwards, Jason S. Link, and Barbara P. Rountree, "Portfolio Management of Wild Fish Stocks," *Ecological Economics*, vol. 49, no. 3 (2004), pp. 317-329.

[174] Ferretti et al., "From Data Deficient to Big Data"; Jorgensen et al., "Emergent Research Priorities"; and Elpis J. Chávez et al., *Challenges and Opportunities for the Conservation of the Scalloped Hammerhead Shark* Sphyrna lewini *in the Eastern Tropical Pacific*, MigraMar, Costa Rica, April 2023, pp. 1-135 (hereinafter Chávez et al., *Challenges and Opportunities for the Conservation of the Scalloped Hammerhead Shark*).

[175] Jorgensen et al., "Emergent Research Priorities."

[176] Michael Parke, *Ecosystem-Based Fisheries (EBF) Science in a Data-Limited Region*, NOAA, NMFS, NOAA Technical Memorandum NMFS-PIFSC-141, April 2023, pp. 1-37. Hereinafter Parke, *EBF Science in a Data-Limited Region*.

[177] Jorgensen et al., "Emergent Research Priorities"; Peterson et al., "Preliminary Recovery of Coastal Sharks"; and NOAA, NMFS, "Northeast Shark Research."

[178] Parke, *EBF Science in a Data-Limited Region*; Chávez et al., *Challenges and Opportunities for the Conservation of the Scalloped Hammerhead Shark*; and Pacoureau et al., "Conservation Successes and Challenges."

[179] Executive Order 14276 of April 17, 2025, "Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness," 90 *Federal Register* 16993-16995, April 22, 2025 (hereinafter E.O. 14276, "Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness"). For more information about this executive order, see CRS In Focus IF13017, *President Trump's April 2025 Executive Order on American Seafood Competitiveness: Considerations for U.S. Fisheries*, by Anthony R. Marshak.

including some data-limited reef fisheries, and call for increased attention to sharks in this context among other priority marine conservation and fisheries management objectives.[180]

Shark Depredation and Considerations for Fisheries Management

Stakeholders and experts have raised concerns about the impacts of shark depredation to fishers (e.g., observed and perceived frequency of shark depredation in Southeast recreational fisheries) and its potential implications for shark conservation.[181] Shark depredation can affect commercial and recreational fisheries due to sharks consuming or damaging hooked or netted fish before they are brought onboard. This may result in lower commercial harvest, fewer recreational captures, less fisheries revenue, and displacements of fishers from certain areas.[182] Fishers primarily report shark depredation on fishery species captured in or released from commercial longline fisheries,[183] hook-and-line gear (e.g., Gulf of America and Pacific Island reef fishes, Tarpon),[184] and shrimping trawls.[185] In light of these factors, some experts and certain stakeholders argue for further investigation into these topics to inform management of sharks and fisheries affected by shark depredation, and to address ongoing ambiguities about its impact.[186]

Some experts have been investigating the degree of impact from shark depredation to particular fisheries.[187] The degree of depredation depends on many factors, including the geographic scale of analysis and type of fishery examined. For example, in some recreational catch-and-release fisheries, such as for Permit (*Trachinotus falcatus*) in the Florida Keys, shark depredation estimates can be as high as 90% in specific locations.[188] Additionally, in some Pacific Island fisheries, fishers reported losing up to 50% of their catch from shark depredation.[189] Other analyses report shark depredation rates between 0.9% and 26% in commercial and recreational

[180] Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council (WPRFMC), "Fishermen and Scientists Unite to Tackle Shark Depredation in the Pacific Islands," press release, February 19, 2026. Hereinafter WPRFMC, "Fishermen and Scientists Unite."

[181] See footnote 7 for a definition of depredation. Mitchell et al., "Shark Depredation"; and Simpfendorfer et al., "Complex Human-Shark Conflicts."

[182] Mitchell et al., "Shark Depredation"; Simpfendorfer et al., "Complex Human-Shark Conflicts"; and J.D. Mitchell et al., "Shark Depredation in Commercial and Recreational Fisheries," *Reviews in Fish Biology and Fisheries*, vol. 28 (2018), pp. 715-748. Hereinafter Mitchell et al., "Shark Depredation in Commercial and Recreational Fisheries."

[183] Mitchell et al., "Shark Depredation in Commercial and Recreational Fisheries."

[184] J. Marcus Drymon et al., "Descender Devices or Treat Tethers: Does Barotrauma Mitigation Increase Opportunities for Depredation?," *Fisheries*, vol. 45 (2020), pp. 377-379; WPRFMC, "Fishermen and Scientists Unite"; and Julia Saltzman et al., "The Silver King in the Magic City: Observation of Atlantic tarpon *Megalops atlanticus* Aggregation off Miami, Florida," *Journal of Fish Biology*, vol. 106 (2025), pp. 1202-1213.

[185] Laura Picariello et al., *Southern Shrimp Trawl Shark Depredation Workshops Report*, Marine Extension and Georgia Sea Grant, University of Georgia and NOAA Sea Grant, 2022, pp. 1-33, https://repository.library.noaa.gov/view/noaa/49703. Hereinafter Picariello et al., *Southern Shrimp Trawl Shark Depredation*.

[186] Strout, "Florida Representatives Want to Ban Shark Feeding"; and Nathan Strout, "U.S. House Passes SHARKED Act for the Second Time," *Seafood Source*, January 29, 2025.

[187] As examples, Mitchell et al., "Shark Depredation"; Drymon et al., "Depredation"; J. Marcus Drymon et al., "Characterizing a Century of Shark Depredation in U.S. Atlantic Recreational Fisheries," *ICES Journal of Marine Science*, vol. 83, no. 4 (2026), fsag060, pp. 1-9; and Evan Gerald Prasky et al., "Depredation Influences Anglers' Perceptions on Coastal Shark Management and Conservation in the United States Gulf of Mexico," *Frontiers in Conservation Science*, vol. 4 (2023), 1271223, pp. 1-10 (hereinafter Prasky et al., "Depredation Influences Anglers' Perceptions").

[188] Peter E. Holder et al., "Stress, Predators, and Survival: Exploring Permit (*Trachinotus falcatus*) Catch-and-Release Fishing Mortality in the Florida Keys," *Journal of Experimental Marine Biology and Ecology*, vol. 524 (2020), 151289.

[189] WPRFMC, "Fishermen and Scientists Unite."

fisheries (depending on fishery) or during research fishing.[190] Some studies report financial losses of thousands of dollars due to shark depredation to a fisher's monthly gillnet harvest or single longline set, or to a particular shrimping vessel.[191] These revenue losses to fishers may be compounded by other expenses, such as replacing damaged gear, with market losses varying among fisheries (e.g., depredation primarily by spiny dogfish on a Georges Bank gillnet fishery resulted in an approximate 3.6% market-value loss during the assessment period).[192]

Despite a growing body of research, some stakeholders comment that ambiguities remain on the causes of shark depredation. Multiple stakeholders suggest that shark depredation may have increased due to the growth of shark populations driven by conservation measures.[193] Other stakeholders, however, question these assertions, arguing that the assertions are premature because no comprehensive study on the relationship between shark abundance and shark depredation rates exists.[194] Some studies have examined relationships between shark abundance and shark depredation rates for particular regional fisheries. For example, one investigation in the Gulf of America observed no relationship between fishery-independent surveys of shark abundance, observed shark depredation rates, and anglers' perceptions of shark depredation rates.[195] Apart from conservation measures, some studies suggest other factors may influence the frequency of shark depredation, including seasonality, timing and location of fishing activities, bait choice, and increases in recreational fishing effort.[196] Further, some other experts question whether depredation may be learned behavior by sharks or influenced by other factors, such as increased recreational fishing effort in certain U.S. regions.[197]

Some scientists have sought to further examine the relationship between fishers' perspectives on shark depredation and empirical observations. For example, the above Gulf of America study found decreased rates of shark depredation on increasingly abundant red snapper over time in fishery-independent surveys. These observations coincided with increasing perception among anglers that shark depredation had risen over time.[198] In addition to these findings, several studies have examined fishers' perspectives regarding shark depredation. Some experts suggest that fishers' perceptions of increased shark abundance and depredation events may be related to *shifting baselines* regarding past shark abundance levels (i.e., a person's perception that a species' past abundance observed during that person's lifespan was the "normal state," which may not be

[190] Mitchell et al., "Shark Depredation in Commercial and Recreational Fisheries."

