2020 Conservation Roadmap for Sharks and Rays in the Philippines
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**PREFACE**

At the apex of the Coral Triangle, the Philippines is part of the global center of marine biodiversity. With over 200 species of sharks and rays in the Philippines, our country plays a crucial role in conserving these ecologically important marine species.

However, their uses in the Philippines are varied and conflicting. They are a fishery resource, utilized by coastal communities and traders in an industry that is still largely unmonitored and unmanaged. The presence of some sharks, such as the thresher sharks and whale sharks, also draws thousands of tourists locally and internationally, supporting local livelihoods.

In November 2016, nearly 100 advocates, scientists, government officials, and representatives from the academe, diving community, local community, fishing industry, and private sector gathered in Dumaguete City for the 2nd Shark Summit. The 2nd Shark Summit identified the urgent need for a roadmap to comprehensively tackle complex issues and to serve as a guide to align everyone's efforts toward a common vision of conserving sharks and rays.

As a result, from 21 to 22 February 2017, an interdisciplinary, multi-stakeholder group of over 40 people gathered in Quezon City to develop the roadmap. The participants discussed the opportunities and challenges to lay out a plan to conserve sharks and rays in the country. Bringing a diverse group together strategically ensures that the roadmap will be supported by commitments and enforceable legislation.

The output is the 2020 Conservation Roadmap for Sharks and Rays in the Philippines. This roadmap is expected to propel shark and ray conservation forward in the Philippines, in hope of finding the balance between human needs and the integrity of the Philippine marine ecosystem.
"A Philippines where all sharks are conserved for the benefit of all Filipinos."

**VISION**

Pating, tumatagingting

**SHARKS**

all cartilaginous fishes including
sharks (true sharks)  
rays (batoid fishes or flat sharks)  
chimaeras (ghost or silver sharks)

**CONSERVED**

where all shark populations are in a healthy state, whilst mitigating threats and allowing for the science-based sustainable utilization of some populations.
INTRODUCTION

Pating na aming turing

Sharks are amongst the oldest surviving marine vertebrates yet they are considered one of the most threatened taxa globally. The term ‘sharks’ is used in the 2002 Conservation Roadmap for Sharks and Rays in the Philippines to refer to the conventional image of a shark (true sharks), as well as its relatives: rays, batoids (flat sharks) and chimaeras (ghost or silver sharks). Collectively, these are cartilaginous fishes belonging to the class Chondrichthyes represented by over 1,000 species that share similar taxonomic characteristics: they are long-lived, age slowly, mature late, and are often feared and persecuted, while its lesser-known relatives are hardly given any attention at all. The poor understanding of chondrichthyans has contributed to a general lackluster support for their conservation. Interest in sharks only recently gained public attention due to various sources exposing the cruelty and wastefulness of the shark fin trade, and through increased documentation of human–shark conflicts (or “shark attacks”) in shallow waters. Appreciation has also increased through shark interaction tourism and awareness raising initiatives.

Despite the lack of understanding on the sharks’ various roles in ecosystems, it is clear that they are key players in structuring food webs, whether they are at the top of the food chain or at lower trophic levels. Sharks are typically depicted as apex predators that have significant top-down effects on marine habitats. Therefore, the removal of sharks from an ecosystem has the potential to create significant changes to predator–prey interactions, affecting the whole system. Aside from ecological benefits, sharks and rays have also been proven to boost local economies sustainable tourism activities and through fisheries in many developing countries.

Global spotlight

Frequently portrayed by popular media as ferocious predators of the sea, sharks are often feared and persecuted, while its lesser-known relatives are hardly given any attention at all. The poor understanding of chondrichthyans has contributed to a general lackluster support for their conservation. Interest in sharks only recently gained public attention due to various sources exposing the cruelty and wastefulness of the shark fin trade, and through increased documentation of human–shark conflicts (or “shark attacks”) in shallow waters. Appreciation has also increased through shark interaction tourism and awareness raising initiatives.

