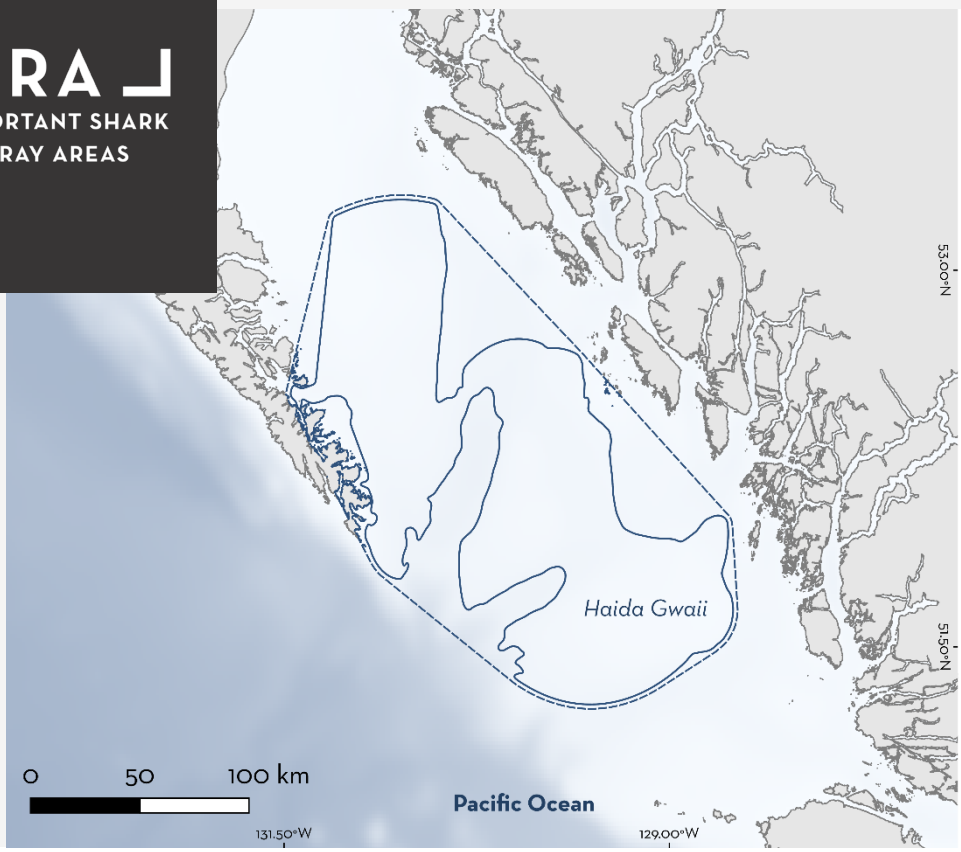
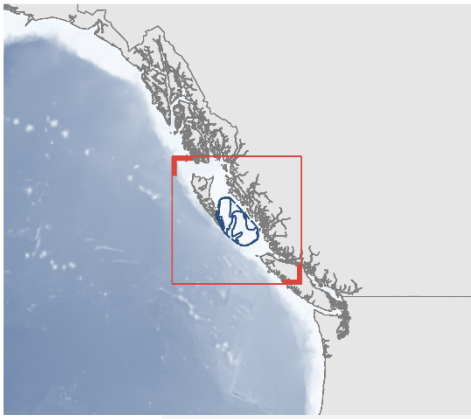
ISRA
IMPORTANT SHARK AND RAY AREAS





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

HAIDA GWAII ISRA

North American Pacific Region

CANADA

0–285 metres

18,143 km²

SUMMARY

Haida Gwaii is located in British Columbia, Canada. This area sits on the continental shelf of northern Pacific Canada between the mainland and the archipelago of Haida Gwaii. The benthos comprises carbonate sediments (coarse shell debris) and rocky and gravel substrates with patches of unique glass sponge reefs. The area is influenced by highly dynamic oceanographic conditions, including predominantly semi-diurnal tidal currents, wind-driven subtidal currents, and high freshwater inflow. Within this area there are: **undefined aggregations** (North Pacific Spiny Dogfish *Squalus suckleyi*).