[191] Picariello et al., *Southern Shrimp Trawl Shark Depredation*; A.R. Rafferty et al., "Depredation by Harbor Seal and Spiny Dogfish in a Georges Bank Gillnet Fishery," *Fisheries Management and Ecology*, vol. 19 (2012), pp. 264-272 (hereinafter Rafferty et al., "Depredation by Harbor Seal and Spiny Dogfish in a Georges Bank Gillnet Fishery"); and K.V. Aneesh Kumar et al., "Bait, Bait Loss, and Depredation in Pelagic Longline Fisheries—A Review," *Reviews in Fisheries Science and Aquaculture*, vol. 24, no. 4 (2016), pp. 295-304.

[192] Picariello et al., *Southern Shrimp Trawl Shark Depredation*; and Rafferty et al., "Depredation by Harbor Seal and Spiny Dogfish in a Georges Bank Gillnet Fishery."

[193] Mitchell et al., "Shark Depredation"; Grace A. Casselberry et al., "When Fishing Bites: Understanding Angler Responses to Shark Depredation," *Fisheries Research*, vol. 246 (2022), 106174 (hereinafter Casselberry et al., "When Fishing Bites"); and Prasky et al., "Depredation Influences Anglers' Perceptions."

[194] Mitchell et al., "Shark Depredation."

[195] Drymon et al., "Depredation."

[196] Mitchell et al., "Shark Depredation in Commercial and Recreational Fisheries"; Prasky et al., "Depredation Influences Anglers' Perceptions"; and Mitchell et al., "Shark Depredation."

[197] Prasky et al., "Depredation Influences Anglers' Perceptions"; J.D. Mitchell et al., "A Novel Experimental Approach to Investigate the Potential for Behavioural Change in Sharks in the Context of Depredation," *Journal of Experimental Marine Biology and Ecology*, vol. 530-531 (2020), 151440; and NOAA, NMFS, *Fisheries Economics of the United States 2023: Economic and Social Status and Trends Series*, NOAA Technical Memorandum NMFS-F/SPO-254, February 2026, pp. 1-29.

[198] Drymon et al., "Depredation."

reflective of that species' historical abundance and subsequent population loss), which may be influencing these assertions.[199] However, other experts also say that stakeholders' perceptions that shark depredation has increased can be as potent as scientific observations, and argue that the perceived or real conflict should be addressed by policymakers and managers.[200] Some experts also recommend that, independent of its causes, future efforts to manage shark depredation should include integrated approaches that consider stakeholders' perceptions and desired outcomes.[201] These varying findings and viewpoints can lead to challenges in deciding how to address these factors and potentially allocate resources to account for them.

Some stakeholders assert that there is a need to manage shark depredation, yet argue that few specific management responses are available.[202] Some stakeholders point to NMFS protocols that account for toothed whale depredation mortality in fishery abundance surveys and in stock assessments for the Alaska Sablefish fishery as examples for other species.[203] They suggest that these protocols may facilitate development of similar approaches to account for shark depredation impacts in certain regional fisheries.[204] Some scientists also point to studies that use underwater video to quantify catch losses and examine the behavior of certain depredating species as a way to inform management approaches.[205] These types of protocols and approaches also might address concerns, including those expressed in stakeholders' testimony, about shark depredation and its effects on commercial and recreational fishers' catches and revenue.[206] In response to questions about these concerns, NMFS highlighted its funding of a study on shark depredation through its Bycatch Reduction Engineering Program, which is investigating how gear modifications may mitigate shark depredation.[207] Some stakeholders and experts have also asked for more data to characterize and manage shark depredation effects on fisheries. Possible approaches include

[199] Mitchell et al., "Shark Depredation"; and Daniel Pauly, "Anecdotes and the Shifting Baseline Syndrome of Fisheries," *Trends in Ecology and Evolution*, vol. 10, no. 10 (1995), p. 430. In the latter reference, Pauly refers to *shifting baseline syndrome* with respect to each generation of stakeholders (generation) accepting a baseline of a fish population's size as that observed during that generation's window of observation during their lifespans, which the generation uses to evaluate changes.

[200] Drymon et al., "Depredation."

[201] Prasky et al., "Depredation Influences Anglers' Perceptions."

[202] Klizentyte et al., "De-Hooking Depredation"; and Mitchell et al., "Shark Depredation."

[203] Dana H. Hanselman et al., "Sperm Whale Depredation on Longline Surveys and Implications for the Assessment of Alaska Sablefish," *Fisheries Research*, vol. 200 (2018), pp. 75-83; and Mitchell et al., "Shark Depredation."

[204] Mitchell et al., "Shark Depredation."

[205] Mitchell et al., "Shark Depredation."

[206] U.S. Congress, House Natural Resources Committee, Water, Wildlife and Fisheries Subcommittee, *Hearing on H.R. 4587, H.R. 4051, H.R. 4094, H.R. 1792, H.R. 1437, H.R. 2950, H.R. 2982, H.R. 4596*, 118th Cong., 1st sess., July 27, 2023, https://naturalresources.house.gov/calendar/eventsingle.aspx?EventID=414642. Hereinafter House Natural Resources Committee, Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries Subcommittee, *Hearing*, July 27, 2023; and Casselberry et al., "When Fishing Bites."

[207] House Natural Resources Committee, Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries Subcommittee, *Hearing*, July 27, 2023; NOAA, NMFS, "Bycatch Reduction Engineering Program," https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/bycatch/bycatch-reduction-engineering-program; and NOAA, NMFS, "2024 Bycatch Reduction Engineering Program Projects Recommended for Funding," https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/funding-financial-services/2024-bycatch-reduction-engineering-program-projects-recommended. According to NOAA, this program was proposed for termination in FY2026. NOAA stated that in the program's absence, "NMFS will continue to work with its partners and others to better understand bycatch and to implement management measures." NOAA, *Budget Estimates Fiscal Year 2026, Congressional Submission*, p. NMFS-17, https://www.noaa.gov/sites/default/files/2025-06/NOAA%20FY26%20Congressional%20Justification.pdf.

- using citizen science (i.e., information gathered from the general public) to inform shark depredation;[208]
- using technologies to deter sharks (e.g., magnets, electrical, acoustic, chemical) and evaluate the effectiveness of personal electrical shark bite deterrents used by surfers and divers;[209]
- using descender devices to mitigate *barotrauma* in reef fishes to limit postrelease depredation by sharks;[210]
- rotating fishing sites to mitigate shark depredation, and/or modifying certain fishing methods or gear types (e.g., using jigs and lures and not using bait that relies on odor cues; altering gear soak times and hook depths); and
- diversifying targeted species to mitigate depredation based on studies finding that sharks may target particular species more frequently.

Some scientists also find that behavioral or technological measures (e.g., changing fishing areas or gear types) appear to be the most effective ways to reduce shark depredation. These approaches could include modifying fisher behaviors and additional approaches such as educating stakeholders about shark depredation.[211] Further, some modeling studies suggest that the factors that contribute to most depredation events are already controlled by ships' captains, and that beyond novel technologies to repel sharks (e.g., electrical deterrent devices)[212] there may be little further opportunity to reduce depredation loss in a given fishery.[213] Additionally, some studies suggest that some certain fishers may not wish to change their fishing behaviors in light of shark depredation due to differing responses to shark depredation experiences (e.g., private recreational anglers may be less likely than charter for-hire fishers to change their behaviors due to shark depredation and may have differing responses to a depredation encounter).[214]

In addition to its effects on fisheries, some experts have raised concerns about how shark depredation affects social perceptions of sharks and shark conservation. For example, some have

[208] Michael P. McCallister et al., "A Multifaceted Citizen-Science Approach for Characterizing Shark Depredation in Florida's Recreational Fisheries," *ICES Journal of Marine Science*, vol. 82, no. 2 (2025), fsaf013, pp. 1-18.

[209] Mitchell et al., "Shark Depredation."

[210] Some experts define *barotrauma* as "a bodily injury to a fish caused by sudden changes in pressure," which may lead to expansion of the fish's swim bladder (causing the fish to float at the surface for an extended time) and lead to difficulty in swimming back to its original depth. Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, "Spotlight on Barotrauma," https://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/page/barotrauma. A descender device is a weighted tool used to return fish back to deep water for recompression. Mitchell et al., "Shark Depredation"; J. Marcus Drymon et al., "Descender Devices or Treat Tethers: Does Barotrauma Mitigation Increase Opportunities for Depredation?," *Fisheries*, vol. 45, no. 7 (2020), pp. 377-379; and Brendan J. Runde et al., "Depredation of Demersal Reef Fishes Released with Descender Devices Is Uncommon off North Carolina, USA," *North American Journal of Fisheries Management*, vol. 42, no. 5 (2022), pp. 1196-1201.

[211] Mitchell et al., "Shark Depredation."

