



email: admin@whitsundayconservation.org.au
www.whitsundayconservation.org.au
Contact: Secretary 0407 207 441

Dr. Leanne Fernandes
Director Policy and Planning Section
Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority
email address is: Leanne.Fernandes@gbrmpa.gov.au

15 May 2023

Dear Dr Fernandes,

RE: SHARKS ARE FRIENDS NOT FOOD

The Whitsunday Conservation Council would like to express our concerns regarding the declining shark populations on the Great Barrier Reef, most especially the vulnerable and endangered species...and the continued use of gillnets within the Marine Park.

Our concerns focus on the following species:

Great Hammerhead – Endangered (IUCN); not listed (EPBC Act 1999)
Scalloped Hammerhead – Endangered (IUCN); Conservation Dependent (EPBC Act 1999)
Winghead – Vulnerable (IUCN); not listed (EPBC Act 1999)

We all know the importance of sharks as the apex predators in the Reef food chain. A healthy reef requires a healthy shark population. With the impacts of climate change bearing down on our marine environment, the Reef needs healthy shark populations now more than ever.

Commercial fishing is the biggest threat to hammerhead sharks, with 370t of hammerhead sharks legally allowed to be caught every year in Australian waters.

It is hard to understand why Australia and the EPBC ignores the IUCN listings and continue to allow vulnerable and endangered species to be fished.

And it is unacceptable that endangered shark species are allowed to be fished in the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area.

The plight of the scalloped hammerhead shark highlights the incongruity of our fishing regulations. Scalloped hammerhead sharks are listed endangered under the EPBC Act, but the listing comes with a caveat; they are listed under the 'Conservation Dependent' category, which means commercial fishing for this endangered species can continue.

"Conservation Dependent' is a nonsense category created specifically for fish. This very obviously protects the interests of commercial fishing at the expense of our environment and wildlife – by allowing continued fishing of threatened species if a plan to manage the capture of the species is in place.

1 of 2 pages

Under this category, 78 tonnes of hammerhead sharks can be caught in the Great Barrier Reef, the largest catch of the species anywhere around Australia.

Great and smooth hammerheads, and winghead sharks have no protection under the EPBC Act and are not listed to date.

Our Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area should be a refuge for our threatened marine wildlife. The fishing of threatened species within the Marine Park needs to stop, particularly for the hammerhead sharks that are listed as endangered by the IUCN.

Of course, to truly protect our sharks, gillnets must be removed from the Marine Park. Gillnets are indiscriminate killers, easily entangling and drowning not only sharks but other threatened species like dugongs and turtles.

If every fisher had their nets in the water, they would stretch more than 159km, from our mangrove forests to the outer edge of the Reef and beyond.

Late last year, UNESCO and IUCN, scientific advisors to the World Heritage Centre, made 22 recommendations to address the key threats to the Great Barrier Reef. One of their priority recommendations was to remove commercial gillnets from the World Heritage Area.

Now is the time to push through these necessary protective measures.

Fishery reforms are occurring around the country, including here in Queensland.

Our national nature laws are currently undergoing a once in a generation reform.

There are 5 threatened shark and ray species that are currently undergoing assessment for protection. And finally, our federal government has made the commendable and ambitious claim of no new extinctions.

The Whitsunday Conservation Council's recommendations are simple.

- No fishing of threatened shark species within the Marine Park
- Permanently remove all large mesh gillnets from the Great Barrier Reef.

For further discussion and/or information please contact;

WCC Vice President Tony Fontes Mobile: 0417 749 143

Sincerely,



Faye C Chapman
Secretary

