

## PRESS RELEASE

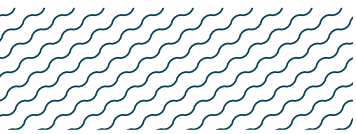
### First map of Important Shark and Ray Areas released

A new science-based tool to support spatial planning of threatened marine life

**Vancouver, Canada. February 7, 2023.** The Important Shark and Ray Areas (ISRA) project has released the first electronic atlas of priority areas for sharks, rays, and chimaeras (also known as ‘ghost sharks’). Sharks and rays are some of the most threatened vertebrates on Earth, and are in desperate need of new and improved management. The ISRA project uses the best available science to identify regions across global waters most critical for the long term survival of sharks, rays, and chimaeras. These include places where species of concern mate, reproduce, feed, rest, or aggregate as well as key stopovers during a migration.

The new Atlas is being launched at the 5<sup>th</sup> International Marine Protected Areas Congress (IMPAC5) in Vancouver, Canada which brings together over 3,000 leading global ocean conservation professionals to chart the course towards protecting 30 percent of the world’s ocean by 2030. With important commitments by countries to address global biodiversity loss adopted in December 2022 through the Convention on Biological Diversity, there is momentum for action and change. But to achieve these ambitious targets, the tools to inform policy and take action need to be available. “Over the last few decades, the management of sharks, rays, and chimaeras has largely focused on measures related to curbing the impacts of fisheries and trade. But populations of these species continue to rapidly decline and we need new approaches to ensure we can reduce mortality. The ISRA project will provide decision-makers with spatial information on areas that are most critical to species and that can be managed for conservation,” said Dr Rima Jabado, ISRA project leader and Chair of the IUCN Species Survival Commission Shark Specialist Group.

Initiated in late 2021, the ISRA project is based on similar efforts to identify key habitats for birds and marine mammals. Areas are delineated through a consultative process and during regional workshops that bring together local experts who are familiar with the species and waters in their region. This first release of Important Shark and Ray Areas focuses on the Central and South American Pacific Region (from the Gulf of California in Mexico to the tip of Chile) and consolidates information contributed and gathered by over 50 regional experts working across the field of marine conservation. Supported by the Shark Conservation Fund (SCF), the two upcoming workshops in 2023 will focus on the Mediterranean and Black Seas and Western Indian Ocean. An updated Atlas is expected to be released after each of



these meetings to ensure the most updated data are available online. Geographic information System (GIS) layers for each area will be made freely available for scientists, managers, conservationists, or the interested public upon request, or anyone can view these areas on the ISRA electronic atlas available at <https://sharkrayareas.org/e-atlas/>. Users can also filter areas to view them based on the ISRA Criteria or by region, country, species, and depth.

“As areas are added to the Atlas from around the world, it will become the most comprehensive and authoritative tool to identify areas most critical for the survival of sharks, rays, and chimaeras,” added Dr. Jabado. Some ISRAs from the first release include areas such as the Cocos-Galápagos Swimway, a migratory corridor that connects important habitats between Costa Rica and Ecuador for at least seven threatened species including the Whale Shark (*Rhincodon typus*), Scalloped Hammerhead (*Sphyrna lewini*), and Pelagic Thresher Shark (*Alopias pelagicus*); the Costa Rica Thermal Dome, a dynamic oceanographic feature where Spinetail Devil Rays (*Mobula mobular*) feed and where Silky Sharks (*Carcharhinus falciformis*) form large aggregations; and the Gulf of Montijo in Panama where contemporary records of Largetooth Sawfish (*Pristis pristis*) indicate that the area is being used for reproductive purposes making it a regionally, if not globally, significant location.

Now that these important areas have been identified, they can be prioritized for the protections they need. “As governments seek to implement their 30x30 obligations and develop impactful marine protected areas, SCF is pleased to support this work and plans to use it to guide its new Shark Biodiversity Initiative which is designed to enhance biodiversity by protecting the most biologically important areas for sharks and rays.” said Lee Crockett, Executive Director for the Shark Conservation Fund.

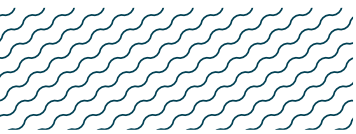
The ISRA project is also contributing to a suite of tools that have been developed to identify critical habitats for species. “As we continue working on identifying ISRAs in parallel with our work to delineate Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs), I look forward to seeing these maps side by side because that’s when we will start seeing real conservation priorities and inform spatial management”, added Prof. Giuseppe Notarbartolo di Sciara, co-Chair of the IUCN Marine Mammal Protected Areas Taskforce. The ultimate goal of these area-based approaches is to ensure that decision-makers have the right information to conserve species in an era of rapid biodiversity loss. For the first time, this will now be possible for sharks, rays, and chimaeras.

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## ORGANIZATIONAL INFORMATION

**Important Shark and Ray Areas project** - [www.sharkrayareas.org](http://www.sharkrayareas.org)

The Important Shark and Ray Areas (ISRAs) is an initiative led by the IUCN SSC Shark Specialist Group. ISRAs are “discrete, three-dimensional portions of habitat, important for one or more shark, ray, and



chimaera species, that are delineated and have the potential to be managed for conservation”. The identification of ISRAs is an evidence-driven, purely biocentric process based on the application of ad hoc scientific criteria supported by the best available science. Any relevant management implication can only be subsequent to, and detached from, the ISRA identification process. The ISRA Criteria have been designed to capture important aspects of shark biology, ecology, and population structure and to encompass multiple aspects of species vulnerability, distribution, abundance, and key life cycle activities, as well as areas of high diversity. The ISRAs’ main purpose is to attract the attention of policy- and decision-makers on the need of maintaining the favourable conservation status of sharks, rays, and chimaeras in specific areas through the implementation of the most appropriate management measures, and this can include a protected area designation.

**IUCN Species Survival Commission Shark Specialist Group - [www.iucnssg.org](http://www.iucnssg.org)**

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) is the world’s largest global environmental network composed of both government and civil society organizations. It is a membership union with more than 1,400 member organizations and over 17,000 volunteer scientists in more than 160 countries. This diversity and vast expertise makes IUCN the global authority on the status of the natural world and the measures needed to safeguard it.

The Species Survival Commission (SSC) is a science-based network of over 9,000 experts from almost every country of the world, all working towards achieving the vision of: ‘A just world that values and conserves nature through positive action to reduce the loss of diversity of life on earth’.

The IUCN SSC Shark Specialist Group (SSG) was established by the SSC in 1991 in response to growing awareness and concern of the severe impact of fisheries on shark, ray, and chimaera populations around the world. It is a global network of experts in the biology, taxonomy, use, and conservation of sharks, rays, and chimaeras. The SSG currently has more than 230 members from 82 countries collaborating to assess the status of all known species, collate knowledge, highlight species at risk, develop conservation plans, inform policy, and advise policy-makers on effective, science-based policies for sustainable use, and long-term conservation.

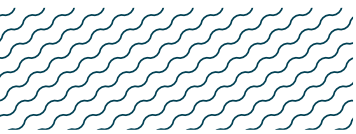
**Shark Conservation Fund - [www.sharksandrays.org](http://www.sharksandrays.org)**

The Shark Conservation Fund (SCF) is a philanthropic collaboration focused on halting the overexploitation of the world’s sharks and rays, preventing extinctions, and restoring populations.

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