[212] Jonathan D. Mitchell et al., "Significant Reduction in Shark (Cucut) Depredation Rates When Using an Electrical Deterrent Device at Cocos (Keeling) Islands, Australia," *Marine and Freshwater Research*, vol. 77, no. 4 (2026), MF25165, pp. 1-13.

[213] M. Aaron MacNeil et al., "Shark Depredation Rates in Pelagic Longline Fisheries: A Case Study from the Northwest Atlantic," *ICES Journal of Marine Science*, vol. 66, no. 4 (2009), pp. 708-719; WPRFMC, "Overview of Shark Depredation Research and Needs in Western Pacific Region," https://www.wpcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/Overview-of-Shark-Depredation-Research-Affecting-U.S.-Fisheries-Management.pdf; and Associated Press staff, "Sharks Take Bigger Bite of Hawaii Fishermen's Catch," *E&E News Greenwire*, March 12, 2026.

[214] Kotryna Klizentyte et al., "De-Hooking Depredation: Exploring Multiple Fisher Perceptions About Marine Depredation in Florida," *Ocean and Coastal Management*, vol. 241 (2023), 106677. Hereinafter Klizentyte et al., "De-Hooking Depredation."

suggested that retaliatory killing of sharks may result from negative perceptions associated with depredation.[215] Additionally, some studies reveal mixed perceptions by stakeholders regarding shark depredation and shark conservation, and differential behavioral responses. For example, a study of Gulf of America recreational reef fish anglers found that most believed that shark populations should be maintained at current levels, while approximately one-third responded that shark populations should be reduced.[216]

Conservation Concerns for Threatened and Endangered Sharks

Some shark species that inhabit U.S. waters are found in international waters and governed waters of other countries,[217] including some species identified as threatened or endangered. Therefore, U.S. shark conservation activities and issues are tied to international policies and conservation practices addressing sharks. Threatened and endangered shark species listed under the ESA, CITES, and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species are often the subject of stakeholder concerns.[218] A global assessment of sharks and similar fishes found that approximately one-third of these species are listed by the IUCN as threatened with extinction, primarily due to overfishing by commercial fisheries; some shark species listed in this category are found in U.S. waters.[219] Scientists suggest that countries with science-based sustainable fisheries management measures, such as the United States, have comparatively lower percentages of extinction risk for sharks. These scientists also caution that challenges remain for the United States and these developed nations in managing threatened sharks given ongoing cases of depletion and/or unsustainable mortality for many shark populations in these nations' waters and their import of seafood from inequitably managed fisheries.[220] In January 2026, President Trump directed executive agencies to withdraw the United States from the IUCN, among other international intergovernmental organizations; the United States remains a party to CITES.[221] It remains unclear how these aforementioned factors may influence future conservation measures for threatened and endangered sharks (including those occurring in U.S. waters) given varying management considerations and assessments for sharks among nations. Additional information is included in the text box below.

---

[215] Tianna Olivas et al., "Assessing Marine Wildlife Interactions with the Charter Boat Fishing Industry on Alabama's Gulf Coast, USA," *Human Dimensions of Wildlife*, 2025, pp. 1-17 (hereinafter Olivas et al., "Assessing Marine Wildlife Interactions"); and J. Marcus Drymon and Steven B. Scyphers, "Attitudes and Perceptions Influence Recreational Angler Support for Shark Conservation and Fisheries Sustainability," *Marine Policy*, vol. 81 (2017), pp. 153-159 (hereinafter Drymon and Scyphers, "Attitudes and Perceptions Influence Recreational Angler Support").

[216] Prasky et al., "Depredation Influences Anglers' Perceptions."

[217] Example sharks include those managed under the NOAA, NMFS Consolidated Atlantic Highly Migratory Species Management Plan. NOAA, NMFS, *Final Consolidated Atlantic Highly Migratory Species Fishery Management Plan*, July 2026, pp. 3-109. See also NOAA, NMFS, "Atlantic Highly Migratory Shark Species," https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/atlantic-highly-migratory-species/atlantic-highly-migratory-shark-species.

[218] International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), "The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species," https://www.iucnredlist.org/.

[219] Dulvy et al., "Overfishing Drives Over One-Third of All Sharks and Rays."

[220] Nicholas K. Dulvy et al., "Ecological Erosion and Expanding Extinction Risk of Sharks and Rays," *Science*, vol. 386, no. 6726 (2024), pp. 1-10.

[221] In a presidential memorandum issued on January 7, 2026, President Trump directed executive agencies to withdraw the United States from multiple international intergovernmental organizations, including the IUCN. Executive Office of the President, "Withdrawing the United States from International Organizations, Conventions, and Treaties That Are Contrary to the Interests of the United States," Memorandum of January 7, 2026, 91 *Federal Register* 2281-2284, January 16, 2026 (hereinafter Executive Office of the President, "Withdrawing the United States from International Organizations," 91 *Federal Register* 2281-2284).

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN)

The IUCN is an international conservation organization composed of multiple members (i.e., parties), commissions, and representatives from more than 160 nations. It was created in 1948 and self-identifies as the world's largest environmental network. Among its efforts, the IUCN has produced the Red List of Threatened Species (IUCN Red List) since 1964, which identifies species threatened with extinction based on its own criteria (i.e., pertaining to population reduction; restricted geographic range; population size and decline; and extinction probability). Species classifications from most to least threatened include "extinct," "extinct in the wild," "critically endangered," "endangered," "vulnerable," and "near threatened." Other classifications include "least concern," "data deficient," and "not evaluated." Based on its listing criteria, the IUCN identifies 37% of global sharks and rays as being threatened with extinction (i.e., ranging from "vulnerable" to "critically endangered" classifications).

Some stakeholders have raised concerns about threats to IUCN-listed sharks, and have highlighted inconsistencies between species listed under the IUCN Red List and under the Endangered Species Act. According to NMFS, its scientists participate in the species assessment for the IUCN Red List, but do not base their management decisions on IUCN designations (i.e., NMFS uses different criteria to determine species status in accordance with the ESA and Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation Management Act). For example, the White shark is listed as "vulnerable" on the IUCN Red List, but not listed under the ESA. In 2013, NMFS evaluated petitions requesting that the northeastern Pacific population of White sharks be listed under the ESA and found that the population did not warrant listing due to a low to very low risk of extinction in consideration of multiple factors. Some experts have disagreed over whether IUCN Red List criteria are appropriate across the range of life histories and ecological attributes that exist for IUCN-listed species, including sharks, and suggest that any findings may depend on the scale of analysis.

Sources: IUCN, "IUCN," https://iucn.org/; IUCN, "The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species," https://www.iucnredlist.org/; IUCN, "Frequently Asked Questions—What Are the IUCN Red List Categories and Criteria," https://www.iucnredlist.org/about/faqs; National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Marine Fisheries Service, "Understanding Atlantic Shark Fishing," https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/insight/understanding-atlantic-shark-fishing; Heidi Dewar et al., *Status Review of the Northeastern Pacific Population of White Sharks (Carcharodon carcharias) Under the Endangered Species Act*, NOAA, NMFS, La Jolla, CA, 2013, pp. 1-176, https://repository.library.noaa.gov/view/noaa/17705; and M. Kai, "Are the Current IUCN Category and CITES Listing Appropriate for the Conservation and Management of Shortfin Mako, *Isurus oxyrinchus*, in the North Pacific Ocean?," *Marine Policy*, vol. 134 (2021), 104790.

A global assessment of sharks and other similar fishes found that disproportionate numbers of threatened and endangered sharks and rays occur in tropical and subtropical coastal waters where they are vulnerable to continued harvest and overfishing.[222] Studies have also found that small sharks and several threatened species (e.g., Thresher and Hammerhead sharks) have higher probabilities of mortality following their incidental capture in gillnet and longline fisheries, including in these and other regions.[223] Experts have called for additional science-based fishing limits, effective place-based protections, novel approaches to reduce or eliminate mortality to threatened species as bycatch for fisheries, and ensuring sustainable catch and trade of sharks.[224]

Some stakeholders have also raised concerns regarding data deficiencies in accounting for shark bycatch rates, including for threatened and endangered species.[225] Some researchers have found that entanglements with fishing gear impact threatened species. In addition, some studies document shark entanglements with marine debris, such as derelict fishing gear, including effects

[222] Dulvy et al., "Overfishing Drives Over One-Third of All Sharks and Rays."

[223] For example, Leonardo Manir Feitosa et al., "Retention Bans Are Beneficial but Insufficient to Stop Shark Overfishing," *Fish and Fisheries*, vol. 26, no. 3 (2025), pp. 473-487. The authors of this study reported that of the 160 relevant studies they examined in the scientific literature, the majority came from study locations in the United States (n=56), Australia (n=19), and Portugal (n=13).

