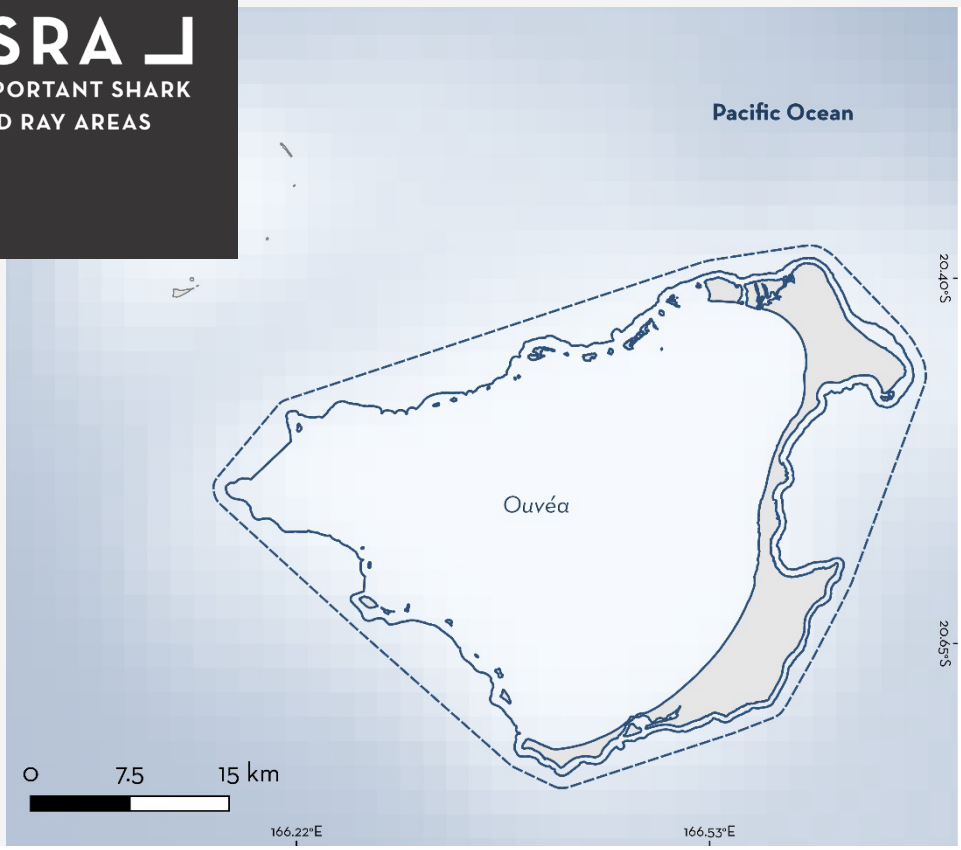
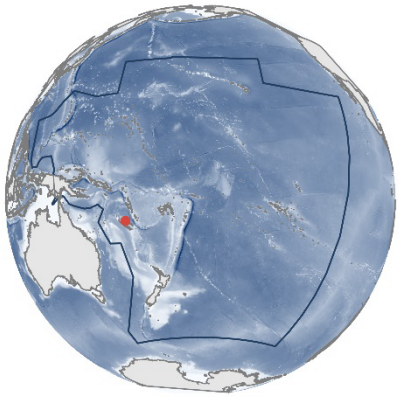
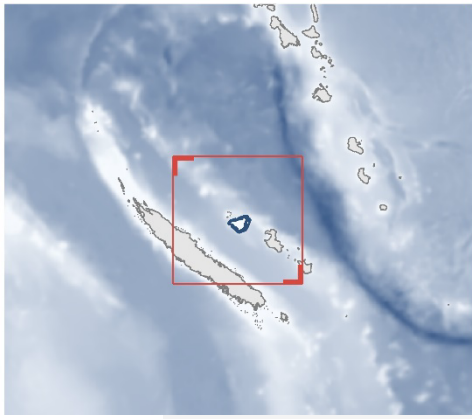
ISRA
IMPORTANT SHARK AND RAY AREAS







Blue lines indicate the area meeting the ISRA Criteria; dashed lines indicate the suggested buffer for use in the development of appropriate place-based conservation measures

OUVÉA ISRA

New Zealand & Pacific Islands Region

SUMMARY

Ouvéa is located in the northeast side of New Caledonia within the Coral Sea. It is an atoll with a barrier reef surrounding a lagoon with multiple islets and three major islands: Ouvéa, Faiava, and Mouli. Within this area there are: **threatened species** (e.g., Grey Reef Shark *Carcharhinus amblyrhynchos*) and **undefined aggregations** (e.g., Reef Manta Ray *Mobula alfredi*).

