

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

CAPBRETON CANYON ISRA

European Atlantic Region

SUMMARY

Capbreton Canyon is located offshore of Vizcaya and Guipúzcoa Provinces, Basque Country, Spain. It encompasses part of the continental shelf and part of the slope towards the Capbreton canyon system. The area is characterised by rocky, sandy-muddy, and sandy substrates with the presence of contourite channels. The area is influenced by a system of boundary currents. The area overlaps with the Cantabrian Sea (Southern Bay of Biscay) Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Area. Within this area there are: **reproductive areas** (Blackmouth Catshark *Galeus melastomus*).

CRITERIA

Sub-criterion C1 - Reproductive Areas

—	—
SPAIN	—
—	—
100–750 metres	—
—	—
564.5 km²	—
—	—





DESCRIPTION OF HABITAT

Capbreton Canyon is located offshore of Vizcaya and Guipúzcoa Provinces, Basque Country, Spain. This area encompasses part of the continental shelf and part of the slope towards the Capbreton Canyon system. Capbreton Canyon is characterised by shallower areas on the continental shelf which are predominantly rocky and occasionally covered by sandy-muddy and sandy substrates, to the slope in which muddy-sandy or muddy sedimentation predominates with the presence of contourite channels with pockmarks (cone-shaped, circular, or elliptical depressions) (Jané et al. 2010; Galparsoro et al. 2020).

The area is influenced by a system of boundary currents of varying densities, formed in the North Atlantic or resulting from the interaction of Atlantic water masses with those formed in the Mediterranean Sea, leading to stratification through the water column (Llave et al. 2015).

The area overlaps with the Cantabrian Sea (Southern Bay of Biscay) Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Area (EBSA; CBD 2025).

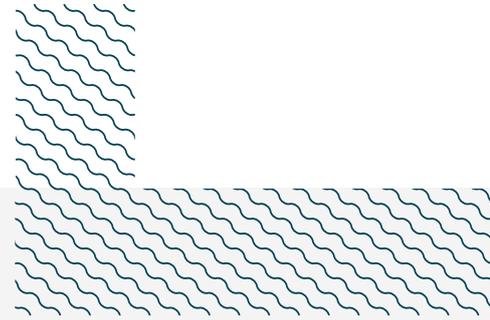
This Important Shark and Ray Area is benthic and subsurface and is delineated from 100-750 m based on the bathymetry of the area.

ISRA CRITERIA

SUB-CRITERION C₁ – REPRODUCTIVE AREAS

Capbreton Canyon is an important reproductive area for one shark species.

Between 1990-2024, Blackmouth Catshark neonates and young-of-the-year (YOY) were captured during the Northern Spanish Shelf Groundfish Survey in the area and wider Cantabrian Sea and off Galicia, using a stern trawler with a horizontal opening of ~20 m and a vertical opening of 4 m, during 30 min hauls at a towing speed of four knots (ICES 2015; Fernández-Zapico et al. 2023). During this period, 3,834 Blackmouth Catsharks were caught in the area. Of these, 30% (n = 1,136) were neonates/YOY measuring 13-25 cm total length (TL) (ICES 2025). Size-at-maturity for the species ranges from 33-45 cm TL (Ebert et al. 2021), and size-at-birth is estimated at 8.5 cm TL, attaining ~24-25 cm TL at 1-yr of age (Baptista et al. 2010), confirming these were neonates and YOYs. Individuals in this size range were observed in every year of the survey, and during contemporary years, numbers were: 2010 (n = 59), 2011 (n = 13), 2012 (n = 52), 2013 (n = 28), 2014 (n = 26), 2015 (n = 40), 2016 (n = 37), 2017 (n = 14), 2018 (n = 50), 2019 (n = 64), 2020 (n = 23), 2021 (n = 18), 2022 (n = 23), 2023 (n = 27), and 2024 (n = 41) (ICES 2025). The surveys in this area were undertaken in October, and therefore additional temporal data are required to confirm seasonality in reproductive behaviour (ICES 2025). Neonates and YOY were captured between 148-565 m depth in the area (ICES 2025). Although there are records of neonates/YOY Blackmouth Catshark in the wider Cantabrian Sea and off Galicia, this area has national importance as it has one of the highest known catch records of Blackmouth Catshark at this life history stage in northern Spain (ICES 2025).