[224] Dulvy et al., "Overfishing Drives Over One-Third of All Sharks and Rays."

[225] Charles A. Gray and Steven J. Kennelly, "Bycatches of Endangered, Threatened and Protected Species in Marine Fisheries," *Reviews in Fish Biology and Fisheries*, vol. 28 (2018), pp. 521-541.

to IUCN-listed "vulnerable" shark species.[226] In addition to these threats, some scientists also say that some species of sharks are becoming more vulnerable to catch and entanglements due to their range expansions. One study found increasing vulnerability of certain ESA-listed species, such as Great Hammerhead sharks, in international fisheries (i.e., both those that target the species or capture it as bycatch) associated with the species' range expansions.[227] Such expansions and vulnerabilities may potentially result in refined considerations by RFMOs and other intergovernmental management bodies regarding conservation of these species.[228]

The effects of the legal and illegal trade of shark-based products on threatened and endangered shark species are a concern expressed by stakeholders.[229] Demand for shark-based products increases pressure on threatened and endangered shark species whose populations are vulnerable to harvesting. Studies find that U.S. demand for shark-based products (e.g., shark fins and shark meat) also may contribute to the decline of endangered shark species. For example, one study reported that 31% of shark meat samples taken from U.S. grocery stores were derived from shark species listed as endangered or critically endangered by the IUCN.[230] In developing countries, a portion of shark-based products are derived from threatened and endangered species, which may be imported into the United States. Using molecular approaches, scientists found that over 70% of traded fins sampled in Tanzania fish markets originated from threatened sharks or similar fishes, with approximately 37% from critically endangered species.[231] Additionally, approximately 91% of traded fins were from CITES-listed species. In Brazil, scientists found that the majority of harvested shark species sampled in fish markets and landing ports were considered threatened with extinction under Brazilian law and other international authorities (i.e., IUCN, CITES).[232] Similarly, studies sampling shark fin products in various locations throughout Singapore, Hong Kong, Indonesia, and other countries have detected the sale of CITES or IUCN-listed shark species.[233] Additional studies have documented that 61% of online shark trophy sale listings

[226] The authors found that 44% of animals evaluated in this study (out of 557 total animals evaluated) were from the United States. Kristian J. Parton et al., "Global Review of Shark and Ray Entanglement in Anthropogenic Marine Debris," *Endangered Species Research,* vol. 39 (2019), pp. 173-190.

[227] Neil Hammerschlag et al., "Range Extension of the Endangered Great Hammerhead Shark *Sphyrna mokarran* in the Northwest Atlantic: Preliminary Data and Significance for Conservation," *Endangered Species Research,* vol. 13 (2011), pp. 111-116.

[228] For example, R. Coelho et al., "Revision of the Shortfin Mako Shark Size Distribution in the Atlantic," *Collective Volume of Scientific Papers, ICCAT,* vol. 82, no. 2 (2025), pp. 1-22.

[229] For example, Association of Zoos and Aquariums, "Global Study Reveals Widespread Illegal Shark Fin Trade Nearly a Decade After International Protections," https://www.aza.org/connect-stories/stories/global-study-reveals-widespread-illegal-shark-fin-trade-nearly-a-decade-after-international-protections.

[230] Savannah Ryburn et al., "Sale of Critically Endangered Sharks in the United States," *Frontiers in Marine Science*, vol. 12 (September 2025).

[231] Cyrus Rumisha et al., "Threatening the Endangered: Uncovering Endangered Elasmobranchs and Factors Perpetuating the Tanzanian Shark-Fin Trade," *African Journal of Ecology*, vol. 62, no. 2 (2024), e13275.

[232] Leonardo Manir Feitosa et al., "DNA-Based Identification Reveals Illegal Trade of Threatened Shark Species in a Global Elasmobranch Conservation Hotspot," *Scientific Reports,* vol. 8 (2018), 3347, pp. 1-11; and Fernanda Almerón-Souza et al., "Molecular Identification of Shark Meat From Local Markets in Southern Brazil Based on DNA Barcoding: Evidence for Mislabeling and Trade of Endangered Species," *Frontiers in Genetics*, vol. 9 (2018), 138, pp. 1-12.

[233] Kai-Lin Selena Shen et al., "DNA Barcoding Continues to Identify Endangered Species of Shark Sold as Food in a Globally Significant Shark Fin Trade Hub," *PeerJ*, vol. 12 (2024), e16647, pp. 1-16; Diego Cardeñosa et al., "Two Thirds of Species in a Global Shark Fin Trade Hub are Threatened with Extinction: Conservation Potential of International Trade Regulations for Coastal Sharks," *Conservation Letters*, vol. 15 (2022), pp. e12910, pp. 1-11 (hereinafter Cardeñosa et al. "Two Thirds of Species"); and Andrianus Sembiring et al., "DNA Barcoding Reveals Targeted Fisheries for Endangered Sharks in Indonesia," *Fisheries Research*, vol. 164 (2015), pp. 130-134.

(mainly jaws) were from species listed as endangered or critically endangered.[234] Some experts recommend enhancing intergovernmental collaborations and international trade regulations for additional shark species to help address these practices.[235] However, some stakeholders, such as the International Coalition of Fisheries Associations, have cautioned about the inclusion of some additional shark species under CITES, which regulates the international trade of threatened and endangered species, given differences in the biology of and fishing practices for certain sharks among different regions.[236]

In addition to commercial harvesting, stakeholders and experts have raised concerns about the effect of recreational fisheries on threatened and endangered sharks. Some experts state that it remains uncertain whether harvest-based recreational fisheries could be a significant contributing factor to the global downward trend in the abundance of sharks.[237] They also recommend additional data to allow for greater enumeration of recreational shark catches. Meanwhile, some studies also suggest that mortality from recreational angling can pose a conservation threat to certain species of threatened sharks.[238] For example, one study reported that approximately 7% (n=85) of all species for which size records were published in the 2011 International Game Fishing Association (IGFA) world record guide were those listed as threatened with extinction (i.e., either "vulnerable," "endangered," or "critically endangered)."[239] These species also comprised a higher proportion of the largest size class, while species of least concern made up a higher proportion of the smallest size class. Some experts recommend that for IUCN Red List threatened species, the IGFA stop issuing records that implicitly require killing the fish. They claim that this approach can reduce fishing pressure on the largest individuals of species of conservation concern while still allowing anglers to target more than 93% of species for which records have been issued.[240] Some further assert that recreational catch and release tournaments, including those with cooperative tag and release approaches and mandatory reporting requirements, may assist with shark data collection and conservation efforts.[241]

Stakeholders also have offered perspectives on the effect of recreational shark fishing tournaments on shark populations, including potential capture of threatened and endangered

[234] Sunandan Chakraborty et al., "Prevalence of Endangered Shark Trophies in Automated Detection of the Online Wildlife Trade," *Biological Conservation*, vol. 304 (2025), 110992.

[235] For example, Executive Order (E.O.) 13648, "Combating Wildlife Trafficking," established an interagency task force on wildlife trafficking to coordinate domestic and international efforts to address wildlife trafficking. As directed in the E.O., the task force also produced a National Strategy for Combating Wildlife Trafficking. Sharks are among the species of interest mentioned in the national strategy. Executive Order 13648 of July 1, 2013, "Combating Wildlife Trafficking," 78 *Federal Register* 40621-40623, July 5, 2013; The White House, *National Strategy for Combating Wildlife Trafficking*, February 2014, pp. 1-12, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/docs/nationalstrategywildlifetrafficking.pdf; and Cardeñosa et al. "Two Thirds of Species."

[236] Chris Chase, "International Coalition of Fisheries Associations Urging CITES to Reject Proposals on Multiple Species," *Seafood Source*, November 25, 2025.

[237] Austin J. Gallagher et al., "Shark Recreational Fisheries: Status, Challenges, and Research Needs," *Ambio*, vol. 46 (2016), pp. 385-398. Hereinafter Gallagher et al., "Shark Recreational Fisheries."

[238] Gallagher et al., "Shark Recreational Fisheries"; and P.M. Kyne and P. Feutry, "Recreational Fishing Impacts on Threatened River Sharks: A Potential Conservation Issue," *Ecological Management and Restoration*, vol. 18 (2017), pp. 209-213.

[239] D.S. Shiffman et al., "Trophy Fishing for Species Threatened with Extinction: A Way Forward Building on a History of Conservation," *Marine Policy*, vol. 50 (2014), pp. 318-332. Hereinafter Shiffman et al., "Trophy Fishing for Species Threatened with Extinction."

[240] Shiffman et al., "Trophy Fishing for Species Threatened with Extinction."