Aside from the whole shark, only a few shark species are globally protected, mostly because they are listed in the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) Appendices. As stipulated in the Philippine Fisheries Code, Republic Act (RA) 8650, as amended by Section 102 of R.A. 10654, all species in the CITES appendices are protected in the country unless a Non-Deteriment Finding (NDF) to its population is provided.

Targeted fishery for whole shark meat provided a steady source of income for communities and traders exporting this product before its taking, catching, and trade was banned in 1998. Fisheries for mobulids and other rays are primarily for local/domestic meat consumption. Although trade for mobulid gill plates exist, it is recent and only comprises a minor part of the fisheries. There is also a market for ingredients derived from sharks, such as liver oil and cartilage, found in health supplements, and personal care products. Leather from shark and ray skin have also found use in the production of bags, belts, wallets, sandals and furniture accessories.

Concern for sharks in the Philippines rapidly progressed after the first National Round Table Discussion for the Conservation and Management of Sharks or the 1st Shark Summit was held in Cebu in August 2014. There have been several attempts by advocates and legislators to declare national laws and local ordinances prohibiting the fishery and trade of all shark species. Moreover, the Department of Agriculture — Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (DA-BFAR) is currently updating its National Plan of Action for the Conservation and Management of Sharks (NPOA-Sharks). Meanwhile, various multi-sectoral policy workshops in the last two years show growing support for a comprehensive policy that would allow for the sustainable utilization and management of shark fisheries.

Philipines in focus

In the Philippines, it is approximated that 200 species of sharks occur in its waters, of which 23% may be new records or undescribed species. However, very little is known of sharks in the Philippines, with only a few species studied in the past two decades. Shark attacks are seldom reported or documented in the Philippines, yet sharks are also generally feared by Filipinos. In some provinces, sharks and rays are considered valuable in traditional culinary and folklore culture: the meat is often served as a coconut-infused dish called kinunot, and the whip-like tails of certain rays are believed to ward off supernatural forces.

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Only the following species are protected in the Philippines as of 2017:

**Batoids**
- Beef manta ray, Mobula alfredi
- Giant manta ray, Mobula birostris
- Longfin devil ray, Mobula anguillarum
- Spinetail mobula, Mobula tarapacana
- Shortfin devil ray, Mobula koehni
- Sickletail devil ray, Mobula tarapacana
- Smoothtail mobula, Mobula thurstoni
- Knifetail sawfish, Anoxypristis cuspidata
- Largetooth sawfish, Pristis pristis
- Green sawfish, Pristis zijsron

**True sharks**
- Pelagic thresher shark, Alopias pelagicus
- Bigeye thresher shark, Alopias superciliosus
- Common thresher shark, Alopias vulpinus
- Largetooth sawfish, Pristis zijsron
- Green sawfish, Pristis zijsron
- Oceanic white tip shark, Carcharinus longimanus
- Basking shark, Cetorhinus maximus
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Due to their unique life history traits, sharks and their relatives are particularly vulnerable to threats from targeted fisheries, overfishing, bycatch, pollution, unregulated tourism, and climate change. These threats place almost a quarter of the world’s total chondrichthyan species at risk of extinction.5

Directed Fishery
Sharks are directly impacted by fishing, and while the seemingly quick solution would be to ban shark fisheries and substitute it with alternative livelihoods, these would not resolve all the problems. On a global scale, shark fisheries are largely unmonitored and/or unregulated6 because they occur in areas that are difficult to monitor, e.g. open oceans7 and deep seas8 or are part of coastal artisanal fisheries with less stringent regulatory mechanisms.9 In developing countries, they are fished directly and incidentally and retained or utilized for subsistence,10 or as a main source of income, providing additional safeguards for food security11 amongst some of the world’s poorest and marginalized people.