CRITERIA

Criterion A – Vulnerability; Sub-criterion C5 – Undefined Aggregations

NEW CALEDONIA

0–50 metres

910.8 km²

DESCRIPTION OF HABITAT

Ouvéa is located in the Coral Sea on the northeast side of New Caledonia. It sits on the Loyalty Ridge and is found ~100 km east of Grande Terré Island. It is an atoll with a barrier reef surrounding a lagoon with a west opening to oceanic waters and multiple passes in the north and south (Andréfouët & Torres-Pulliza 2004; Maurizot et al. 2020). It includes three major islands: Ouvéa, Faiava, and Mouli. The area encompasses parts of the north (Northern Pleiades) and south (Southern Pleiades) sides. The area is characterised by living and dead coral substrates with sandy patches (Andréfouët & Torres-Pulliza 2004).

This Important Shark and Ray Area is benthic and pelagic and is delineated from inshore and surface waters (0 m) to 50 m based on the bathymetry of the area.

ISRA CRITERIA

CRITERION A – VULNERABILITY

Two Qualifying Species considered threatened with extinction according to the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species regularly occur in the area. These are the Endangered Grey Reef Shark (Simpfendorfer et al. 2020), and the Vulnerable Reef Manta Ray (Marshall et al. 2022).

SUB-CRITERION C5 – UNDEFINED AGGREGATIONS

Ouvéa is an important area for undefined aggregations of one shark and one ray species.

Distance-sampling visual censuses (50 m long by 10 m wide at ~15 m depth) conducted between 1986–2014 and Baited Remote Underwater Video Station (BRUVS) surveys between 2012–2014 at 385 sites for BRUVS and 2,790 sits for visual census (including 15 marine protected area) along New Caledonia reefs revealed the regular presence of Grey Reef Shark aggregations (Juhel et al. 2017). Abundances for Grey Reef Sharks in the area from visual census (3–4 individuals) and BRUVS (8–14 individuals) were among the second largest in all of New Caledonia. Additionally, aggregations up to 10 individuals have been recorded from social media pictures in multiple years. Further information is required to confirm the nature and function of these aggregations.

Between 2017–2020, photographs of Reef Manta Rays were collected from recreational divers, snorkelers, and diving surveys across 11 sites in New Caledonia (Lassauce et al. 2024). Photographs from Ouvéa were taken in 75 days of sampling between 2005–2020, with a higher effort (85.3%) concentrated between 2017–2020 (Lassauce et al. 2024). In Ouvéa, 206 sightings (average = 2.7 individuals sighted per day) were recorded at two aggregation sites that serve as cleaning stations and occasionally for feeding in the Southern and Northern Pleiades. Of the total sightings, 116 individuals were identified with the majority (83.5%) found in Southern Pleiades and some (13.3%) Reef Manta Rays being observed at both sites (Lassauce et al. 2024). These cleaning stations are located on the reef crest at 10–15 m depths. At these sites, aggregations of 10–20 individuals are regularly observed (H Lassauce unpubl. data 2024). While movements of Reef Manta Rays from Ouvéa to other locations across New Caledonia (e.g., Noumea and Touho) have been observed, there is a high residency of Reef Manta Rays to Ouvéa (Lassauce et al. 2023, 2024). Courtship behaviour has been observed in the area, but more information is needed to confirm the reproductive importance of the area.

Acknowledgments

Hugo Lassauce (University of the Sunshine Coast) and Emiliano García-Rodríguez (IUCN SSC Shark Specialist Group – ISRA Project) contributed and consolidated information included in this factsheet. We thank all participants of the 2024 ISRA Region 10 – New Zealand and Pacific Islands workshop for their contributions to this process.

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QUALIFYING SPECIES

Scientific Name	Common Name	IUCN Red List Category	Global Depth Range (m)	ISRA Criteria/Sub-criteria Met								
				A	B	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	D1	D2
SHARKS												
Carcharhinus amblyrhynchos	Grey Reef Shark	EN	0–280	X						X		
RAYS												
Mobula alfredi	Reef Manta Ray	VU	0–711	X						X		

SUPPORTING SPECIES

Scientific Name	Common Name	IUCN Red List Category
SHARKS		
Carcharhinus albimarginatus	Silvertip Shark	VU
Carcharhinus melanopterus	Blacktip Reef Shark	VU
Nebrius ferrugineus	Tawny Nurse Shark	VU
Negaprion acutidens	Sharptooth Lemon Shark	EN
Triaenodon obesus	Whitetip Reef Shark	VU
RAYS		
Aetobatus ocellatus	Spotted Eagle Ray	EN

IUCN Red List of Threatened Species Categories are available by searching species names at www.iucnredlist.org Abbreviations refer to: CR, Critically Endangered; EN, Endangered; VU, Vulnerable; NT, Near Threatened; LC, Least Concern; DD, Data Deficient.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

There are additional indications that this area is important for undefined aggregations of one ray species.

Reports from social media in 2018 and 2019 have revealed the presence of Spotted Eagle Ray aggregations in the area. More information is needed to confirm the regularity of these aggregations and the importance of this area for this species.

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