

Milk Shark, *Rhizoprionodon acutus*

Report Card assessment	Sustainable		
IUCN Red List Australian Assessment	Least Concern	IUCN Red List Global Assessment	Least Concern
Assessors	Harry, A.V., Moore, A. & Simpfendorfer, C.		
Report Card Remarks	In Australia, taken in modest quantities in managed fisheries; globally heavily fished in unregulated fisheries		

Summary

The Milk shark is a small bodied, common and broadly distributed species found throughout tropical and subtropical waters of the Indian, Western Central Pacific and eastern Atlantic oceans. It is targeted for its meat and fins and apart from in



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in Australia, is heavily fished in unregulated fisheries throughout its global range. No species-specific evidence exists, but large scale declines in similar coastal shark species in much of its distribution suggest the Milk Shark may also be declining, possibly by up to 30%. The fast growth and very young age at maturity imply it is a productive species which would be expected to recover quickly following management intervention. Within Australian waters, fishing pressure is low and carefully managed and so the local population of Milk Shark is not considered to be at risk of decline. Given the above, Milk Shark is assessed globally as Near Threatened but in Australia as Least Concern (IUCN). Australian stocks are considered to be Sustainable (SAFS).

Distribution

Milk Sharks are found throughout continental shelf waters from South Africa, across Asia to Australia and southern Japan. An isolated population is also present in the southeast Atlantic Ocean from Mauritania to Angola (Compagno 1984). Within Australian waters it is found north from Geraldton (Western Australia)), across the Northern Territory and to as far south as Fraser Island in Queensland (Last and Stevens 2009).

Stock structure and status

There is currently very little information on population size or stock structure for Milk Sharks in Australian waters, although fishing pressure on the local population is relatively low, so the stock is considered Sustainable.). Globally, the species may contain several subpopulations (Naylor et al. 2012). The eastern Atlantic subpopulation is geographically isolated from the remainder of the population. In Australian waters, the Milk Sharks from the east coast are genetically homogenous with no evidence of fine-scale stock structuring (Ovenden et al. 2011).

Fisheries

The Milk Sharks is often a large component of shark landings in many parts of its range (Compagno 1984, Stevens and McLoughlin 1991, Moore et al. 2012). Apart from in Australia, unregulated fishing pressure is high throughout much of its global distribution, where it is commonly caught in

subsistence, artisanal, recreational and commercial fisheries (Schaefer 2004, Diop and Dossa 2011, Moore et al. 2012). It is commonly encountered as a non-retained bycatch in some Australian gillnet and trawl fisheries, with post-release mortality likely to be high (Stobutzki et al. 2002, Tobin et al. 2010). It has, most likely, benefitted from the implementation of bycatch reduction devices on northern Australian trawl nets (Griffiths et al. 2006). Fisheries pressure on Milk Sharks in Australia is considered low to moderate (Stobutzki et al. 2002, Zhou and Griffiths 2008, Tobin et al. 2010).

Habitat and biology

The Milk Shark is common in coastal and continental shelf waters, with seagrass habitats considered important to this species (White and Potter 2004). Maximum size is at least 100 cm total length (TL) (Stevens and McLoughlin 1991, Henderson et al. 2006, White 2007), while maximum reported age is 8 years (Harry et al. 2010). Growth is rapid, with age at maturity very young, at 1 year for males and 2 years for females (Harry et al. 2010). This species reproduces annually (Stevens and McLoughlin 1991).

Longevity and maximum size	Longevity estimated 8 years Max size: at least 100 cm TL
Age and/or size at maturity (50%)	Males: 1 year, 65-95 cm TL Females: 2 years, 65-95 cm TL

Link to IUCN Page: <http://www.iucnredlist.org/details/41850/0>

Link to page at Shark References: <http://shark-references.com/species/view/Rhizoprionodon-acuteus>

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