In the Philippines, whale sharks and mobulid rays were historically hunted in the Bohol Sea for their meat, fins and gill plates.12,13 In recent years, targeted fisheries for smaller shark species, like thresher sharks and dogfish sharks, have also been reported in Cagayan, Leyte and Sorsogon.14

Bycatch
What appears to be a bigger threat may be incidental catches of sharks in other fisheries. Many species are landed as bycatch in small-scale and artisanal fisheries,15 and are often unreported. Some sectors argue that bycatch is a contentious issue because fishermen can always claim that sharks were caught incidentally. Moreover, the term ‘bycatch’ is further convoluted as incidental catches in the Philippines are not discarded but instead, kept and utilized as subsistence or for trade. For instance, fishermen in Guimaras Strait interviewed in 2012-2013 claimed that stingrays landed and sold in local markets were bycatch of gillnet fisheries for small reef fishes and lobsters.16,17 These problems are further compounded considering that the National Stock Assessment Program (NSAP) only monitors the landing of the top ten commercially important fish species wherein sharks are not a part of. The NSAP is also unable to monitor artisanal landing sites.

Unregulated tourism
Another increasing concern for sharks in the Philippines is unregulated tourism. In the case of Oslob, Cebu, whale sharks are being provisioned with a shrimp (locally called uyap), which has been suggested to result in behavioral changes.18 The influx of tourists and boats also put the whale sharks at risk for injuries from direct contact, resulting of being injured especially from direct contact to the animal resulting from low compliance to recommended tourism guidelines. The importation of shrimps used to feed the whale sharks has also reportedly increased their demand and market prices in the neighboring area, Bago City.19

Habitat degradation
Due to unrestrained land development and rampant overfishing, important marine habitat along Philippine coasts, such as coral reefs, mangrove forests and seagrass beds have rapidly deteriorated over the years. This widespread destruction inevitably leads to the decline of species populations reliant on these ecosystems, and has left fishery resources at the brink of collapse.20

Nine out of the Philippines’ 13 fishing grounds are currently described as overfished and declining21 and this has impacts throughout the ecosystem, as prey loss affects many pelagic sharks.

Only 120,000 out of 450,000 hectares remain of the mangrove forests in the Philippines. Likewise, barely a small percentage of the country’s coral reefs are in excellent condition.22 The destruction of habitats critical in sustaining sharks in various stages of their life cycle leaves many species vulnerable.

The degradation of important habitat due to poor governance and lack of coherent monitoring programs highlights the urgent need for ecosystem-based management plans and solutions that look not just at the specific species and populations in question, but how that species and its population fits in a larger system of management.
Considering these unrelenting threats to sharks, there is an urgent need for Filipinos to develop and engage in collaborative efforts to conserve Philippine sharks through their sustainable use and management using the best available information.

The 2020 Conservation Roadmap for Sharks and Rays in the Philippines is consistent with national priorities expressed in the Philippines Biodiversity Strategic Action Plan (PBSAP). By building the capacity and networks of stakeholders, the roadmap will raise awareness on and strengthen compliance to the Philippine Fisheries Code RA 8550, as amended by RA 10654; Local Government Code; and the Wildlife Act.

It will likewise support the Philippines’ commitments to the following international conventions: CITES; CMS; and CBD, particularly in meeting the following Aichi biodiversity targets by 2020, specifically: Strategic Goal (SG) A, Target 1 and 2: On awareness raising and integrating biodiversity into national and local development and poverty reduction strategies; SG C, Target 12: On preventing extinction of threatened species; SG E, Target 18: On use of traditional knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities relevant for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity.

**GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

Precautionary Approach. The precautionary approach is a set of agreed cost-effective measures and actions, including future courses of action, which ensures prudent foresight, reduces or avoids risks to the resources, the environment, and the people, to the extent possible, taking explicitly into account existing uncertainties and the potential consequences of being wrong.
SHARK CONSERVATION TIMELINE

2010
- Proposed SB 2616: bans catching, sale, purchase, possession, transportation, importation, & exportation of all sharks & rays
- P 100 bill features the whale shark

2011
- Proposed HB 5412: banning the catching, sale, purchase, possession & trade of all sharks & rays, as well as their derivatives & by-products

Community-based Coastal Resources Management (CBCRM). CBCRM is a “response to the limitations of the top-down approach of managing coastal resources in the Philippines. It is a process of involving local community members and other stakeholders in the management of the coastal resources.”