[241] Ashley D. Keefer, "We're Gonna Need a Bigger Boat: How Federal Regulations of Shark Fishing Tournaments Could Shift the Tides of Conservation Initiatives," *Jeffrey S. Moorad Sports Law Journal*, vol. 23, no. 1 (2016), pp. 291-336.

species during tournaments. Some note that certain IUCN or CITES-listed species (e.g., Mako sharks) may be taken in tournaments, and report that NMFS allows these captures given its ability to manage their harvests directly (i.e., using quotas to prevent overfishing).[242] In contrast to this sentiment, NMFS states that it does not "operate, sponsor, fund, or profit from any fishing tournaments," and requires all participants to know and follow all relevant state and federal regulations regarding sharks.[243] Some nations take additional precautions during fishing tournaments with respect to IUCN-listed shark species. For example, in Canada, after finding that Porbeagle shark were assessed as "endangered," tournament organizing committees excluded Porbeagle shark from catch considerations and stated that participants could not win by landing a Porbeagle shark.[244] Canadian conservation concerns for some other species (e.g., Shortfin Mako shark [considered endangered]) led to conditions that permitted only Blue shark landings; all other shark species were prohibited.[245]

Some experts suggest that studies documenting population benefits associated with catch-and-release fishing, particularly for shark species, are needed.[246] Others note that certain IUCN-listed shark species (i.e., Hammerhead sharks) are vulnerable to angling stress and postrelease mortality independent of catch-and-release practices.[247] NMFS provides information on identifying prohibited sharks and tips for safe handling and release by anglers.[248] Further, Amendment 11 to the Comprehensive Atlantic HMS FMP requires all recreational shark anglers fishing for Atlantic HMS in federal waters to use nonoffset, corrosive circle hooks, except when fishing with flies or artificial lures.[249] Some experts have recommended further restrictions on "harmful and unnecessary" angling practices focused on avoiding prolonged air exposure, long fight times, abrasions from dragging, and injuries from specific gear types. They also note concerns about lags in anglers' behavioral changes despite legal protections for certain shark species.[250]

Selected Options and Considerations for Congress

Some Members of Congress may consider current activities regarding shark conservation and management to be inadequate for meeting congressional goals for species conservation, whereas

[242] Shark Research Institute, "2019 U.S. Shark Tournaments," https://www.sharks.org/shark-slaughter-for-sport; and Shark Allies, "Shark Fishing Tournaments," https://sharkallies.org/shark-fishing-tournaments.

[243] NOAA, NMFS, "Tournaments for Atlantic Highly Migratory Species," https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/atlantic-highly-migratory-species/tournaments-atlantic-highly-migratory-species.

[244] Heather Bowlby et al., *A Summary of the Recreational Shark Fishing Tournament Landings Data and Canadian Dart Tag Database from Maritimes Region*, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Canadian Technical Report of Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences 3516, 2023, pp. 1-26, https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Heather-Bowlby/publication/379875000_A_Summary_of_the_Recreational_Shark_Fishing_Tournament_Landings_Data_and_Canadian_Dart_Tag_Database_from_Maritimes_Region/links/661fc60139e7641c0bd3e5da/A-Summary-of-the-Recreational-Shark-Fishing-Tournament-Landings-Data-and-Canadian-Dart-Tag-Database-from-Maritimes-Region.pdf. Hereinafter Bowlby et al., *Recreational Shark Fishing Tournament Landings*.

[245] Bowlby et al., *Recreational Shark Fishing Tournament Landings*.

[246] Steven J. Cooke et al., "Angling for Endangered Fish: Conservation Problem or Conservation Action?," *Fish and Fisheries*, vol. 17 (2016), pp. 249-265.

[247] David S. Shiffman, "Recreational Shark Fishing in Florida: How Research and Strategic Science Communication Helped to Change Policy," *Conservation Science and Practice*, vol. 2, no. 4 (2020), e174, pp. 1-5.

[248] NOAA, NMFS, "Understanding Atlantic Shark Fishing."

[249] U.S. Department of Commerce, NOAA, NMFS, *Amendment 11 to the 2006 Consolidated Atlantic Highly Migratory Species Fishery Management Plan*, 2018, pp. 1-252, https://media.fisheries.noaa.gov/dam-migration/final_amendment_11_to_the_2006_consolidated_hms_fmp.pdf; NOAA, NMFS, "Understanding Atlantic Shark Fishing."

[250] David S. Shiffman et al., "Fishing Practices and Representations of Shark Conservation Issues Among Users of a Land-Based Shark Angling Online Forum," *Fisheries Research*, vol. 196 (2017), pp. 13-26.

others may consider current law, regulations, and implementation sufficient. Congress may face several issues with respect to shark conservation and management, including any potential costs or shifts in policy priorities that may occur from attention to these issues.

Congress may consider whether certain laws should specifically address sharks in provisions related to conservation and management or remain broadly framed. For example, several provisions in the ACFCMA prescribe management approaches governing interjurisdictionally managed coastal fisheries, such as American lobster.[251] Congress may consider whether certain provisions regarding coastal shark management may be warranted, such as with respect to the interstate Atlantic Coastal Sharks FMP.[252] Relatedly, for example, several bills introduced in the 119th Congress have sought to amend the MSA to include provisions that focus on sharks (e.g., H.R. 207 and H.R. 3831).[253] Some laws address specific aspects of shark conservation, including a prohibition on shark finning and feeding of sharks in specific waters. Congress could consider amending these laws or enacting a new law that broadly supports the conservation and monitoring of sharks in U.S. waters.

Alternatively, Congress may continue leaving most shark conservation and management priorities to the discretion of agencies and management bodies in accordance with present authorities for fisheries and protected species. Some experts suggest that such an approach could provide flexibility to managers and stakeholders in addressing management of sharks and other fishery species.[254] Other experts also have commented that discretion and flexibility for managers, as opposed to a rigid and/or overly prescriptive management system, can allow for adaptive management when responding to emerging stressors (e.g., climate change) affecting sharks and other fishery species.[255] Further, other studies emphasize the importance of governance-focused priorities for particular ecosystems and their fisheries, together with flexible options for decisionmakers, in allowing for effective management.[256] In addition to these factors, Congress may evaluate other potential consequences related to prescribing actions for shark species in legislation because their implementation might compete with appropriations and resources for other fisheries priorities and mandates.

Congress may consider whether directing agencies to refine their shark conservation, assessment, and management approaches may be warranted. Members of Congress intermittently have directed or encouraged NMFS and partners to prioritize particular shark species (e.g., those managed as highly migratory species) and their conservation and

[251] 16 U.S.C. §4102(3); and 16 U.S.C. §§5107a-5107b.

[252] ASMFC, *Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Atlantic Coastal Sharks*, Fishery Management Report No. 46 of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, August 2008, pp. 1-172, https://asmfc.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/interstateFMPforAtlanticCoastalSharks.pdf; and ASMFC, "Coastal Sharks."

[253] In another example, S. 3099, the Access for Sportfishing Act of 2016 (introduced in the 114th Congress), would have amended the MSA to make shark feeding illegal in all U.S. waters unless conducted under a permit for scientific research or educational purposes as issued by the Secretary of Commerce. For more information about H.R. 207/S. 2314, the Supporting the Health of Aquatic systems through Research, Knowledge, and Enhanced Dialogue Act (SHARKED Act) and H.R. 3831, the Florida Safe Seas Act of 2025 (introduced in the 119th Congress), see the section "Selected Legislation Related to Shark Conservation and Management in the 119th Congress."

[254] Hollie Booth et al., "The Mitigation Hierarchy for Sharks: A Risk-Based Framework for Reconciling Trade-Offs Between Shark Conservation and Fisheries Objectives," *Fish and Fisheries*, vol. 21, no. 2 (2020), pp. 269-289. Hereinafter Booth et al., "The Mitigation Hierarchy for Sharks."

[255] For example, Abigail S. Golden et al., "Climate Adaptation Depends on Rebalancing Flexibility and Rigidity in U.S. Fisheries Management," *ICES Journal of Marine Science*, vol. 81, no. 2 (2024), pp. 252-259.

