

Mobula rays

Also known as Devil rays (*Mobula spp.*)

Proposal to list mobula rays on CITES Appendix II – supported by WWF

Sicklefin devil ray (*Mobula tarapacana*), spinetail devil ray (*Mobula japanica*) and seven other known *Mobula* species: full proposal for CITES CoP17:

<https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/cop/17/prop/060216/E-CoP17-Prop-44.pdf>

IUCN/TRAFFIC Analysis of the proposal: <http://citesanalyses.iucn.org>

Initially Proposed by Fiji

Co-sponsors. Bahamas, Bangladesh, Benin, Brazil, Burkina Faso, the Comoros, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Egypt, EU, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Maldives, Mauritania, Palau, Panama, Samoa, Senegal, Seychelles, Sri Lanka and USA

Species Overview: The genus *Mobula* comprises nine currently recognized species with a wingspan from 100–370 cm. Sicklefin and spinetail devil rays have worldwide distributions in the tropical and temperate waters of the Pacific, Atlantic and Indian Oceans, but are sparsely distributed within this broad range and populations are believed to be highly fragmented. They appear to be seasonal visitors along productive coastlines with regular upwelling, in oceanic island groups, and near offshore pinnacles and seamounts.

Reproductive Biology: Sicklefin and spinetail devil rays are slow-growing, large-bodied animals, that have among the lowest fecundity of all elasmobranchs, giving birth to a single pup every two to three years, and have a generation length greater than ten years.

Threats and Impacts: The greatest threat to sicklefin and spinetail devil rays is unmonitored and unregulated directed and bycatch fisheries that are increasingly driven by the rising international trade demand for their gill plates, which are used in an Asian health tonic purported to treat a wide variety of conditions. These species are not likely to be able to tolerate high catch levels, given their low reproductive potential.

Although global population numbers are unknown for *Mobula spp.*, global, genus-wide declines have been recorded. New research on the scale and impacts of mobulid fisheries in Sri Lanka, India, Indonesia, the Philippines, Peru, and Guinea and continued strong demand for mobulid gill plates in China strongly suggest recent, marked increases in rates of depletion for these species. Of particular concern is the exploitation of this species from within critical habitats, well-known aggregation sites, and migratory pathways, where numerous individuals can be targeted with relatively high catch-per-unit-effort.

Listing the mobula rays on Appendix II will greatly reduce the potential to launder manta gill plates in the trade as mobula gill plates, in order to avoid existing CITES trade regulations on mantas.

IUCN Red List Status: The spinetail devil ray is Near Threatened globally and Vulnerable in Southeast Asia. New data indicate that this species most likely qualifies for Vulnerable globally.

The sicklefin devil ray is currently assessed as Data Deficient globally and Vulnerable in Southeast Asia. The forthcoming 2016 IUCN Red List reassessment re-categorized this species as Vulnerable, globally, and Endangered in three of the six ocean regions: Southeast Asia, Eastern Pacific, and Indian Ocean.

CITES Qualifying Criterion: Sicklefin and spinetail devil rays qualify for inclusion in Appendix II under Annex (2a) Criterion A, meeting CITES' guidelines for the application of decline for low productivity, commercially exploited aquatic species. Increasing international trade in *Mobula* gill plates has led to expansion of unsustainable fisheries, which are largely unregulated and unmonitored. As a result, local catch declines of up to 96% for sicklefin and spinetail devil rays in the Indo-Pacific region have been observed in fished populations over the past ten to fifteen years despite increased directed effort. Small and highly fragmented populations, exceptionally low productivity, and known aggregating behaviour make these species highly vulnerable to exploitation with limited ability to recover from a depleted state. Without prompt regulation of international trade, these species will likely soon qualify globally for Appendix I listing.

The seven other species of *Mobula* rays are included in this listing proposal due to the great difficulty in distinguishing between the traded dried gill plates of the different species in genus *Mobula*, and therefore meet the criterion for "look-a-like" species.

Additionally, all species in the genus *Mobula* qualify for inclusion in Appendix II due to the similarities between the dried gill plates of large *Mobula* and small specimens of manta rays (already listed on Appendix II), which is a major reason for WWF and TRAFFIC to support listing the *Mobula* rays.