Ecosystem-based Management. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (UN FAO) suggests that an “ecosystem approach to fisheries strives to balance diverse societal objectives, by taking into account the knowledge and uncertainties about biotic, abiotic and human components of ecosystems and their interactions and applying an integrated approach to fisheries within ecologically meaningful boundaries.”

Social Justice. According to the Philippine Constitution, “[t]he promotion of social justice shall include the commitment to create economic opportunities based on freedom of initiative and self-reliance.” Furthermore, the State shall “protect the rights of subsistence fishermen, especially of local communities, to the preferential use of the communal marine and fishing resources, both inland and offshore.”

2020 is projected as the year when Filipinos are empowered to conserve shark populations, mitigate threats, and apply scientific bases for sustainable utilization of some populations. It is the same year that the Aichi biodiversity targets, set by the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), are to be achieved.

The term “20/20” is also used to describe perfect vision. This document articulates a clear vision for the conservation of sharks and rays in the Philippines, supported by realistic, participatory, and inclusive activities identified by stakeholders.

The 2020 Conservation Roadmap for Sharks and Rays in the Philippines aims to complement the NPOA–Sharks, serving as a guide for government and non-government sectors, i.e. academe and civil society organizations, toward fully conserving sharks in the Philippines.
The Need to Know More to Do More

Research

Inadequate information about the biology, ecology, and critical habitats of sharks, as well as fisheries and social science research (on people and fisheries) hinders conservation efforts. Augmented research capacity is necessary to improve knowledge and facilitate science-based measures, whilst upholding social equitability. Research forms one of the fundamental bases for a holistic understanding of sharks and conservation issues.

By 2020, scientific and knowledge-based policies are developed, adopted, and implemented. These can be achieved through the:

1. Creation of a directory of shark researchers in the Philippines
2. Enhancement of research and development capacity through opportunities for training and advancement
3. Promotion of knowledge sharing and collaboration through regular conference for shark research and conservation
4. Mobilization of financial and human resources to increase research capacity
5. Augmentation of data gaps through biological, ecological, social, cultural, and economic studies

By 2030, scientific research and local knowledge are standards for pursuing and/or updating shark conservation policies.
Awareness on sharks remains low. While there have been initiatives for local and national campaigns, reach has been limited to a small percentage of social media users who were likely already interested in marine life; coastal communities where environmental projects have been ongoing; and government units and agencies directly affected by shark fisheries. The potential effect of communication campaigns has yet to be fully realized.

By 2020, all stakeholders, especially all those who benefit directly, can make informed decisions vis-à-vis sustainable use of sharks and mitigation of threats. Stakeholder awareness on shark conservation is improved through the:

1. Development of a top-down harmonized communications framework to ensure that national policies are adopted at lower governance levels
2. Ensured widespread availability and access to scientific publications and local knowledge
3. Development of tailored, audience specific materials
4. Conduct of outcome-specific advocacy campaigns
5. Creation of platforms to disseminate information and enable networking opportunities
6. Development of activities that enrich human-wildlife interactions and instill appreciation for the natural environment
7. Consolidation of relevant laws and policies into a dossier and policy brief, which will be disseminated to key stakeholders

By 2030, shark conservation is mainstreamed at all stakeholder levels such that this becomes integral to their agenda, e.g. awareness and conservation values are incorporated into education systems and biodiversity conservation integrated in development agenda.

The most challenging task in management is to mobilize and unite stakeholders for a common goal. Stakeholders must recognize that the identified institutions, organizations, agencies, and individuals all have an integral role in shark conservation.

Collaboration and cooperation between and among stakeholders will help ensure the successful implementation of the 2020 Conservation Roadmap for Sharks and rays in the Philippines.