[256] Booth et al., "The Mitigation Hierarchy for Sharks"; and Andrew J. Kenny et al., "Delivering Sustainable Fisheries Through Adoption of a Risk-Based Framework as Part of an Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management," *Marine Policy*, vol. 93 (2018), pp. 232-240; and Link and Marshak, "Characterizing and Comparing Marine Fisheries Ecosystems."

management.[257] For example, in 2003, congressional conferees expressed their expectation that NMFS would continue funding multi-biological research on highly migratory shark species to inform their conservation and management.[258] Further, in 2024, Members encouraged NMFS to conduct regular assessments of vulnerable shark and ray populations, among other related efforts.[259] Congress may consider authorizing such directives in exclusive laws, given their intermittent inclusion in appropriations language, or consider to what degree they may be necessary in light of such intermittent frequency. Further, Congress might consider directing agencies to alter (e.g., increase) the regularity of assessing (1) certain shark populations, (2) the impacts from shark depredation to specific fisheries, and/or (3) the viability of listed species.[260] Congress also may consider whether to prioritize the conservation and management of particular shark species, including whether to include such directives in appropriations. Congress also may consider the degree to which NMFS and partners have addressed some of these topics and past directives.

Relatedly, in accordance with NMFS mandates and policies, Congress could consider if or to what degree ecosystem-based management approaches may be warranted for sharks as components of marine ecosystems, including with respect to setting aggregate harvest limits for certain shark species collectively.[261] These approaches may manage sharks collectively with other members of an ecosystem and may broadly account for their roles or position in the food web.[262] Additionally, some experts note that holistic ecosystem-based management approaches require less species-specific focus and may be more effective for managing risk to fishery species.[263] Congress could also consider the degree to which concurrent management approaches that include ecosystem-based measures and single-species management actions may be warranted for certain shark species.[264] For example, Congress may prefer that management bodies continue to focus certain management actions on dominantly landed shark fishery species, such as Spiny

[257] As examples, U.S. Congress, Conference Committee, *Making Further Continuing Appropriations for the Fiscal Year 2003, and for Other Purposes*, conference report to accompany H.J. Res. 2, 108th Cong., 1st sess., H.Rept. 108-10, February 13, 2003, p. 710 (hereinafter U.S. Congress, Conference Committee, *Making Further Continuing Appropriations for the Fiscal Year 2003*); and Senate Appropriations Committee, *Departments of Commerce and Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, 2024*, p. 42; and NOAA, NMFS, "Consolidated Atlantic Highly Migratory Species Management Plan."

[258] U.S. Congress, Conference Committee, *Making Further Continuing Appropriations for the Fiscal Year 2003*, p. 710.

[259] Senate Appropriations Committee, *Departments of Commerce and Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, 2024*, p. 42.

[260] Prasky et al., "Depredation Influences Anglers' Perceptions"; Jorgensen et al., "Emergent Research Priorities"; Oceana, "Are U.S. Sharks in Trouble?," https://usa.oceana.org/blog/are-us-sharks-trouble/.

[261] For more information about Ecosystem-Based Fisheries Management, see CRS In Focus IF12768, *Ecosystem-Based Fisheries Management*, by Anthony R. Marshak; Link and Marshak, "Characterizing and Comparing Marine Fisheries Ecosystems"; and Wendy E. Morrison et al., "Ecosystem-Level Reference Points: Moving Toward Ecosystem-Based Fisheries Management," *Marine and Coastal Fisheries: Dynamics, Management, and Ecosystem Science*, vol. 16, no. 2 (2024), e210285 (hereinafter Morrison et al., "Ecosystem-Level Reference Points").

[262] Link and Marshak, "Characterizing and Comparing Marine Fisheries Ecosystems"; and Morrison et al., "Ecosystem-Level Reference Points."

[263] Link and Marshak, "Characterizing and Comparing Marine Fisheries Ecosystems"; and Townsend et al., "Multispecies Portfolios of U.S. Marine Fisheries."

[264] Andrea Dell'Apa et al., "Who Let the Dogfish Out? A Review of Management and Socio-Economic Aspects of Spiny Dogfish Fisheries," *Reviews in Fish Biology and Fisheries*, vol. 25 (2014), pp. 273-295; Link and Marshak, "Characterizing and Comparing Marine Fisheries Ecosystems"; and Kristin N. Marshall et al., "Inclusion of Ecosystem Information in U.S. Fish Stock Assessments Suggests Progress Toward Ecosystem-Based Fisheries Management," *ICES Journal of Marine Science*, vol. 76, no. 1 (2019), pp. 1-9.

dogfish, which is managed under its own FMP.[265] Further, Congress could include directives to NMFS and its federal partners regarding their focus on other factors that may affect shark conservation (e.g., climate- and oceanographic-related factors, prey shifts), including considerations of long-term environmental change. Congress may consider adjusting funding amounts related to these factors, including how focus on such factors may intersect with or detract from priorities for other living marine resources.

Congress may consider funding levels for shark conservation and management. The level of funding for the conservation and management of marine species is a recurring issue for Congress. Congress provides appropriations to NMFS to administer the conservation and management of fisheries and protected species broadly, including sharks.[266] Congress also typically provides annual funding to the Department of State to administer U.S. engagements with international fisheries commissions, some of which multilaterally manage certain transboundary shark species.[267] In recent years, Congress has intermittently included directives regarding NMFS's use of funding under its budget lines to inform its management of sharks, but has not authorized or funded a specific program for shark management or conservation.[268] Congress may contemplate whether to specify appropriations for shark conservation and management within an existing program or in a new program authorized for sharks. Alternatively, Congress might decide to continue to give NMFS discretion to allocate appropriations for sharks. Congress may consider stakeholder perspectives, including those of the Administration, on shark conservation and management when appropriating funds and other administrative priorities with respect to fishery and protected species. Examples of Trump Administration policy initiatives that may have funding-related implications for management of sharks include the proposal to consolidate the ESA and MMPA-related work of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and NMFS into a single program under FWS,[269] and implementation of priorities for U.S. fisheries in accordance with Executive Order (E.O.) 14276.[270] Relatedly, in accordance with this E.O., the Gulf Council

[265] New England Fishery Management Council, "Spiny Dogfish," https://www.nefmc.org/management-plans/dogfish.

[266] As examples, Congress appropriates funds to NOAA for shark-related efforts in budget lines such as "Protected Resources Science and Management," "Fisheries Science and Management," and "Enforcement." Further, for example, Congress provides funding to NOAA to allocate to FMCs and interstate marine fisheries commissions through its "Fisheries Science and Management—Regional Councils and Fisheries Commissions" funding line. Typically, appropriations are through annual Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies appropriations laws.

[267] Examples include ICCAT, the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission, and those that may be included under "Other Marine Conservation Organizations." For example, "Explanatory Statement Submitted by Mr. Cole, Chair of the House Committee on Appropriations, Regarding H.R. 7006, Financial Services and General Government and National Security, Department of State, and Related Programs Appropriations," *Congressional Record*, vol. 172, part No. 10 (January 14, 2026), p. H858. At times, Congress has further specified which organizations were included under "Other Marine Conservation Organizations," such as in S.Rept. 112-85 (September 2011), where the Senate Committee on Appropriations included ICCAT and "International Shark Conservation Program" among those organizations.

[268] For example, in S.Rept. 118-62, the Senate Committee on Appropriations included language encouraging NOAA to "expeditiously implement" the Shark Fin Sales Elimination Act, among other directives. U.S. Congress, Senate Appropriations Committee, *Departments of Commerce and Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, 2024*, report to accompany S.2321, 118th Cong., 1st sess., S.Rept. 118-62, July 13, 2023, p. 42. Hereinafter Senate Appropriations Committee, *Departments of Commerce and Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, 2024*.

[269] FWS, *Budget Justifications and Performance Information Fiscal Year 2026*, p. ES-1, https://www.fws.gov/media/budget-justifications-and-performance-information-fiscal-year-2026. Such consolidations have been considered in previous administrations too. For example, U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Government Reorganization: Potential Benefits and Drawbacks of Merging the National Marine Fisheries Service into the Fish and Wildlife Service*, GAO-13-248, February 14, 2013, pp. 1-43, https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-13-248.

[270] E.O. 14276, "Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness." Some of these priorities may lead to management refinements pertaining to sharks and/or attention to other fisheries (and potentially adjustments to funding allocations). (continued...)

issued recommended actions for fisheries management that included its support for transferring shark management responsibilities for Atlantic sharks to FMCs directly (as opposed to NMFS's present management of various Atlantic sharks as stipulated in the MSA).[271]

Congress also may consider whether to focus appropriations on additional or alternative priorities, including those pertaining to marine species broadly and which may or may not include sharks. Congress also may consider the degree to which private contributions toward shark conservation efforts may be an alternative or complementary avenue for funding shark conservation activities, including how interests among stakeholders for donating to such programs may vary.[272]

Congress may consider whether to address science and data gaps applicable to shark conservation and management. Some Members of Congress and stakeholders have discussed how ongoing science and data gaps may impede shark conservation and management.[273] For example, some stakeholders note the number and proportion of domestic and international shark species for which overfishing or overfished status remains unknown.[274] Related to these knowledge gaps and use of available scientific information, concerns regarding the overfished status for some shark species, or about delays in their potential listing under the ESA, have led to litigation against NMFS by conservation-focused advocacy groups.[275]

Congress may consider whether to direct NMFS or other management bodies to address data and science gaps for shark species that have important conservation or economic value. For example, appropriations committees have occasionally directed NMFS to carry out collaborative research to inform shark conservation and management (in 2003) or encouraged the agency to conduct regular assessments of stock rebuilding needs and bycatch susceptibility for particular sharks and rays (in 2024).[276] Measures to address gaps in scientific information, such as shark ecology, shark migration routes, and technologies to avoid shark depredation could be funded individually or within an authorized program created by Congress through legislation. Congress also may consider how the level of funding for assessing sharks might impact the capacity to assess or manage other species. More broadly, Congress could also focus on addressing assessments of data-limited fishery species in general, of which multiple shark species are a component in certain U.S. regions.

