



Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation of Migratory Sharks


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Great White Shark



The great white shark (*Carcharodon carcharias*) is a large lamnid shark and one of the ocean's apex predators. Growing to lengths of over 6 meters and weights of up to 3 tons, it is a large, powerfully-built and streamlined shark with a body characteristic of a lamnid shark. As with many members of this family, it is highly active and exhibits a degree of endothermy, adaptations which facilitate it in its hunting of fast-moving fish and mammalian prey. This shark is an ambush predator and typically hunts by taking its prey by surprise from below. This hunting strategy is assisted by its characteristic countershading colouration; specimens possess a dark dorsal upper and a light, white underside – colouration that conceals the shark both from above (against the darker ocean depths) and below (against the lighter surface water). They are occasionally known to clear the water completely following their high speed approach, behaviour known as breaching.

The great white shark is found in coastal waters in all major oceans, with greatest concentrations found off the coasts of South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Chile and the USA (Atlantic Northeast and California). Its distribution correlates strongly with the presence of rich prey animals like seals, sea lions, cetaceans and large fish. It is epipelagic and prefer waters with temperatures of between 12°C and 24°C, and are also known to be migratory. Migration patterns of populations are variable (both within and across populations) and still relatively unknown, but the distances travelled may be vast. Sharks off the coast of California are known to migrate to an area between Baja California and Hawaii periodically, while a shark from South Africa made a 20,000km roundtrip journey to Australia and back in less than nine months.

The great white shark is currently protected in Australia, South Africa, Namibia, Israel, Malta and the USA. While trade in its products is restricted under CITES (Appendix II), it is still targeted by fisherman for its jaws, teeth and fins. As a result of its infamous reputation, it has also been ruthlessly persecuted in the past. Together with increasing fishing pressures and vulnerable life


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history characteristics (including a late sexual maturity, a low fecundity and a long longevity) these factors have contributed to a significant decline in population numbers. The great white shark is currently considered as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, listed on Appendix II of CITES, Annex I of UNCLOS, and Appendix I and II of CMS.

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Acknowledgements

This website was kindly funded by the European Commission through the ENRTP* Strategic Cooperation Agreement with UNEP.

*Thematic Programme for Environment and Sustainable Management of Natural Resources including Energy

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