



Sharks

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The annual OSPAR Commission meeting, taking place in Brest, has added six species of shark to the OSPAR list of threatened and/or declining species and habitats.

Which sharks have been added?

Six: Angel shark, Gulper shark, Leafscale gulper shark, spurdog, Portuguese dogfish, Porbeagle. Sharks are fish with a full cartilaginous skeleton, which are long lived, mature late, and give birth to relatively small number of pups for a fish. These characteristics make them extremely vulnerable to human activities, and the recovery of depleted populations can therefore be very slow.

Angel shark

Angel sharks are found in waters from close inshore out to depths of 150m. They prefer a muddy or sandy seabed, where it is possible to rest during the day and be active by night. Angel sharks resemble rays and are between 1.8m and 2.5m long. Historically they were common along the coasts of the north-east Atlantic, but population numbers declined dramatically during the 20th century. The Angel shark has been included in the Initial OSPAR List due to evidence of decline and threats in OSPAR Regions II (Greater North Sea), III (Celtic Seas) and IV (Iberian . Biscay Shelf)



Angel shark
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Gulper shark

The Gulper shark is found in deep water off France, Spain and Portugal [in the north-east Atlantic,] on the upper continental slopes and outer continental shelf. They are believed to have the lowest reproductive potential of all the sharks and ray species. The Gulper shark has been included in the Initial OSPAR List on the basis of evidence of decline and threats in OSPAR Regions IV (Iberian . Biscay Shelf) and V (Wider Atlantic)

Leafscale gulper shark

The Leafscale gulper shark is a migratory species that can be found in the region of the Mid-Atlantic Ridge from the Azores to Iceland, on the continental slope from the Faroe isles to Portugal. It can live on or near the seabed between the depths of 230. 2400m. The Leafscale gulper shark has been included in the Initial OSPAR List on the basis of evidence of decline and threats in OSPAR Regions IV (Iberian . Biscay Shelf) and V (Wider Atlantic)

Spurdog

The highly migratory Spurdog can be found throughout the OSPAR area from Iceland and Murmansk in the North south to Gibraltar. It lives on or near the seabed in coastal waters. Until very recently it was the most important commercially-fished elasmobranch species in the OSPAR Area. However, as a result of over fishing the population of this species has declined severely. The Spurdog has been included in the Initial OSPAR List on the basis of evidence of decline and threats throughout the OSPAR maritime area.

Portuguese dogfish

The Portuguese dogfish has the ability to live in some of the deepest waters of the oceans of all shark species. They inhabit on or near the bottom of the continental slope and the abyssal plain in depths from 270 to 3,700 m. They can be found throughout the OSPAR area from as far north as Greenland and Iceland and south along the east Atlantic continental slope to Portugal. The decline of the species in OSPAR area is estimated as greater than 50%. The Portuguese dogfish has been included in the Initial OSPAR List on the basis of evidence of decline and threats throughout the OSPAR maritime area.

Porbeagle

Of the six shark species, the Porbeagle is the widest distributed shark across the OSPAR area, it can be found across the whole area both in coastal and oceanic regions. The Porbeagle has been included in the Initial OSPAR List on the basis of evidence of decline and threats throughout the OSPAR maritime area.

Why have these sharks been included in the OSPAR List?

OSPAR has decided to extend the list to this shark on the basis of evidence of observed or indicated significant decline in population numbers, extent to quality of the species, and/or current threats.

All the listed species are also recognised as vulnerable or even critically endangered (for angel shark) by the International Union for Conservation of Nature. They are listed in the IUCN Red List of threatened Species. All listings have been quality assured by the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea.

What is the OSPAR list?

The OSPAR Strategy on the Protection and Conservation of the Ecosystems and Biological Diversity of the Maritime Area, the implementing tool of Annex V to the OSPAR convention, provides that the OSPAR Commission will assess which species and habitats in the OSPAR maritime area need to be protected. The OSPAR List of threatened and/or declining species and habitats, originally adopted in 2003, has been developed for the purpose of guiding the OSPAR Commission on setting priorities for future priorities in its work on protection and conservation of marine biodiversity. The list is based upon nominations submitted to the OSPAR Commission by Contracting Parties and observers. The evidence used to support the inclusion of a species or habitat on the list has been compiled into a justification report, which will be published on the OSPAR website. The OSPAR list contains so far 14 habitats, 13 fish, 5 birds, 4 mammals and 2 reptiles.

What does the inclusion of species of sharks on the OSPAR List mean?

The extension of the OSPAR List allows OSPAR to set a high priority for its further work on these species. Inclusion of a species or habitats on the OSPAR List has the following implications: OSPAR Contracting Parties are urged to take the need for protection of a species or habitat into account in their work to develop Marine Protected Areas as part of the OSPAR network of MPAs; the attention of other management authorities responsible for human activities is drawn to the need for protection of these species or habitats. This should be taken into account when deciding any management measures. OSPAR will develop further products to raise awareness and educate on the need for protection of these species and habitats. OSPAR will continue to further analyse the need for action either at the level of the OSPAR Commission or Contracting Parties or the need to draw specific questions to the attention of other competent authorities.

Note for editors

1. The OSPAR Commission was set up by the 1992 OSPAR Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic, which unified and up-dated the 1972 Oslo and 1974 Paris Conventions. It brings together the governments of Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom, together with the European Community.
2. The OSPAR Commission would like to thank the organisations and individuals who have kindly given permission for their photographic material to be used for the press release. These photos are not downloadable and under no circumstances should they be reproduced. Anyone wishing to use any image should contact the author directly.