For more information about this executive order, see CRS In Focus IF13017, *President Trump's April 2025 Executive Order on American Seafood Competitiveness: Considerations for U.S. Fisheries*, by Anthony R. Marshak.

[271] Letter from Gulf FMC to Mr. Eugenio Pineiro-Soler, Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, NOAA Fisheries Service, September 25, 2025, https://www.fisherycouncils.org/executive-orders; and 16 U.S.C. §1854(g).

[272] Drymon and Scyphers, "Attitudes and Perceptions Influence Recreational Angler Support."

[273] Shiffman et al., "The Next Generation of Conservation Research and Policy Priorities"; Jorgensen et al., "Emergent Research Priorities"; Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership (TRCP), "TRCP Applauds Bipartisan Support for SHARKED Act," https://www.trcp.org/2025/08/12/trcp-applauds-bipartisan-support-for-sharked-act/; and Nathan Strout, "U.S. House Passes SHARKED Act for the Second Time," *Seafood Source*, January 29, 2025.

[274] Oceana, "Are U.S. Sharks in Trouble?"; and Michael C. Melnychuk et al., "Characterizing State-Managed and Unmanaged Fisheries in Coastal Marine States and Territories of the United States," *Fish and Fisheries*, vol. 24, no. 5 (2023), pp. 711-729.

[275] For example, see Defenders of Wildlife, "Lawsuit Launched Over Federal Failure to Protect Shortfin Mako Shark as Endangered or Threatened Species," June 28, 2022, https://defenders.org/newsroom/lawsuit-launched-over-federal-failure-protect-shortfin-mako-shark-endangered-or-threatened; and Earth Justice, "Oceana Wins Lawsuit to Protect Overfished Dusky Sharks," March 14, 2019, https://earthjustice.org/press/2019/oceana-wins-lawsuit-to-protect-overfished-dusky-sharks.

[276] U.S. Congress, Conference Committee, *Making Further Continuing Appropriations for the Fiscal Year 2003*, p. 710; and Senate Appropriations Committee, *Departments of Commerce and Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, 2024*, p. 42.

Congress may consider whether and how to address human-shark conflicts. Some stakeholders argue that higher rates of shark depredation on U.S. fisheries and shark attacks on beachgoers are due to successful shark conservation measures that have resulted in larger shark populations.[277] Some other scientists attribute higher nearshore shark densities to nutrient runoff from cities, climate change, and food supply.[278] Further, some scientists have observed that countries with low populations have higher rates of shark attacks than those with high populations (e.g., United States).[279] Several scientists suggest that some of these causative relationships between shark abundance and frequencies of human-shark conflicts cannot be verified with existing scientific data and that additional research is warranted.[280] Some Members of Congress and stakeholders have focused on human-wildlife conflicts with sharks, such as the frequency of shark attacks, shark depredation of particular fisheries, and other impacts to humans from sharks. Some legislative proposals address these issues, such as H.R. 207/S. 2314 and H.R. 2076/S. 1003 in the 119th Congress and similar proposals in the 118th Congress (see "Selected Legislation Related to Shark Conservation and Management in the 119th Congress"). Further, some Members of Congress have emphasized the need for additional studies into human-wildlife conflicts with sharks, including during hearings in 2025.[281]

Congress may consider whether additional investigations into human-shark conflicts in relation to fisheries or human safety are warranted. For example, Congress could consider directing NMFS to prioritize human-shark conflicts in its investigations, when implementing competitive grants that it administers (e.g., Saltonstall-Kennedy Grant Competition, Bycatch Reduction Engineering Program), or possibly through a new grant program that addresses human-shark conflicts.[282] Members of Congress previously directed NMFS to review and assess conflicts among dolphins, sharks, and Southeast fisheries in 2022.[283] Congress may consider if similar investigations may be warranted for other regional fisheries. Congress may further examine regional trends in human-shark conflicts and consider potential impacts from shark predation or depredation on particular fishery species when setting catch limits for those fisheries. Congress might also choose whether to further examine the degree to which environmental, behavioral, and other factors may be influencing trends in human-shark conflicts.[284]

Alternatively, Congress may consider whether funding for these types of investigations is sufficient and if no additional authority may be needed to direct agencies. Congress also may consider whether present approaches for addressing human-shark conflicts are sufficient and

[277] Olivas et al., "Assessing Marine Wildlife Interactions"; Prasky et al., "Depredation Influences Anglers' Perceptions"; and Mitchell et al., "Shark Depredation."

[278] For example, see Neil Hammerschlag et al., "Urban Sharks: Residency Patterns of Marine Top Predators in Relation to a Coastal Metropolis," *Marine Ecology Progress Series*, vol. 691 (2022), pp. 1-17.

[279] Stephen R. Midway et al., "Trends in Global Shark Attacks," *PLoS One*, vol. 14, no. 2 (2019), e0211049, pp. 1-13.

[280] Drymon et al., "Depredation"; Mitchell et al., "Shark Depredation"; and Mitchell et al., "Shark Depredation in Commercial and Recreational Fisheries."

[281] Amelia Davidson, "House Approves Water, Public Land, Conservation Bills," *E&E Daily*, January 22, 2025; and Daniel Cusick, "Senate Committee to Vote on Shark Depredation Bill," *E&E Daily*, July 28, 2025.

[282] NOAA, NMFS, "Bycatch Reduction Engineering Program," https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/bycatch/bycatch-reduction-engineering-program. For more information, see CRS Report R46335, *Saltonstall-Kennedy Act: Background and Issues*, by Anthony R. Marshak.

[283] House Appropriations Committee, *Explanatory Statement Submitted by Mrs. Lowey*, p. 216; and NOAA, NMFS, *Report to Congress, Interactions Between Bottlenose Dolphins and Sharks and Commercial, For-Hire, and Private Recreational Fisheries in the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic*, August 29, 2022, pp. 1-49 (hereinafter NOAA, NMFS, *Interactions Between Bottlenose Dolphins and Sharks*).

[284] For example, a 2022 report by NMFS suggested that illegal feeding of wild dolphins may compound shark interactions with fisheries. NOAA, NMFS, *Interactions Between Bottlenose Dolphins and Sharks*; and Mitchell et al., "Shark Depredation."

whether conflicts with other species (e.g., marine mammals) and U.S. fisheries may warrant greater attention and resources.[285] Congress might consider leaving the discretion and authority to address human-shark conflicts with states. Some stakeholders may contend that states have greater knowledge and understanding of the dynamics between humans and sharks within their boundaries. Further, Congress may consider whether such information may already be sufficiently accounted for in NMFS and partners' assessment and management efforts.

Congress may consider oversight on U.S. engagements in intergovernmental shark conservation and management activities. The United States participates in several intergovernmental bodies aimed at improving shark conservation and management activities. Much of this engagement is through the U.S. Department of State, which works to promote sustainable fishing practices in bilateral, regional, and global fora, and advocates for international adoption of measures that match U.S. domestic standards, including priorities for effective conservation and management of sharks.[286] Stakeholders have varying perspectives on intergovernmental fora for addressing shark conservation, as well as opinions on U.S. participation and support for various policies addressing sharks. For example, some stakeholders have criticized the degree of U.S. leadership on shark-related matters at intergovernmental fora.[287] Further, some others have questioned the necessity of U.S. engagement in certain multilateral agreements, including those related to shark conservation, and suggest that some multilateral approaches may be contrary to U.S. interests.[288] Some decisionmakers have argued that the United States may be better suited as a model for other countries, but not necessarily a participant in certain international agreements that might cause burden to the United States or its economy.[289]

Some organizations have issued statements on shark conservation and management decisions made by intergovernmental bodies in which the United States participates.[290] Further, some scientists have criticized the effectiveness of certain RFMO policies to address mortality, bycatch, and overfishing of shark species, while other scientists have pointed to the effectiveness of certain multilateral approaches.[291] Others argue for the importance of RFMOs and multilateral agreements for ensuring sustainable conservation of sharks in tandem with domestic actions led

[285] For more information about these conflicts, see the section on trade-offs between marine mammal conservation and fisheries in CRS Report R47892, *The Marine Mammal Protection Act (P.L. 92-522): Primer and Issues for Congress*, by Anthony R. Marshak; and CRS In Focus IF11045, *Sea Lion Predation on Columbia River Salmon and Steelhead*, by Anthony R. Marshak.