CRITERIA

Sub-criterion C5 – Undefined Aggregations

DESCRIPTION OF HABITAT

Haida Gwaii is located in British Columbia, Canada. This area sits on the continental shelf of northern Pacific Canada between the mainland and the archipelago of Haida Gwaii. It covers part of Hecate Strait and Queen Charlotte Sound with Vancouver Island lying to the southeast. The benthos comprises carbonate sediments (coarse shell debris) and rocky and gravel substrates (Carey et al. 1995). The area overlaps with patches of unique glass sponge reefs (Hannah et al. 2019).

The area is influenced by highly dynamic oceanographic conditions, including predominantly semi-diurnal tidal currents, wind-driven subtidal currents, and high freshwater inflow (Dodimead 1980; Cummins et al. 2022). Seasonal wind patterns drive circulation and productivity, with boreal summer northwest winds deflecting surface waters offshore, which results in deep, nutrient-loaded, coastal water being forced into the shallow sounds, while in winter, prevailing southeast winds tend to restrain upwelling and drive downwelling (Dodimead 1980; Cummins et al. 2022).

This Important Shark and Ray Area is benthic and pelagic and is delineated from inshore and surface waters (0 m) to 285 m based on the depth range of Qualifying Species in the area.

ISRA CRITERIA

SUB-CRITERION C5 – UNDEFINED AGGREGATIONS

Haida Gwaii is an important area for undefined aggregations of one shark species.

Between 1998–2025, the International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC) conducted annual longline surveys during summer months (May–September) across nearshore and offshore waters from Southern California to Alaskan waters (Gulf of Alaska, Aleutian Islands, and Bering Sea; IPHC 2026a). Surveys were conducted at ~1,200 stations each year at depths of 15–503 m. Longlines consisted of 4–8 skates (longline units) with 96–104 hooks per skate with soak times between 5–24 hours (IPHC 2026b). Non-halibut species were counted either as subsample counts (20% observations, the majority for sharks) and whole-set counts (100% observations). The average (± standard deviation) number of hooks per set across the surveys was 643 ± 119, while the number of hooks observed per set (i.e., where bycatch was recorded) was 207 ± 120. Nominal catch-per-unit-effort (CPUE) was estimated as the number of individuals caught per 100 hooks per hour.

Across IPHC surveys, North Pacific Spiny Dogfish were recorded in 15,525 sets during longline surveys, 2,384 (15.4%) of which were recorded inside this area between the months of May–August at depths 10–285 m (IPHC 2026a). For this species, individuals were counted in subsamples (20% of the observations) in 12,132 sets (78.1% of the total). The third-highest mean CPUE of North Pacific Spiny Dogfish in the region (Southern California to Alaska) was reported from this area (mean = 0.76 individuals/100 hooks/hour; range = 0.01–6.9) compared to adjacent areas in the region (mean CPUE outside the area = 0.41 individuals/100 hooks/hour; range = 0.006–13.3). Multiple individuals (>10) were recorded in 1,632 sets (68.4% of the sets with the species captured inside this area) with 424 individuals being the maximum number recorded in a single set (mean = 44.2 individuals/set). High abundances of North Pacific Spiny Dogfish have been associated with aggregations and are mostly related to seasonal increases in abundance of prey species (Beamish 1992).

Additional information is required to understand the nature and function of these aggregations.

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Emiliano García-Rodríguez (IUCN SSC Shark Specialist Group – ISRA Project) and Peter M Kyne (IUCN SSC Shark Specialist Group – ISRA Project) contributed and consolidated information included in this factsheet. We thank all participants of the 2026 ISRA Region 11 – North American Pacific region 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												
Squalus suckleyi	North Pacific Spiny Dogfish	LC	0–1,236							X		

SUPPORTING SPECIES

Scientific Name	Common Name	IUCN Red List Category
SHARKS		
Apristurus brunneus	Brown Catshark	LC
Hexanchus griseus	Bluntnose Sixgill Shark	NT
Lamna ditropis	Salmon Shark	LC
RAYS		
Beringraja binoculata	Big Skate	LC
Caliraja rhina	Longnose Skate	LC
CHIMAERAS		
Hydrolagus colliei	Whitespotted Chimaera	LC

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.

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