Acknowledgments

Cristina Rodríguez-Cabello (Spanish Institute of Oceanography [IEO-CSIC]) and Marta D Palacios (IUCN SSC Shark Specialist Group - ISRA Project) contributed and consolidated information included in this factsheet. We thank all participants of the 2025 ISRA Region 02 - European Atlantic workshop for their contributions to this process.

This factsheet has undergone review by the ISRA Independent Review Panel prior to its publication.

This project was funded by the Shark Conservation Fund, a philanthropic collaborative pooling expertise and resources to meet the threats facing the world's sharks and rays. The Shark Conservation Fund is a project of Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors.

Suggested citation

IUCN SSC Shark Specialist Group. 2025. Capbreton Canyon ISRA Factsheet. Dubai: IUCN SSC Shark Specialist Group.

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												
<i>Galeus melastomus</i>	Blackmouth Catshark	LC	55-2,000			X						

SUPPORTING SPECIES

Scientific Name	Common Name	IUCN Red List Category
SHARKS		
<i>Alopias vulpinus</i>	Common Thresher	VU
<i>Galeorhinus galeus</i>	Tope	CR
<i>Prionace glauca</i>	Blue Shark	NT
<i>Scyliorhinus canicula</i>	Smallspotted Catshark	LC
<i>Scyliorhinus stellaris</i>	Nursehound	VU
<i>Scymnodon ringens</i>	Knifetooth Dogfish	VU
RAYS		
<i>Leucoraja naevus</i>	Cuckoo Skate	NT
<i>Raja clavata</i>	Thornback Skate	NT
<i>Raja montagui</i>	Spotted Skate	LC
CHIMAERAS		
<i>Chimaera monstrosa</i>	Rabbitfish	VU

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.





REFERENCES

- Baptista M, Coelho R, Figueiredo I, Erzini K. 2010.** Determination of age and growth of *Galeus melastomus*, Rafinesque, 1810, a deepwater shark, using a modification to the cobalt nitrate technique. ICES CM 2010/E:40.
- Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). 2025.** Cantabrian Sea (Southern Bay of Biscay). Ecologically or Biologically Significant Areas (EBSAs). Available at: <https://chm.cbd.int/en/database/record?documentID=263479> Accessed June 2025.
- Ebert DA, Dando M, Fowler S. 2021.** *Sharks of the world: A complete guide*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Fernández-Zapico O, Ruiz-Pico S, Blanco M, Rodríguez-Cabello C, Punzón A, González-Irusta JM, Velasco F. 2023.** Results on main elasmobranch species captured in the 2022 Northern Spanish Shelf Groundfish Survey. Lisbon: CSIC - Instituto Español de Oceanografía (IEO). <http://doi.org/10.20350/DIGITALCSIC/15299>
- Galparsoro I, Muxika I, Garmendia JM, Rodríguez JG. 2020.** Continental shelf, canyons and pockmark fields in the southeastern Bay of Biscay. In: Harris PT, Baker E, eds. *Seafloor geomorphology as benthic habitat*. Elsevier, 769-781. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-814960-7.00046-4>
- ICES. 2015.** Manual for International Pelagic Surveys (IPS). Series of ICES Survey Protocols (SISP) 9: 92. <https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.pub.3519>
- ICES. 2025.** ICES Database on Trawl Surveys (DATRAS). Copenhagen, Denmark: ICES. Available at: <https://datras.ices.dk> Accessed May 2025.
- Jané G, Maestro A, Ercilla G, López-Martínez J, De Andrés JR, Casas D, González-Aller D, Catalán-Morollón, M. 2010.** Occurrence of pockmarks on the Ortegal Spur continental margin, Northwestern Iberian Peninsula. *Marine and Petroleum Geology* 27: 1551-1564. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpetgeo.2010.04.001>
- Llave E, Jané G, Hernández-Molina FJ, Ercilla G, Juan C, Roque C, Van Rooij D, García M, Brackenridge R, Stow D, et al. 2015.** Bottom current processes along the Iberian continental margin. *Boletín Geológico y Minero* 126: 219-256.