

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

PLAYA CHICA ISRA

European Atlantic Region

SUMMARY

Playa Chica is located on the southeast coast of Lanzarote Island in the Canary Islands, Spain. The area features nearshore and benthic habitats dominated by open sand and rocky reef. The area overlaps with the Oceanic Islands and Seamounts of the Canary Region Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Area. Within this area there are: **threatened species** and **reproductive areas** (Angelshark *Squatina squatina*).

CRITERIA

Criterion A - Vulnerability; Sub-criterion C1 - Reproductive Areas

—	—
SPAIN	—
—	—
0-150 metres	—
—	—
5.92 km²	—
—	—





DESCRIPTION OF HABITAT

Playa Chica is located on the southeast coast of Lanzarote Island in the Canary Islands. The Canary Islands are a Spanish archipelago in the northeast Atlantic, consisting of eight main islands and five islets, situated ~100 km from the northwest African coastline. This area is characterised by a narrow insular shelf with shallow and nearshore habitats with open sand and rocky reef substrates (EEA 2025).

The area is strongly influenced by the Eastern Boundary Upwelling System, the Canary Current, and Calima events (Sahara Desert dust; Vázquez et al. 2024). The Azores High Pressure System and trade winds drive complex patterns of seasonal upwelling, temperature fluctuation, and ocean stratification, leading to high productivity and nutrient richness along the West African continental shelf, which in turn influences environmental and biological conditions across the Canary Islands. The furthest islands and waters to the northeast of the Canary Islands (including Lanzarote Island) have an oceanic desert climate, characterised by low rainfall and northerly prevailing winds (Santana-Cordero 2016).

The area overlaps with the Oceanic Islands and Seamounts of the Canary Region Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Area (EBSA; CBD 2025).

This Important Shark and Ray Area is benthic and is delineated from inshore and surface waters (0 m) to 150 m based on the bathymetry of the area.

ISRA CRITERIA

CRITERION A – VULNERABILITY

One Qualifying Species considered threatened with extinction according to the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species regularly occurs in the area. This is the Critically Endangered Angelshark (Morey et al. 2019).

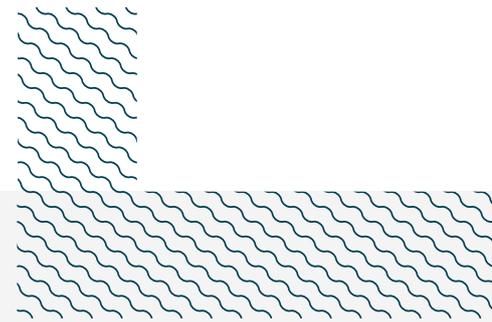
SUB-CRITERION C1 – REPRODUCTIVE AREAS

Playa Chica is an important reproductive area for one shark species.

Since 2015, the Angel Shark Project has conducted a combination of underwater visual census (UVC) surveys, tagging, and citizen science data collection in the Canary Islands. Visual transects and tagging surveys were conducted across the Canary Islands in high suitability areas (Meyers et al. 2017), potential nursery areas (Jiménez-Alvarado et al. 2020), and locations where Angelsharks are commonly observed. In this area, monitoring campaigns (n = 12) were undertaken annually and consisted of surveys with dives during 3–9 days (Angel Shark Project unpubl. data 2025).

Between 2015–2022, adult and neonate/young-of-the-year (YOY) Angelsharks were recorded in the area. Of 50 Angelsharks tagged during surveys (n = 36) conducted in the area, 68% (n = 34) were adults and 32% (n = 16) measured <30 cm total length (TL; Angel Shark Project unpubl. data 2025). These individuals were categorised as neonates based on the reported size ranges for this life stage (24–30 cm TL; Ebert et al. 2021). Three tagged sharks (two males and one female) were resighted up to two years after being tagged, suggesting site fidelity to this area and confirming that the area is used by sharks over multiple years (Angel Shark Project unpubl. data 2025). Angelsharks have been observed mating in this area on multiple occasions and at least 10 pregnant females (based on distended abdomens) were recorded during these surveys (Angel Shark Project unpubl. data 2025).

Further, of the 280 reported sightings by dive operators between 2020–2024, nine pregnant females were recorded across three different years (Angel Shark Project unpubl. data 2025). Reports of females giving birth and mating scars on females were reported by dive operators as well as observations of sharks mating in the area (Angel Shark Project unpubl. data 2025). Playa Chica was highlighted as one of four sites across the archipelago with a high frequency of Angelshark sightings per grid cell (Meyers et al. 2017).



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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													
<i>Squatina squatina</i>	Angelshark	CR	0-150	X		X							

SUPPORTING SPECIES

Scientific Name	Common Name	IUCN Red List Category
RAYS		
<i>Aetomylaeus bovinus</i>	Duckbill Eagle Ray	CR
<i>Bathytoshia lata</i>	Brown Stingray	VU
<i>Dasyatis pastinaca</i>	Common Stingray	VU
<i>Gymnura altavela</i>	Spiny Butterfly Ray	EN
<i>Mobula birostris</i>	Oceanic Manta Ray	EN
<i>Mobula tarapacana</i>	Sicklefin Devil Ray	EN
<i>Myliobatis aquila</i>	Common Eagle Ray	CR
<i>Rostroraja alba</i>	White Skate	EN
<i>Taeniurops grabatus</i>	Round Fantail Stingray	NT
<i>Torpedo marmorata</i>	Marbled Torpedo Ray	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.





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