

## Current Status and Concerns on Shark and Ray Fishery of Sri Lanka

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Traditionally, sharks and rays are considered as constant contributors for the marine fishery of Sri Lanka. High consumer demand for fins, gill plates, liver oil and meat influences vulnerability of these species. Unfortunately, accurate quantitative data on shark and ray fishery is scarce to understand the status of these species. The current study aimed to investigate the status of shark and ray fishery exportation, illegal trade and fisher response on conservation measures. From April 2019 to February 2020, the data were collected from Tangalle, Mirissa and Negombo fisheries harbors, interviewing fishers, and exporters. Statistical secondary data on shark and ray trades, collected from National Aquatic Resources Research and Development Agency, Sri Lanka Coast Guard and Sri Lanka Customs were analyzed. During the study period, from 2015 to 2019 shark and ray products were exported to 19 countries while Hong Kong (56%) was the main export destination, followed by Maldives (16%). *Carcharhinus falciformis* (Silky shark), *Prionace glauca* (Blue shark), *Mobula mobular* (Spinetail devil ray) and *Mobula tarapacana* (Sicklefin devil ray) were recorded as the main traded shark and ray species. Illegal landing of three shark species was observed during the study period. The highest number of illegal shark cases was reported from Dikowita and Oluwil harbors. According to the illegal shark records, 59% were *Alopias* spp. (Thresher sharks) followed by 20% of *Carcharhinus longimanus* (Oceanic whitetip shark). It was observed that unreported cases to be much higher than the reported cases. Of the interviewed fishers (n= 100), 93% of them reported landing of illegal shark species and 70% of the fishers support the lift of banning *Alopias* spp. This study revealed that there is an urgency to extend protection of these species considering their ecological importance, while addressing the role of shark and ray trade to the countries' economy.

**Keywords:** Export, Fishery, Fins, Trade, Gills

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