[286] U.S. Department of State, "Bycatch and Environmental Impacts of Fishing," https://2017-2021.state.gov/key-topics-office-of-marine-conservation/bycatch-and-environmental-impacts-of-fishing/.

[287] E. Carver, "Under Trump, U.S. Retreats from Global Fisheries and Oceans Leadership," *Mongabay*, April 29, 2025.

[288] Executive Office of the President, "Withdrawing the United States from International Organizations," 91 *Federal Register* 2281-2284; and Satyaki Baidya, "'Contrary to U.S. Interests': Trump Exits from 66 International Organizations, Including India-France-Led Solar Alliance," *Republic*, January 8, 2026.

[289] For example, Executive Order 14162 of January 20, 2025, "Putting America First in International Environmental Agreements," 90 *Federal Register* 8455-8457, January 30, 2025.

[290] For example, see Shark League for the Atlantic and Mediterranean, "ICCAT 2025 Shark Conservation Priorities," https://sharkleague.org/2025/11/10/iccat-2025-shark-conservation-priorities/; and Sharks Pacific, *Position Statement: 21st Regular Session of the Scientific Committee (SC) of the Western Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC)*, Nuku'alofa, Tonga, August 14-21, 2025, pp. 1-4, https://meetings.wcpfc.int/file/18216/download.

[291] Gabrielle Carmine et al., "An Expanded Evaluation of Global Fisheries Management Organizations on the High Seas," *Environmental Research Letters*, vol. 20 (2025), 123001, pp. 1-17; Pacoureau et al., "Conservation Successes and Challenges"; and Cronin et al., "Policy and Transparency Gaps for Oceanic Sharks and Rays."

by various nations.[292] Some experts also contend that despite certain criticisms, positive aspects of intergovernmental approaches to shark conservation outweigh such perceived shortcomings.[293]

Given these perspectives, Congress may face consideration of multiple options. For example, to fill in identified data gaps on shark populations and their ecology, Congress could direct NMFS and partner agencies to encourage multilateral bodies to prioritize data collection and assessments of particular shark species during intergovernmental deliberations for particular RFMOs. Relatedly, Congress also could direct NMFS and partners to carry out gap analyses for priority transboundary shark species and fisheries for which shark bycatch is greatest and recommend management actions. To address broader issues on shark conservation globally, Congress may consider whether to support, through appropriations or authorizations, U.S.-led initiatives regarding multilateral shark conservation and management or leave discretion on the level of participation and types of activities to agency directors. Congress also may consider how shark conservation and management activities supported by multilateral organizations align with other U.S. priorities. For example, Congress might consider oversight on the degree to which such multilateral agreements have been effective for sharks and whether more nationally centric conservation and management approaches may be of value. Congress also might consider any potential limitations of such nationally centric approaches.

Congress may consider impacts from IUU fishing on shark conservation and management. Some experts have identified IUU fishing as an impediment to sustainable shark conservation.[294] Congress could consider whether to direct further capacity building for partner nations with respect to shark conservation and management, similar to efforts authorized through the High Seas Driftnet Fishing Moratorium Protection Act and the Maritime Security and Fisheries Enforcement Act that address IUU fishing and other living marine resource management activities.[295] Congress also may consider whether programs focused on preventing imports of IUU-associated fisheries products may warrant additional focus on sharks. While SIMP focuses on sharks collectively, Congress could consider whether additional focus on particular species may be of value or whether a separate specialized program focused on shark imports may be beneficial. Congress also may consider potential costs associated with a standalone program. Further, Congress may consider whether any restrictions on the imports of fishery products associated with shark bycatch may be warranted, such as those that exist for fisheries imports associated with marine mammal bycatch.[296] Congress also may assess stakeholders' perspectives regarding marine mammal comparability findings, SIMP, and other efforts to address IUU fishing and seafood auditing when evaluating whether refinements of these approaches for addressing sharks may be warranted.[297]

---

[292] For example, U.S. Department of State, "Bycatch and Environmental Impacts of Fishing," https://2017-2021.state.gov/key-topics-office-of-marine-conservation/bycatch-and-environmental-impacts-of-fishing/; and Animal Welfare Institute, "International Shark Protection Measures," https://awionline.org/content/international-shark-protection-measures.

[293] Mariana Travassos Tolotti et al., "Banning Is Not Enough: The Complexities of Oceanic Shark Management By Tuna Regional Fisheries Management Organizations," *Global Ecology and Conservation*, vol. 4 (2015), pp. 1-7.

[294] For example, Boris Worm et al., "Global Catches, Exploitation Rates, and Rebuilding Options for Sharks," *Marine Policy*, vol. 40 (2013), pp. 194-204.

[295] 16 U.S.C. §§8001-8041; see footnote 65.

[296] NOAA, NMFS, "2025 Marine Mammal Protection Act Comparability Finding Determinations for Harvesting Nations," https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/international-affairs/2025-marine-mammal-protection-act-comparability-finding-determinations.

[297] Oliver McBride, "Seafood Coalition Sues NOAA Over Flawed Marine Mammal Protection Rule," *The Fishing Daily*, October 13, 2025; National Fisheries Institute, "The Modern-Day Lawn Dart: NOAA's Seafood Import (continued...)

Monitoring Program," https://aboutseafood.com/the-modern-day-lawn-dart-noaas-seafood-import-monitoring-program/; and Stimson Center, "Stimson Center Applauds NOAA Fisheries' New Action Plan to Strengthen U.S. Seafood Import Monitoring," press release, November 14, 2024.

Appendix A. Sharks Listed Under the Endangered Species Act

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Marine Fisheries Service is responsible for the management of multiple shark and shark-like species listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).[298] Specific domestic and foreign ESA-listed shark species, and their *distinct population segments* (DPSs),[299] are included below in **Table A-1**.

Table A-1. Domestic and Foreign Shark Species Listed Under the Endangered Species Act

Jurisdiction	Species Name and DPS	Protected Status	Year Listed
Domestic Shark Species	Oceanic Whitetip shark (*Carcharhinus longimanus*)	Threatened	2018
	Scalloped Hammerhead shark (*Sphyrna lewini*)—Central and Southwest Atlantic DPS	Threatened	2014
	Scalloped Hammerhead shark—Eastern Pacific DPS	Endangered	2014
	Scalloped Hammerhead shark—Indo-West Pacific DPS	Threatened	2014
Foreign Shark Species	Argentine Angelshark (*Squatina argentina*)	Endangered	2017
	Common Angelshark (*Squatina squatina*)	Endangered	2016
	Daggernose Shark (*Isogomphodon oxyrhynchus*)	Endangered	2017
	Narrownose Smoothhound Shark (*Mustelus schmitti*)	Threatened	2017
	Sawback Angelshark (*Squatina aculeata*)	Endangered	2016
	Scalloped Hammerhead shark—Eastern Atlantic DPS	Endangered	2014
	Smoothback Angelshark (*Squatina oculata*)	Endangered	2016
	Spiny Angelshark (*Squatina guggenheim*)	Endangered	2017
	Striped Smoothhound Shark (*Mustelus fasciatus*)	Endangered	2017

[298] See footnote 84.

[299] See footnote 79.

Sources: National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), "Species Directory—[Endangered Species Act] Threatened & Endangered," https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/species-directory/threatened-endangered; and NOAA, NMFS, "Endangered and Threatened Species; Notice of 12-Month Findings on a Petition to List the Tope Shark as Threatened or Endangered Under the Endangered Species Act and Proposed Listing of Two Distinct Populations Segments of Tope Shark as Threatened," 91 *Federal Register* 20260-20315, April 15, 2026.

Notes: DPS = distinct population segment. Although some other species listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) may be shark-like in appearance (e.g., guitarfish, sawfish species), they are biologically classified as rays and not sharks. NMFS also has proposed listing two DPSs of Tope shark (*Galeorhinus galeus*) as threatened under the ESA, for which public comments have been solicited through June 15, 2026. Information as of April 15, 2026.

Author Information

Anthony R. Marshak
Analyst in Natural Resources Policy

Pervaze A. Sheikh
Specialist in Natural Resources Policy

Disclaimer