By 2020, stakeholders who are dependent on shark fisheries have been identified, and mechanisms are established for their transition to sustainable fisheries or alternative livelihoods. These can be achieved through the:

1. Consultation of the stakeholder to explore alternative measures and identify needs, i.e. financial hubs, possible collaborators, and development of program proposals
2. Building of stakeholders’ capacity to enable ownership and longevity of programs
3. Engagement of stakeholders in skills training; research monitoring; and program development
4. Guaranteed support from local governments vis-a-vis institutionalization of programs through establishment of memorandums of agreement
5. Reduction of targeted shark fisheries and bycatch to sustainable levels
6. Consolidation of relevant laws and policies into a dossier and policy brief, which will be disseminated to key stakeholders

By 2030, stakeholders and Local Government Units are proactive partners in ensuring that shark fisheries are at sustainable levels, and where necessary, the dependence on shark fisheries is minimized through equitable alternative economic opportunities.
Although the Philippines has a multitude of fisheries and conservation laws, not all issues on shark conservation is addressed sufficiently. Filling in these gaps and harmonizing existing policies are essential. The right legal framework and government support will ensure implementation of laws leading to the success of the conservation efforts on sharks.

By 2020, government entities are equipped with scientific bases and local knowledge to make informed policies and programs that safeguard the conservation of sharks in the Philippines whilst upholding social equitability. These can be achieved through the:

1. Identification of priority species, populations, and sites
2. Mapping of legislative support for shark conservation and sustainable use
3. Establishment of appropriate local management plans at priority sites, and adopted by grassroots stakeholders
4. Assessment and harmonization of relevant laws and policies consistent with all relevant policy measures
5. Consultation of key stakeholders at all levels (national, local, grassroots/community) are consistently sought
6. Establishment and operationalization of regulatory and management mechanisms and secured funding, such as:
   - Institutionalization of the Quick Response Teams in each region
   - Development of gear-specific plans with fishers for reduction of shark bycatch
   - Identification and development of exit or compliance strategies for communities engaged in shark fisheries
    - Development of national tourism interaction guidelines
8. Enactment of national tourism interaction guidelines

By 2030, the national government recognizes the importance of sharks as a valuable marine resource, whereby shark conservation is mainstreamed into national agenda, effective partnerships with key stakeholders are pursued, and a comprehensive policy promoting the sustainable management and use of sharks is ratified.

The current efforts and interventions from various government offices, stakeholders, and organizations around sharks is a clear indicator of an urgency to mitigate threats in order to allow our seas to recover from degradation and exploitation. This is the only way to ensure that nature’s contribution to humans, in ecological services, is maintained.

It is time for Filipinos to step up by turning the Philippine seas into a habitat where shark populations and marine biodiversity could thrive. Conserving sharks is not an easy task. The combination of availability of scientific data, high awareness of the importance of marine biodiversity, participation of stakeholders, and the presence of progressive laws in the country will ensure that programs and interventions for shark conservation, as laid out in the 2020 Conservation Roadmap for Shark and Rays in the Philippines, is sustainable, equitable, implementable, and achievable within a certain period of time.
**LITERATURE CITED**


27. Ibid

28. 2020 Conservation Roadmap for Sharks and Rays

**LIST OF ACRONYMS**

- AO: Administrative Ordinance
- BFAR: Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources
- BMB: Biodiversity Management Bureau
- CBD: Convention on Biological Diversity
- CBCRM: Community-based Coastal Resources Management
- CMS: Convention on Migratory Species
- CMS MoU Sharks: Convention on Migratory Species Memorandum of Understanding
- DA: Department of Agriculture
- DENR: Department of Environment and Natural Resources
- EO: Executive Order
- FAO: Fisheries Administrative Order
- GIZ: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH
- HB: House Bill
- IPOA Sharks: International Plan of Action for the Conservation and Management of Sharks
- JAO: Joint Administrative Order
- LGU: Local Government Unit
- MO: Municipal Ordinance
- NPOA Sharks: National Plan of Action for the Conservation and Management of Sharks
- NDF: Non-Determining Finding
- NSAP: National Stock Assessment Program
- PBBAP: Philippine Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan
- PCSD: Palawan Council for Sustainable Development
- PO: Provincial Ordinance
- RA: Philippine Republic Act
- SB: Senate Bill
- SDG: Sustainable Development Goal
- SG: Strategic Goal
- UN FAO: United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization
- USAID: United States Agency for International Development
- WWF: World Wide Fund for Nature Philippines
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