

Thresher Sharks (*Alopias* spp.)

Proposal to list thresher sharks on CITES Appendix II – supported by WWF

Bigeye thresher (*Alopias superciliosus*), Pelagic thresher (*Alopias pelagicus*),
Thresher shark (*Alopias vulpinus*)

Full proposal for CITES CoP17:

<https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/cop/17/prop/060216/E-CoP17-Prop-43.pdf>

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

Initially Proposed by Sri Lanka

Co-sponsors. Bahamas, Bangladesh, Benin, Brazil, Burkina Faso, the Comoros, the Dominican Republic, Egypt, EU, Fiji, Gabon, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Maldives, Mauritania, Palau, Panama, Samoa, Senegal, Seychelles, and Ukraine

Species Overview: All three species of thresher shark have widespread distributions, occurring in most tropical and temperate seas from the surface to 150–500m, depending on the species. Occurs inshore around reefs, to the open sea. The bigeye thresher grows to 480 cm.

Reproductive Biology: Females reach sexual maturity at around 12–14 years and males slightly earlier between 9–10 years. They have a lifespan of 20–21 years and a 12-month gestation. A female bigeye thresher shark will produce fewer than twenty pups in its lifetime. This exceptionally low reproductive rate makes bigeye thresher one of the least fecund species of shark, with a low capacity to recover from even small levels of exploitation. Bigeye threshers have the lowest fecundity and the lowest rate of population increase of the three thresher species.

Threats and Impacts: The principal threat to *Alopias* spp. is unsustainable mortality in target and bycatch fisheries. They are frequently caught by offshore longlines and pelagic gillnet fisheries, most of which are unregulated and unreported. They are also fished with anchored bottom and surface gillnets, and caught as a bycatch of other gear including bottom trawls and fish traps. International trade demand for the large valuable fins of thresher sharks is a significant driver of mortality in many of these target and bycatch fisheries, although there are also important markets for their meat.

The thresher shark family is among the most vulnerable of all pelagic shark species to any level of fisheries mortality, and is one of the seven most vulnerable families of sharks and rays to extinction. Because threshers tend to be identified at family level only, there are few species-specific trend data available.

Bigeye thresher shark populations have experienced declines of 70-80% in the Atlantic Ocean and over 80% decline in the Indian and Pacific Oceans within the last three-generation period.

There has been a 99% decline from historic baseline for thresher sharks in the Mediterranean. The proportion of thresher shark fins appearing in the Hong Kong shark fin market has declined 77-99% in the past ten to 15 years.

IUCN Red List Status: The bigeye thresher shark is assessed as Vulnerable globally, due to population declines reviewed in 2007. This assessment requires updating – more recent data indicate that stocks are more seriously depleted than was realised ten years ago. Regional Red List assessments are: Endangered in European and Mediterranean waters, the northwest Atlantic and western central Atlantic; Vulnerable in the Indo-west Pacific, eastern and western central Pacific; and Near Threatened in the southwest Atlantic.

CITES Qualifying Criterion: The bigeye thresher shark qualifies for inclusion in Appendix II under Annex 2a, Criterion A (see above) because international trade in this species' fins is a major driver of the unsustainable and largely unmanaged fisheries that have caused marked declines in its populations worldwide. These declines, to less than 30% of baseline, meet CITES' guidelines for the application of the decline criterion to commercially exploited aquatic species. Based upon continuing unsustainable rates of exploitation and ongoing population declines, this species is likely to face an even higher threat of extinction and soon qualify for Appendix I unless international trade regulation provides an incentive to introduce or improve monitoring and management measures.

The two other species of thresher sharks are included in this listing proposal since, in the most commonly form traded (dried, unprocessed shark fins), they closely resemble the fins of bigeye thresher and therefore meet the criterion for "look-a-like" species.